

LHP: FROM EMPIRICISM TO EXPRESSIVISM

RHP: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

<A>1. Kant, Pragmatism, and the “New Way of Words”

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Wilfrid Stalker Sellars (1912–1989) was the greatest American philosopher of the middle years of the twentieth century. The depth, originality, and range of his philosophical thought earn him a place alongside Charles Sanders Peirce, the greatest American philosopher of an earlier generation. From the point of view of contemporary conventional opinion among Anglophone philosophers, this assessment is somewhat eccentric—though not quite idiosyncratic. There is no question that other American philosophers of the time were more influential than Sellars—of those with a large overlap of interests, W. V. O. Quine (1908–2000) being preeminent among them. But one can also gauge the importance of a philosopher by the wealth of ideas, connections, and projects he bequeaths, by their power and fecundity, their capacity for further development, their potential for further illumination. Peirce’s scattered, fitful, frustrating writings remain a trove of mostly still-buried treasures. I find in Sellars’s more systematic, sustained, if sometimes equally frustrating, writings correspondingly rich veins of philosophical ore.

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It was obvious to his contemporaries that Sellars was not only an immensely talented philosopher, but one distinguished from his fellow analysts of the time both by his overtly *systematic* ambitions and by the self-consciously *historical* roots of his thought. Although his range of historical reference was very wide, the most important figure for Sellars always was Kant. The subtitle of his most systematic work, his 1966 John Locke lectures, is “Variations on Kantian Themes.” Being avowedly interested in and influenced by Kant was unusual among analytic philosophers during the period of Sellars’s *floruit* in the late fifties and early sixties.

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Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore had forged the fighting faith of analytic philosophy in opposition to the then-dominant British Idealism inspired by Hegel (the passion of their youth), which they properly saw as developing themes already implicit in Kant's transcendental idealism. The recoil from Kant in Sellars's philosophical culture circle was not universal. Of those with most influence on Sellars, C. I. Lewis was a self-professed neo-Kantian, who did more than anyone else to keep the teaching of the first Critique alive in American graduate schools of philosophy. And Sellars was in an ideal position to see how deeply influenced by his neo-Kantian background Rudolf Carnap was—perhaps better situated in this regard than Carnap himself.

The efforts in the late sixties of John Rawls in America and Peter Strawson in Britain ensured that Kant would be recovered for later generations not only for the Anglophone canon but as a party to contemporary philosophical conversation. Sellars's development of Kantian ideas in application to issues of current philosophical interest has yet to have its hearing, however. In Chapter 1 of this work, I talk about two major Kantian axes of Sellars's thought: his metalinguistic version of the Kantian idea of categories ("pure concepts of the Understanding") and his scientific naturalism as a version of Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena. On the first topic, following out clues he finds in Carnap, he gives a metalinguistic reading of Kant's thought that, besides concepts used in empirical description and explanation, there are also concepts whose expressive role it is to make explicit necessary features of the framework that makes empirical description and explanation possible. On the second topic, he brings down to earth Kant's transcendental distinction between empirical appearances and noumenal reality by understanding it in terms of the distinction between what is expressible using the descriptive and explanatory resources of the "manifest image" of the common-sense lifeworld and what is expressible using the descriptive and explanatory resources of ideal natural science (natural science as it is at the Peircean "end of inquiry," construed as a regulative ideal).

One of Kant's big ideas is that what distinguishes judgments and intentional actions from the performances of nondiscursive creatures is that judgments and intentional actions are things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for, they are *commitments* of ours, they are exercises of *authority* on the part of their subjects. As such normative statuses, they are things our *rational entitlement* to which is always potentially at issue. That is, they come with a standing obligation to have *reasons* for them. Sellars takes over this idea, saying in one of the orienting passages of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind":

[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.¹

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Sellars draws from Kant the insight that epistemic, semantic, and intentional vocabulary is all "fraught with ought," as he puts it. Understanding what we are doing when we offer empirical descriptions and explanations requires appreciating the normative character of the space of reasons in which those descriptions and explanations are situated.

Early on he sets the goal of clearing room for a view that goes beyond what he refers to as 'descriptivism' or 'factualism', a view that sees all claims as 'empirical' in a narrow sense.

[O]nce the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*.²

His particular target in the essay from which this passage is drawn is alethic modal vocabulary: the language of subjunctive conditionals and of the expression of the laws of nature. The normative vocabulary whose expressive role is to make explicit the liability to demands for justification implicit in the application of concepts in claims to empirical knowledge and

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judgment generally equally fall within the scope of this dictum. Modal and normative vocabulary, together with ontologically categorizing vocabulary such as ‘property’, ‘universal’, and ‘proposition’ are not for Sellars to be understood as in the first instance describing the empirical world. They rather serve the function I described above as categorial in Kant’s sense: making explicit features of the framework within which empirical description and explanation are possible.

In his earliest published writings, from 1947–48, Sellars announces himself a convert to what he calls “the new way of words”—going so far as to use that expression in two of his titles.³ In general he means the methodological approach that Michael Dummett expresses by the slogan “Philosophy of language is first philosophy,” and that Richard Rorty called the “linguistic turn.” His own formulation is that “philosophy is properly conceived as the *pure theory of empirically meaningful languages*.⁴ This broad methodological approach comprises the dual commitments to understanding discursive (in the Kantian sense of concept-using) creatures first and foremost as language-using creatures, and to approaching philosophical problems through careful attention to the use of the vocabularies in which they are framed. The avatar of the new way of words for Sellars is Carnap. The feature of Carnap’s views that made the scales fall from Sellars’s eyes is his specification of a particular kind of vocabulary that is neither ground-level empirical descriptive vocabulary nor to be relegated to a sort of second-class status: *metalinguistic* vocabulary. The principal idea Sellars takes over from Carnap is that the form that a properly ungrudging acknowledgment of the nondescriptive expressive role that some respectable forms of discourse might play can take the form of a metalinguistic reading of them. In this book, I pursue further what Sellars makes of this idea, in the first part of Chapter 1 and Chapters 4, 5, and 7.

When asked in conversation what he hoped the eventual effect of his work would be, Sellars replied that he hoped to begin moving analytic philosophy from its Humean to its Kantian phase.

Although he is best known for the strictures he put on empiricist epistemology by criticizing what he called the “Myth of the Given” that lies at its core, some of Sellars’s most interesting ideas are constructive suggestions as to how Kantian insights can inform our thought about language. The project of updating Kant in the spirit of the new way of words, of bringing about a post-empiricist Kantian phase of analytic philosophy, is one still well worth engaging in today. Sellars’s enterprise seems to me all the more interesting and promising because he combines these two lines of thought with a third: *pragmatism* of a recognizably late-Wittgensteinian sort. By ‘pragmatism’ in this connection I mean that the project of offering a metalinguistic reading of framework-explicating nondescriptive concepts such as modal, normative, and ontological ones is conducted in terms of *pragmatic* metavocabularies: vocabularies for talking about the *use* of expressions, about discursive social practices. One of the principal aims of this book is to recover a strand of Sellars’s thought that is in danger of being overlooked: the essential role that pragmatism plays in working out his metalinguistic form of neo-Kantianism. (It is a central topic of Chapters 1, 3 through 5, and 7.)

One reason this line of thought is easily overlooked is that Sellars never explicitly identified himself with pragmatism. The tradition of American philosophy from which he thought of himself as converting to Carnapian logical analysis in the forties was rather that of his father, Roy Wood Sellars, and the circle of other (now little read) philosophers with whom he debated issues of direct realism, representational realism, and critical realism: figures such as Edwin Bissell Holt, William Pepperell Montague, and Ralph Barton Perry. This group defined itself in no small part by its opposition to Deweyan pragmatism, on the one hand, and to the neo-Hegelian idealists downstream from Josiah Royce, on the other. Nonetheless, like Quine—who also never thought of himself as a pragmatist—Sellars, if I read him right, did assail empiricism from a pragmatist direction. That he nonetheless never thought of himself as a pragmatist is due, I think, to his emerging from the particular cultural background he did. He says:

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I cut my teeth on issues dividing Idealist and Realist and, indeed, the various competing forms of upstart Realism. I saw them at the beginning through my father's eyes, and perhaps for that reason never got into Pragmatism. He regarded it as shifty, ambiguous, and indecisive. . . . Pragmatism seemed all method and no result.⁵

I owe to Richard Rorty the idea that in spite of this attitude, Sellars should nonetheless be thought of as pursuing a pragmatist argument. In a line of thought taken up and developed with great panache by Michael Williams, Rorty saw Sellars and Quine as mounting complementary assaults on the epistemological foundationalism central to both traditional and logical empiricism.⁶ According to this story, modern foundationalists respond to the traditional epistemological Agrippan trilemma by rejecting the possibilities of an infinite regress of justification and of circular (or "coherentist") justification and embracing a distinguished set of regress-stopping beliefs. Doing so requires two sorts of "epistemically privileged representations" (in Rorty's phrase).⁷ The regress on the side of *premises* is to be stopped by appeal to certain knowledge in the form of the *sensory given*. The regress on the side of justifying *inferences* is to be stopped by appeal to certain knowledge in the form of formulations of connections among claims that are *analytic* of their *meanings*. These two sorts of regress-stoppers, one on the side of *content* and the other of *form*, correspond to the two components of logical empiricism.

Sellars argues that only what is conceptually contentful can serve as evidence, can provide reasons for other beliefs. And he argues that even belief-types whose tokens arise noninferentially must be inferentially related to other concepts and belief-types in order to be conceptually contentful. Belief-tokens playing the functional role of reports, of noninferentially acquired discursive entry moves, do not form an autonomous stratum of discourse. They can be understood as conceptually contentful only in virtue of their inferential connections to token beliefs that do *not* play this reporting functional role, but are arrived at as the conclusion of

inferences. This picture rules out the semantic atomism on which the foundational epistemological role of the sensory given was premised. Quine makes a corresponding argument concerning claims supposed to be independent of factual claims because made true by meanings alone. He looks in vain for a difference in the *use* of claims whose truth turns on matters of empirical fact and those whose truth turns solely on the meanings of terms. More deeply, he finds reason to deny the supposed *independence* of meaning claims from factual claims. Not only do the meanings in question depend on very general matters of fact, that meaning-analytic claims can be held onto in spite of changes in empirical commitments is at best a local and temporary function of the role they play in the whole “web of belief.”

Both these lines of argument begin by looking at the *use* of expressions in virtue of which they express the conceptual contents they do. In each case, that *pragmatic* investigation yields the conclusion that it is playing a distinctive kind of functional role in a larger conceptual system that confers on states, judgments, or expressions the epistemic privilege on which foundationalists rely. But the epistemological uses to which foundationalists want to put these “privileged representations,” on the side of perceptual experience and meaning, require that such representations form an autonomous stratum, in the sense that these representations could have the contents they do independently of their relation to the riskier factual claims to which they are inferentially related. The pragmatic investigation rules out the semantic atomism that is presupposed by the claim of semantic autonomy. This line of thought, leading from pragmatic functionalism through semantic holism to deny epistemological foundationalism, is the common *pragmatist* core of Sellars’s and Quine’s complementary mid-century assaults on empiricism. (I discuss the role of pragmatism in EPM further in Chapter 3.)

In a break with tradition, Sellars considers pragmatics not as a discipline on a level with and alongside syntax and semantics, but as the genus of which they are species. That is, he calls the “pure theory of empirical languages,” **[AU: OK that exact quote cited above does not match?]**

with which he identified philosophy in the passage cited above from “Epistemology and the New Way of Words,” *pure pragmatics*, and says, continuing that passage, that “pure semantics, as it now exists, is but a fragment of such a theory.” His idea is that pragmatics is the study of the *use* of language. Semantics, the study of meaning, is an attempt to codify certain aspects of such use, as is syntax. When Sellars takes over from Carnap the idea that the way to work out an “ungrudging recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*” is to understand such potentially philosophically problematic concepts as those expressed by alethic modal vocabulary, normative vocabulary, intentional vocabulary, and ontological-categorial vocabulary (such as ‘property’ and ‘proposition’) is to understand them as *metalinguistic*, the metalanguages he has in mind are *pragmatic* metalanguages. “Pure pragmatics” is the project of developing a *general* pragmatic metavocabulary for specifying the use of *any* language in which empirical description is possible. His argument for semantic holism (and hence against epistemological foundationalism) is an argument conducted in such a pragmatic metavocabulary. This order of explanation is the pragmatist strand in Sellars’s thought.

The Sellarsian philosophical project I see as still worth our attention is interesting because it is an attempt to weave together these three strands: the “new way of words,” a form of pragmatism specifically adapted to the linguistic turn, and a specifically Kantian successor to empiricist theories of concepts and the discursive generally. It aims to construct a philosophy of language, thought of as first philosophy, in the form of a “pure pragmatics,” that is, to transpose Kant’s semantic insights into a pragmatist key. Sellars did not succeed in developing a pure pragmatics in this sense. But he made important progress in assembling key metaconceptual elements of an anti-descriptivist, post-empiricist Kantian philosophy of language. In Chapter 1, I concentrate on some Kantian themes that unify Sellars’s later work, and how that work can be understood as putting in place the lineaments of a pragmatist expressivism that is a worthy

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successor to the empiricism he inherited. Later chapters go into more detail concerning the ideas and arguments introduced there. My concern throughout is not just to expound or interpret Sellars's ideas, but to work with them, to try to develop and improve them so as better to address the topics with which he was concerned, and with which we are still concerned today.

<A>2. Contingencies of Biography

I acknowledged at the outset of this Introduction that taking a serious philosophic interest in Sellars's writings must still be counted a somewhat eccentric attitude these days. I suppose that not a few of my contemporaries might well think that in my case this focus is a product of my having spent my entire professional career since graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh, where Sellars is revered (in my view, of course, justly). Such an explanation would get things almost exactly backwards. I followed Sellars to Pitt, and since I've been there I have made it my business to make his ideas more generally known—not the least by seeing to it that our doctoral students are at least exposed to those ideas.

When I came to the Yale philosophy department as an undergraduate in 1968, Sellars had been gone for five years, having left for Pitt in 1963. He enjoyed a reputation for depth and brilliance, but left behind no-one who taught his work. Still, he was enough of a 'figure' to motivate me to burrow into "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" on my own. It seemed to me to offer a fresh perspective on both the topics of its title and to hold the promise to illuminate many further ones. I attended a lecture that Rorty gave at Yale (his graduate *alma mater*) in which he talked a lot about Sellars, and I became convinced that Sellars's work offered a perspective that might make possible the synthesis of my two great interests at the time: technical analytic philosophy of language (I had come to philosophy from mathematics, in which I did a joint major) and classical American pragmatism, particularly Peirce.

When I applied to graduate school, Pittsburgh and Princeton were at the top of my list (though I did apply to Harvard, too—as a backup): Pittsburgh principally because of Sellars, and Princeton in no small part because of Rorty. In the end, the strength of the philosophy of language and logic at Princeton convinced me to go there. Saul Kripke, Donald Davidson (whose regular appointment was at Rockefeller, but who often taught seminars at Princeton), and Dana Scott were the big attractions on this front—though ironically Dana left to go to Carnegie Mellon, in Pittsburgh, the year I arrived. Though I was disappointed by this defection, it resulted in my taking every course David Lewis offered, and persuading him to cosupervise my dissertation (with Rorty). (I believe I am the only student on whom they ever collaborated in this capacity.) Rorty did teach Sellars often in his graduate seminars—these were the years during which he worked on a mimeographed “Study Guide” to EPM, which (with his permission) I used as the basis for the much more extensive one I later contributed to my edition of that classic work for Harvard University Press. My appreciation of and interest in Sellars’s work grew in step with my greater understanding of it. The bulk of my philosophical energy and attention in these years, though, was devoted to the philosophy of language. On this front the great task seemed to be to absorb and somehow synthesize the disparate influences percolating at Princeton in those years: the Quinean tradition downstream from *Word and Object*, in which Gilbert Harman (also a reader of Sellars) was passionately interested, the new modal semantics pursued in such different ways by Kripke and Lewis, Rorty’s pragmatism (in which he took himself to be making common cause with Sellars, Davidson, and some aspects of Quine), and Michael Dummett, whose monumental *Frege’s Philosophy of Language*, which appeared in 1974, was the single most important and influential contemporary work of philosophy for me during that time. Sellars was on a back burner, but never far from my mind.

When, in the fall of 1975, Pitt advertised a job, I realized that it was the opportunity of my life. Having regretfully turned away from Pitt and the opportunity to study with Sellars in favor

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of Princeton and all its opportunities, there was now the possibility of going to Pitt as Sellars's colleague—which would never have been possible had I gone there for my degree. (Though Anil Gupta, who got his degree from Pitt the same year I got my degree from Princeton, has finally found his way back—showing both that it can be done and how hard it is to leave.) To my immense gratification (both then and since), that is how things worked out.

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I was soon to discover, however, that being an admirer of Sellars is one thing, and being a colleague of his something else. I had met him only once, when Rorty invited him to talk to one of his seminars at Princeton, and our interaction on that occasion was purely intellectual. I had no contact with him during the hiring process at Pitt—though my later experience of departmental dynamics strongly suggests that unless he had thought well enough of my work, no offer would have been forthcoming. My first face-to-face interaction with Sellars once I took up my duties fit a pattern with which I was to become familiar: cautious démarches on my part and basically friendly responses gruffly delivered on his. I addressed him as “Professor Sellars,” and he replied that since we were colleagues he insisted I address him only as ‘Wilfrid’. It took me a long time to feel at all comfortable doing so. The next time he spoke to me was a couple of weeks later, when he stopped me in the hall, looked me up and down, and demanded, “Why do you dress like the guy who pumps my gas?” Wilfrid himself was always nattily dressed, typically in a style he had adopted during his Oxford days in the middle thirties. (I once saw him wearing spats.) I was twenty-six years old, and did not (and do not today) dress like that. At a faculty cocktail party he hosted at his handsome house on the hill overlooking the campus I expressed admiration for the multi-thousand-gallon rough stone aquarium that dominated both the living room and the rear patio onto which it extended, injudiciously referring to it as a “fish pond.” “It’s for the water lilies—the fish are just a necessary evil of the ecology,” he growled. I learned (too late) that he was a connoisseur of water lilies (Nymphaeaceae), devoting many hours to cultivating rare types, and especially esteeming their lily pads. In the end, I decided it was helpful to think of him as

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belonging in a box with one of the great literary heroes of my youth, Nero Wolfe—with his water lilies in place of Wolfe's orchids.

During my second year, a graduate student came to my office with some questions about an article I had extracted from a central chapter of my dissertation. It was a speculative construction inspired by some ideas of Dummett, called “Truth and Assertibility.” We had a good talk, and at the end I asked him how he had happened to be reading it. He said that it had been the assigned reading and topic of discussion in Sellars's seminar that week. I knew nothing about this. When next I saw Wilfrid, I asked whether it was true that he had talked about some of my stuff in his seminar. He asked me why I wanted to know. I said he must know how thrilled I would be to hear it and how much it would mean to me. His retort was “It's none of your damn business what I talk about in my seminar.”

The best table-talk I was exposed to was before and after Sellars's weekly poker games—which I joined for a while until the action got too intense for my meager skills and interest. When he wanted to be, Sellars was immensely charming and witty. He was a great bon vivant, well read on any number of nonphilosophical topics (not just water lilies) and a lively conversationalist. As an example, he originated the incompatible food triad challenge. He starts off by observing that it is a common occurrence that three *propositions* can be jointly incompatible, even though each pair of them is compatible. His own works are full of these, most famously the inconsistent triad in the opening sections of EPM. But even in ordinary life, we find examples such as “A is a green apple,” “A is a ripe apple,” and “A is a McIntosh apple.” His challenge is to find a *perceptual* analog, specifically in the category of taste. By any standard of compatibility, find three foods each pair of which are compatible, but all three of which together are *not* compatible. This problem has achieved a small notoriety, and even a small literature of its own. The best solution I know is Beer, Whiskey, and 7-Up. Beer and whiskey are a boilermaker, Whiskey and 7-Up is a Seven and Seven, Beer and 7-Up is a Shandy. But the three together are

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disgusting. In any case, given that the phenomenon of irreducible inconsistent triads is so ubiquitous in the *conceptual* realm, why is it so rare in the *perceptual* realm? Or is that too general a claim, because this is specific to the gustatory modality? Is there no olfactory analog? What would tactile, auditory, or visual versions look like?

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On a number of occasions in these early years at Pitt I would make an appointment with his secretary to talk to him about his work. His office was not with the rest of ours; to begin with we were even in a different building, though the philosophy department eventually moved to the Cathedral of Learning where his office was. The reason is that when Wilfrid was being recruited from Yale in 1963, on the third and final campus visit he made, his final meeting was with the Provost, in the Provost's office. Sellars would tell the story this way. The Provost (the architect of the new philosophy department at Pitt, Charles Peake) said, "Professor Sellars, you have been wined and dined during your recruitment. I hope you know how important it is to us that we persuade you to join us. Is there anything that might make a difference to your decision that has *not* been addressed?" Wilfrid responded, "There is one thing, which I almost hesitate to mention, because one is supposed just to focus on the life of the mind. I do like my creature comforts, and a nice office would make a big difference." The Provost said, "I am so glad you brought that up. That is something we can do something about. What would you consider a nice office?" Wilfrid looked around the Provost's office and said, "This is a really nice office." Peake did not miss a beat: "Wilfrid, it's now *your* office." There was nothing Sellars appreciated so much as a grand gesture, and as he told the story, he accepted the position on the spot.

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We had our best philosophical talks on these occasions in his office, but I have to say that they were largely unsatisfactory. For a surprisingly long time the form they took was that I would ask him a question about his views, and he would refer me to something he had written. I would say that I had read that, and still had the question. He would refer me to something else, which I had typically also read. Eventually he would recommend some piece that I had *not* read,

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and send me off to do so. It became clear that Sellars just was not accustomed to talking about his work with people who were knowledgeable about it. He only rarely taught his own stuff in graduate seminars. His work seems to have been a largely solitary undertaking. We know now, from the correspondence in his Nachlass, that he did keep up a substantive weekly epistolary philosophical conversation with his father.

What Sellars and I talked about mostly was picturing. The idea of a nonnormative tracking relation between the use of discursive sign-designs and elements of the objective world—indeed, the idea of such a representational relation that extends well beyond the discursive realm to include animals and then-conjectured robots—appears already in Sellars's earliest papers and continues throughout his life. I was never able to understand how he understood such matter-of-factual picturing relations to be related to the normatively characterizable discursive practices that (he and I agreed) alone deserved to be thought of in genuinely *semantic* terms. Eventually he confessed that he did not take himself clearly to understand the relation, either. But he always insisted that there must be some such relation, and remained convinced that the dimension he called “picturing” must play an absolutely central role in our world-story of ourselves as knowers-and-agents-in-the-world. We both saw that it is in a story about how sign-designs can lead a double life, on the one hand as items caught up in a web of causal relations supporting subjunctively robust conditionals, and on the other as normatively characterizable as having proper and improper uses (“according to rules” as he thought of them, in good Kantian fashion) that his response must be found to the danger that a broadly Kantian approach to the discursive simply replaces a dualism of mind and matter with one of norm and fact. I was quite critical of his characterization of this amphibiousness, without having positive suggestions as to how one might better conceive it. I would not claim to have an adequate story about it today, but the issue has come to assume an importance for me of the same magnitude as it did for Sellars. The culminating Chapter 6 of *Between Saying and Doing* (the “far-off divine event towards which

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my whole creation moves”), “Intentionality as a Pragmatically Mediated Semantic Relation,” sketches a way of thinking about deontic normative vocabulary and alethic modal vocabulary as articulating two aspects of the phenomenon of intentionality, downstream from what I call the normative and modal Kant-Sellars theses. And at the center of my reading of, and interest in, Hegel’s Absolute Idealism is a corresponding claim about the complementary relation between the deontic normative sense of “materially incompatibility” [IAU: as wanted? “material incompatibility”? “materially incompatible”?](#) (Hegel’s “determinate negation”) that applies to commitments of a single subject and the alethic modal sense that applies to properties of a single object. Subjects (exhibiting the structure Kant picked out as the “synthetic unity of apperception”) *ought* not undertake incompatible commitments (in judging and acting) and objects *can* not exhibit incompatible properties. It is by treating commitments as incompatible in the first sense that subjects acknowledge properties as incompatible in the second sense. Although of course there would still *be* incompatibilities among objective properties even if there never had been normative discursive subjects, one cannot *understand* what it *means* to call properties incompatible in the alethic modal sense except by reference to the practices and activities of concept-mongering subjects. An important aspect of this view is expounded in Chapter [5](#) of this book.

What Sellars and I talked about more productively, from my point of view, was semantics, because that was what I cared about. There were whole stretches of his corpus that we did *not* talk about. One topic that did not come up was modality—which I now see as the key to the issues we *did* discuss. Sellars really only wrote one piece on modality, “Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities.” It is long and insightful, but in important ways, inconclusive. He never really figured out how to articulate the sense in which modal vocabulary should be thought of as “metalinguistic.” I discuss his tribulations in this regard, and how I think they should be resolved, in Chapter [3](#) below. At the time I was not much interested in modality,

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in spite of having thought a lot about it as Lewis's student and having co-authored a book extending possible worlds semantics, since my principal aim then was to develop an *alternative* to understanding semantics in terms of modality. And Sellars was very conscious of the unsatisfactory condition of his own thought on this topic. We also did not talk about what is perhaps the most polished and well worked-out portion of his corpus: the treatment of nominalism about universals and other abstract entities. I simply could not understand why the author of EPM thought this was a topic of central philosophical significance. It seemed to me at best a pretty, if minor, *application* of a broadly functionalist inferentialist semantics. I finally come to terms with this part of his corpus in Chapter 7.

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Another topic that loomed large in his corpus that we did not discuss, because I could see no productive way to do so, was his views about sensa. Particularly during the period when we spoke regularly, Sellars was concerned—I sometimes thought obsessed—with the question of what the scientific successor-notion might be to immediate phenomenal sensory experiences (his "sensa"). He had become convinced that the structural continuity of phenomenal color experience—the famous pink ice-cube thought experiment—could be leveraged into an argument that quantum mechanics could not be the form of the ultimate scientific description of reality. This was one motive for the development of his late ontology of pure processes.⁸ I could not and cannot see the philosophical interest of this idea. If it was, indeed, a consequence of the scientific naturalism expressed in his famous *scientia mensura*, the claim that "in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not,"⁹ then this conclusion about the possibility of an armchair refutation of a relatively mature mathematized scientific theory seemed to me a *reductio* of that position. I have come to think of this descriptive privileging of natural science as the unfortunate result of a misplaced, if intelligibly motivated, attempt to naturalize Kant's transcendental distinction between phenomena and noumena in terms of the relations between what he called

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the “manifest image” and the “scientific image” of knowers and agents in the world. I develop this diagnosis of the origins of his idea and sketch the line of thought that leads me to reject it, in the second half of Chapter 1, and in Chapter 7 further expand on the argument concerning identity and modality, deriving from what I take to be Sellars’s own better wisdom, upon which that line of thought principally depends.

When Sellars’s scientific naturalism without descriptivism did come up—apart from what seems to me to be in any case the disastrous bridge (a bridge too far) to *sensa* (even though it anticipates some discussions in contemporary consciousness studies)—it was in connection with picturing. For it seemed to me that that contentious notion ran together issues about nonnormative representation relations with this scientific naturalism, and that progress might be made if we could disentangle them. Alas, we never (and, I believe, he never) did. By contrast, one place we *were* together—a point of mutually reassuring agreement—was with his scientific *realism* about theoretical entities. Sellars sensibly opposed instrumentalism about the ontological status of theoretically postulated entities, a position always tempting to empiricists (in his time, bracketed by Quine on “*posit*s” early on and by van Fraassen in Sellars’s last decade). The distinction between observable and theoretical things is, Sellars argues in EPM, *methodological* rather than *ontological*. It concerns how we know about things, rather than what kind of things they are. (Running these together he called the “Platonic fallacy.”) Theoretical things are, by definition, ones we can only entitle ourselves to claims about by *inference*, whereas observable things are *also* accessible noninferentially. But this status is contingent and mutable, subject to historical development. Sellars had usefully applied this lesson to the philosophy of mind (and then to semantics). The “philosophical behaviorism” he favored—in opposition to the “logical behaviorism” (epitomized by Ryle), which he rejected—essentially consists in the analogy:

mental vocabulary : behavioral vocabulary

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theoretical vocabulary : observational vocabulary.

Mental and intentional vocabulary need not and should not be thought of as *definable* in behavioral terms, but the point of introducing it is to *explain* facts statable in behavioral vocabulary. Two important sorts of mistakes are obviated by this way of thinking about things. In semantics, it permits one to reject the instrumentalism of Dummett's middle period, when he refused to postulate semantic theoretical entities ("meanings") that could not be defined in terms of what one had to be able to *do* to count as grasping or deploying them, specified in a rather restricted behavioral vocabulary. This "manifestability requirement" runs together the sensible idea that the point of postulating semantic entities is to explain behavior (specified, I want to say, with Wittgenstein, in a fairly richly normative vocabulary) with the optional and objectionable instrumentalism that insists on definability in behavioral terms. Second, it opens the way to *philosophical* theorizing that involves postulating unobservables (entities and properties available only inferentially) in both the philosophy of mind and semantics, subject to the methodological pragmatism that insists that the point of such theorizing must be explaining behavior, without the need to identify such philosophical theorizing with *scientific* theorizing. This permits one to accept, as Sellars does, the only claim that occurs verbatim in both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, namely, that "philosophy is not one of the natural sciences." Sellars and I were deeply together on the legitimacy of and need for systematic philosophical theorizing in this sense—as among my more immediate teachers, Lewis decidedly was and Rorty decidedly was not.

One main thing I took away from our talks did not concern Sellars's substantive philosophy, though. With only a few exceptions, he really did not add much in conversation to what I could already glean from his writings. The clarifications he offered when pressed were almost always in terms he had worked out in print. My main takeaway concerned not his philosophical views but his attitude toward his work and its reception. It became very clear that underneath Sellars's

gruff, grumpy exterior (epitomized in some of the vignettes I recount above about our early interactions) was a vast reservoir of professional bitterness. He *knew* he had done philosophical work of the first importance, and deeply felt that it and he had not been appropriately acknowledged. I could not understand how the satisfaction he should take in having written what he had written would not be enough, all on its own, to compensate for any complaints he might have about his reception thus far, and to engender confidence that eventually his work would be duly appreciated. (I thought then as I more or less do now that anyone who had written EPM should die happy.) He longed for people to understand and appreciate his work as he understood and appreciated Kant's, but expressed the worry that it might take centuries in his case, as he thought it had in Kant's. I protested that I was on the case—but somehow he did not find that fact sufficiently reassuring.

It was only many years later, thinking about the shape his career had taken, that I began to understand the likely sources of his radical disaffection, and to sympathize somewhat. Sellars always found philosophical writing exceptionally difficult. He did not publish his first papers until he was thirty-five years old—late enough that his lack of publications was a serious issue in his academic career, and a contrast with his successful and productive philosopher father of which he was acutely aware. And the earliest papers are a mess, their narrative lines almost wholly swamped by detours and digressions. He later said he couldn't describe the flower in the crannied wall without, like Tennyson, seeing the whole world in it.¹⁰ Major pieces written just after he turned forty are much more intelligibly written, including the classics "Inference and Meaning" (1953) and "Some Reflections on Language Games" (1954). There is no question, however, that his professional breakthrough came with what a half-century later is still visible as his masterpiece: the three lectures he gave at the University of London in 1956 that were later published as "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." The lectures were attended by a substantial selection of the most distinguished contemporary English philosophers (Ryle was his

host). His lectures were a smash success, establishing him, in English eyes, as *the* coming American philosopher. Sellars cherished his student days at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar—it was when he decisively turned to philosophy as a career. So the approbation of the English philosophers was particularly satisfying. The London lectures also led immediately to his appointment at Yale, then the second most prestigious philosophy department in the country. Students flocked to him, and his work became the topic of a large number of Ph.D. dissertations. The years from the writing of EPM to the publication in 1963 of his first collection of papers, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, were incredibly productive. It is when he did much of his best work: besides EPM and the paper on modality it includes his classic “Phenomenalism,” the groundbreaking trio of papers on nominalism (“Grammar and Existence: A Preface to Ontology,” “Naming and Saying,” “Abstract Entities”), “Being and Being Known,” and his manifesto “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man.”

In 1965, nine years after his triumphant London lectures, Sellars was invited back to England, to give the prestigious John Locke lectures at Oxford. Sellars worked hard on this lecture series, recognizing the invitation as the honor it is and wanting to confirm the acknowledged promise of EPM by producing a masterpiece that would give substance and impetus to the development he desired and intended of Anglophone philosophy from its Humean empiricist youth to its mature Kantian phase. But his Oxford homecoming was a disaster. The first lecture was well attended, as everyone came to “see the elephant.” But the material he presented in that lecture was exceptionally difficult. He had decided to emulate Kant’s opening of the first Critique with the transcendental aesthetic. I do not myself think Kant did himself or his project any favors by starting this way, but be that as it may, Sellars certainly did not. After numerous readings, I was for many years not able to make much of this first chapter of the book that resulted, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*, until John McDowell finally managed to explain it in his Woodbridge lectures. The thought of trying to follow this

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material as a lecture in real time is mind-boggling. In any case, the effect of that initial experience was devastating: the audience stayed away in droves. (John McDowell, then an undergraduate, attended only the first lecture, and professes not to have understood a word of it.) The last three of the six lectures were delivered in the same cavernous auditorium that had accommodated hundreds for the first lecture, but to an audience comprising only a half-dozen who had been hastily rounded up. It was a humiliation, and Sellars never got over it. When I visited him in his hospital room during the last week of his life he spontaneously brought up this experience as a turning-point in his life, something that had permanently darkened his outlook.

His Oxford experience was desperately disappointing to Sellars, but it came to epitomize a larger sea-change in his position in the discipline of which he could not help but feel the effects, while being too close to it to discern the causes. For he gave those lectures at the midpoint of a decade marked out in American philosophy by the publication of Quine's *Word and Object* in 1960 and Kripke's delivering the Princeton lectures published as *Naming and Necessity* in 1970.

Sellars was forty-four when EPM came out and promised to secure him recognition as a preeminent philosopher of his generation. In the years that followed he continued to produce extraordinary work. But when he looked around a bare nine years later, after the debacle of his Locke lectures, he found himself confronted by a philosophical community that had decisively turned its attentions in other directions. Never again would he get the attention that he had had, and had earned. The Kantian *Kehre* of analytic philosophy was not taking place—indeed, it barely registered as a possibility. Sellars, I think, never knew what hit him. His writing in the seventies is vastly improved stylistically. He made great progress as a communicator in this medium. But nobody much seemed to care.

So the trajectory of Sellars's professional career was quite distinctive, unusual, and in the event disturbing to him. Although he began graduate study at a suitably early age (when he graduated from college and went to Oxford), and had been raised in a philosophical household

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(his father was department chair at Michigan), he began publishing only pretty late: he was thirty-five. Of course the war intervened, but he always claimed that his wartime service spent devising search-patterns for anti-submarine planes in the Atlantic gave him plenty of time for philosophical reflection. He achieved real recognition, and even celebrity only in 1956, when he was forty-four years old. There followed his greatest years of philosophical creativity and flourishing, during which he had every right to think he would take his rightful place as a preeminent figure in the discipline. But a mere nine years later, by 1965, when he was only fifty-three, it all seemed to come crashing down, and the rest of his life seemed anticlimactic. He was never again to reach the creative philosophical heights of those golden years, nor to achieve the professional recognition they seemed to promise. By the time I knew him, he had soured; his world tasted of ashes.

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Sellars's own professional idiosyncrasies contributed significantly to the marginalization of his work that was set in motion by other, larger forces in the discipline. He was rightly known as a charismatic lecturer to undergraduates and a masterful Socratic seminar leader for doctoral students. Philosophers who were interested in his work but daunted by the difficulty of his writing naturally often responded by inviting him to give colloquium presentations, figuring they would come away at least with enough of an idea of what he was doing to be able to make a start on reading him. But Sellars firmly hewed to the view that it is disrespectful of one's colleagues to present finished work in a lecture that is not addressed primarily to students. He believed it implied that the lecturer thought conversation with his audience could contribute nothing to the thought-process the results of which he merely reported. (Is that in fact even true of a finished piece of writing?) So he only ever presented work in progress, the first crude and still confused formulations of ideas that were as yet inchoate. If he was hard to understand in his writings, when he knew what he thought, things were much worse when his complex thoughts were delivered raw, unformed, and untamed. These occasions were by no means always unsuccessful

(he secured ongoing audiences at Notre Dame and Arizona, for instance, where his interlocutors were willing to invest sufficient effort across a number of occasions). But all too often they were, unnecessarily, discouraging philosophers who started with some motivation to try to figure him out. The result is that while Sellars always had readers and admirers, he remained a relatively unusual acquired taste within the larger philosophical community. To a first approximation, only people who had actually been taught by Sellars or been taught by people who had been taught by him, and the handful who had for some other reason been strongly motivated independently to put the effort into his work, appreciated his ideas. He never understood why that should be so, and he resented it.

Although Sellars seldom taught his own work, it has nonetheless been a part of the Pitt curriculum for many years. When I joined the department I went into rotation with my colleague Joe Camp in teaching a core seminar in epistemology (eventually one of those required of all doctoral students). He taught EPM early in the course, and when it was my turn, I did, too. It fit in perfectly with my Rorty-derived view that Sellars in EPM and Quine in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” had between them dismantled the “privileged representations” postulated by empiricist foundationalists in order to stop regresses of justification. Sellars attacked the idea that one could stop justificatory regresses on the side of premises by finding an autonomous foundation in experiential episodes of the sensory given, and Quine attacked the idea that one could stop justificatory regresses on the side of inferences by appeal to those that were good simply in virtue of the meanings of the terms. Both of these assaults turned on pragmatist-functionalism claims about how expressions must be used or what role they must play in what role items must play in order to count as having contents of the sort empiricist epistemological arguments required. I also taught EPM in my undergraduate courses in the philosophy of mind. (It is in this connection that, with his permission and encouragement, I reworked Rorty’s valuable study guide that I had used at Princeton into the altogether more substantial—and

possibly also ideologically biased—form that appears in the Harvard University Press edition of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* that I edited.) When John McDowell joined the department in the mid-eighties, he continued this tradition of reading EPM in graduate courses. I never mentioned to Wilfrid that we were teaching EPM regularly—I had somehow gotten the impression it was none of his business what we taught in our seminars. In later years, though EPM was no longer a constant fixture in core courses, it came up often enough in other courses at Pitt that our graduate students remained very likely to have read it carefully. As they have grown up and fanned out across the profession, many of them have also been moved to teach EPM to their students. Appreciation of this master-work of Sellars is no longer exclusively a Pittsburgh phenomenon. I would like to think that Sellars would be gratified at the resurgence of interest in his work that we have begun to see in recent years.

<A>3. The Present Volume

Empiricism as Sellars criticizes it in EPM is a kind of epistemological and, ultimately, semantic foundationalism. The argument he mounts against it turns on the denial of the *autonomy* of the stratum of experience the empiricist appeals to as the basis in terms of which empirical knowledge and indeed empirical meaningfulness are to be explained. The commitment to the autonomy of the empiricist basis—its independence from that which is to be explained in terms of it—is part of what Sellars means by saying that what he is objecting to is “the whole framework of Givenness.” The argument comprises three interwoven strands. One principle element is the Kantian, antidescriptivist appreciation of the normative character of knowledge and meaning:

[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.¹¹

The empiricist experiential Given must have a *normative* role: providing reasons or evidence for claims about how things empirically are. The issue he presses concerns the context within which something can (even potentially) have that sort of normative significance. Another major strand in the argument is then the denial of the *semantic atomism* implicit in the idea of an autonomous experiential stratum that can play an evidential role relative to objective empirical claims about what properties things have. Sellars's *inferentialist* approach to semantics is crucial to the holist alternative he presents. He understands conceptual content as essentially involving the inferential relations that such a content stands in to other such contents: its role in reasoning. On this view one cannot have *one* concept without having *many*. The conceptual contentfulness of experience, essential not only semantically but to the possibility of experience playing an evidential role by providing reasons for further claims (for Sellars, two sides of one coin), depends on the *inferential* relations such experiences stand in (at least to one another), and is not in principle intelligible just in terms of the role of experiences as *noninferentially* elicited responses. For Sellars experiences can underwrite *descriptions*, rather than merely classificatory *labels* only if and insofar as they are located "in a space of implications."¹² A stratum of experience construed as independent of any inferential relations does not qualify as *conceptually* contentful in the sense required for it to play an *evidential* role. The final strand in the argument is a pragmatic one. Semantic atomism fails because it ignores the *use* or *functional role* of expressions or experiential episodes (perhaps construed as tokenings in a language of thought) in virtue of which they deserve to count as contentful at all. In "Phenomenalism" Sellars also presents an important further argument against empiricism that turns on the implicitly modal character of empirical descriptive concepts (a Kantian point). I discuss this argument in Chapter 3.

I have always thought that these broadly Kantian anti-empiricist arguments of Sellars go deep enough to warrant serious attention to and admiration of his writings. And I have always admired Sellars's systematic theoretical ambitions. But I did not think I had a good grasp of the

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large-scale architecture of the “synoptic vision” he was constructing. In his methodological manifesto, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” Sellars characterizes philosophy as the attempt to understand “how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.” **[AU: no citation OK?]** For a disarmingly long time, I did not really see how all the pieces of his work hung together, even in the broadest possible sense of the term. I thought I had a good grip on the semantic and epistemological lessons of EPM, which I took to be the core of his philosophical contribution. But lots of the rest of the topics he addressed—his nominalism about abstract entities, his treatment of modality, his scientific naturalism, and much else seemed rather far removed from that core. I now think I do see how all these elements “hang together,” and that sense is one of the things that I hope to convey in this book.

The key, it now seems to me, is to think about what, apart from the ideas he weaves together in EPM, Sellars gets from Kant. (In retrospect, this should perhaps all along have been the obvious strategy.) Chapter 1 is entitled “Categories and Noumena: Two Kantian Axes of Sellars’s Thought.” It sets out the broad outlines of two master ideas that I see Sellars as taking from Kant and developing in his own way and for his own time. Together, I think they define the space in which the apparently disparate elements of Sellars’s story “hang together.” The first is a refinement of Sellars’s anti-descriptivism. From the Kantian categories, the “pure concepts of the Understanding,” Sellars distills the idea that besides concepts whose principal use is empirical description and explanation, there are concepts whose principal expressive role is rather to make explicit essential features of the framework within which empirical description and explanation are possible. From Carnap he takes the idea that the function of such concepts is broadly metalinguistic. Sellars does a lot of work sharpening his characterization of this distinctive conceptual role. Among the kinds of concepts that Sellars sees as playing such a role are alethic modal concepts, normative concepts, semantic and intentional concepts, and ontological-

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categorial concepts such as “property,” “universal,” and “proposition,” along with the names of particular universals (“circularity,” “redness”) and propositions (“The fact that snow is white”). Although Sellars never puts the point quite this way, I think his treatment of all of these kinds of vocabulary—which the narrowly descriptivist empiricist fails to understand as “not inferior to, but merely different from” ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary—belong together in a box with something like the Peircean label “A New Theory of the Categories.” I say why I think that in the first half of Chapter 1. The absolutely central case of alethic modality is discussed in Chapters 3 through 6, where the categorial function is elaborated under the heading “the Kant-Sellars thesis about modality.” There I not only try to understand Sellars’s view, but also to develop and extend it, and to investigate some important consequences of accepting it. In Chapter 4 I also consider briefly how normative vocabulary and what it expresses fits into the picture. Chapter 7 then uses the idea of a new, broadly metalinguistic theory of the categories as a lens through which to view Sellars’s nominalism, worked out in impressive detail in three long essays written between 1959 and 1963.

The second half of the first, orienting chapter offers a diagnosis of where Sellars’s philosophical naturalism goes wrong, inviting him down a path that led to such extravagances as his doctrine of sensa. Sellars shaped his scientific naturalism as a detranscendentalized version of Kant’s noumena/phenomena distinction. Whereas I think Sellars’s new version of the categories is a great idea, eminently worthy of further development and exploitation in our own time, I think understanding the relation between the empirical descriptive resources of natural science, on the one hand, and the empirical descriptive resources of essentially every other form of discourse, on the other, on the model of noumena and phenomena—as representing ultimate reality by contrast to mere appearance—has disastrous consequences. I say how I think this works in Sellars, and why I think it is a bad way for him to develop his naturalism, in the second

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half of Chapter 1. I do not revisit it in the rest of the book, though the earlier argument turns on points that are further developed there, particularly in Chapter 6.

I think the structure of Sellars's project becomes much clearer when it is thought about as working within the axes defined by what he makes of the two Kantian ideas discussed in my first chapter. There I recommend adding this division to Rorty's distinction between left-wing and right-wing Sellarsians. In the body of this work I address primarily the categorial idea, since I am interested not only in interpreting Sellars, but also and primarily in developing those of his ideas that seem to me to provide the richest resources for thinking about philosophical problems today. Although there is of course much interest in philosophical naturalism, I do not know how to contribute helpfully to this discussion by drawing on what seems to me the deformation of Sellars's original naturalist motivation that resulted from forcing it into the mold of the phenomenon/noumenon distinction.

Chapter 2 offers a simplified exposition of what I take to be the principal arguments of EPM, showing how they arise out of a particular picture of what it is to use descriptive vocabulary *observationally*, that is, to make empirical *reports*. Chapter 3 deepens the discussion of the arguments against empiricism in EPM by placing them in the context of some of Sellars's other, nearly contemporary articles. It traces further, into those neighboring works, some strands of argumentation that intersect and are woven together in his critique of empiricism in its two principal then-extant forms: traditional and twentieth-century logical empiricism. One of those arguments, from his essay "Phenomenalism," turns on the fact that the use of the ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary employed to say how things objectively are—the target vocabulary of phenomenalist attempts to reduce it to a purely experiential base vocabulary—implicitly involves alethic *modal* commitments. Modality has been anathema to a line of empiricist thought common to Hume and to Quine, and here Sellars exploits that fact as guiding us to a fatal flaw in phenomenalist forms of empiricism.

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Chapter 4 pursues the topic of modality, following Sellars following Kant on the categorial status of modal concepts, filling in the sketch offered in the first half of Chapter 1. Specifically, this chapter looks at what I call the “modal Kant-Sellars thesis.” This is the claim that in being able to use ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything that one needs to know how to do, in principle, to use alethic modal vocabulary—in particular subjunctive conditionals. This is a thesis concerning the *use* of modal vocabulary; so it is a thesis in pragmatics, rather than semantics. And it concerns the relation between the use of modal vocabulary and the *use* of empirical descriptive vocabulary. It asserts a kind of pragmatic dependence, in the form of claiming the sufficiency of one set of practices or abilities for another. It is a way of making specific the idea that the use of modal vocabulary is “broadly metalinguistic.” As I reconstruct it, it is the claim that the use of modal vocabulary can be *elaborated from* the use of descriptive vocabulary, and that it serves to *make explicit* features that are *implicit in* the use of descriptive vocabulary. This is a very special general *expressive role* that modal vocabulary can be taken to play. In fact, as Chapter 4 argues, the *normative* Kant-Sellars thesis claims that deontic normative vocabulary also plays an expressive role of this kind.

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Chapter 5 further investigates and develops the particular kind of *pragmatic modal expressivism* that the previous chapter developed from Sellars’s views. It addresses the crucial question of what sort of derivative descriptive role alethic modal vocabulary could be taken to play, compatible with understanding its use in the first instance in terms of the pragmatic expressive role it plays relative to vocabulary whose principal use is for description and explanation. That is, it considers what kind of *modal realism* is compatible with a broadly Sellarsian *modal expressivism* of the sort discussed in the previous chapter.

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Chapter 6 then looks at some radical consequences for our views about sortals and identity that I argue follow from the broadly Sellarsian understanding of the expressive role distinctive of modal vocabulary epitomized in the modal Kant-Sellars thesis—as elaborated from and

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explicative of the use of empirical descriptive vocabulary. This chapter fills in the argument sketched in the second half of Chapter 1 against thinking of the objects and properties described in the manifest image as mere appearances of the reality that consists of the objects and properties described in the scientific image. For, it is claimed, when we appreciate the modal commitments implicit in the use of *all* empirical descriptive vocabulary, we see that strongly cross-sortal identity claims—those that link items falling under sortal predicates with different criteria of identity and individuation—are *never* true. Appearances to the contrary are due to the idea that one can restrict the properties governed by the indiscernibility of identity to *nonmodal* properties. But the claim that what is made explicit by alethic modal vocabulary is implicit in the use of even the most apparently nonmodal descriptive vocabulary says that this idea is mistaken. In the sense that would be required, there are no “nonmodal” properties. The claim that strongly cross-sortal identities are never true is a radical one. But if it is right, it rules out the sort of identities that are asserted by a scientific naturalism that endorses Sellars’s *scientia mensura* and interprets it as requiring that when manifest-image expressions refer at all, they must refer to items referred to by expressions belonging to the scientific image. This is but one of the consequences for metaphysics of this consequence of the categorial character of modal concepts.

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Finally, in Chapter 7, I consider Sellars’s metalinguistic expressive nominalism about universals and other abstract entities. Here the focus is not on modality, but on a quite different range of concepts whose use Sellars understands as another important species of the same categorial pragmatic expressive genus as modal and normative vocabulary. Sellars’s discussion of what is involved in talk about properties is not much considered in the large contemporary metaphysical literature on properties. That is a shame. He has a lot to offer.

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What I think is right about what Sellars does here is the progress he makes in specifying a distinctive expressive role that ontologically categorizing vocabulary plays relative to the use of empirical descriptive vocabulary: the kind of functional classification he thinks it is performing.

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Sellars himself draws invidious nominalistic ontological conclusions from his characterization of the expressive role of this sort of vocabulary. He takes his account of that expressive role to show that it is wrong to think we are describing anything when we talk about properties, or referring to anything when we use terms like “circularity” or “redness.” That is his nominalism. I close by arguing that he fails to show that we should draw these ontological conclusions from his convincing expressivist analysis of the use of this sort of vocabulary. This conclusion opens up space for elaboration of a kind of realism about universals and propositions that would be compatible with Sellars’s expressivist account of the use of such vocabulary, by analogy to the reconciliation of modal expressivism and modal realism that proceeded by showing how what is expressed by modal vocabulary admits a *parasitic* descriptive function, which is argued for in Chapter 5. Alas, I am not currently in a position to elaborate an antinominalist realism about abstracta that would occupy the space opened up by my critical argument. (Such further clues as I have are contained in the argument at the end of “The Significance of Complex Numbers for Frege’s Philosophy of Mathematics,” which is Chapter 9 of *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, together with the discussion of the Julius Caesar problem in Chapter 8 of *TMD*.) The book leaves off within sight of the tantalizing possibility of such a realism compatible with pragmatic expressivism in this area, too, but without seeking to enter that Promised Land.

The attentive reader will notice that some quotations and discussions of the lessons I think should be learned from them are repeated across chapters. This is typically because they are central to my understanding of Sellars’s enterprise and contribution. I have left them in place in spite of the repetition for the sake of clarity in the local narratives.

That there can be shown to be a kind of pragmatically metalinguistic expressive role common to Sellars’s account of modality and the analysis of abstract-entity-talk that leads him to his special kind of ontological nominalism is a central criterion of adequacy of the account I have given in the first chapter of how disparate parts of Sellars’s work are bound together by

employing a common strategy of understanding important classes of concepts as playing expressive roles analogous to those of Kant's "pure categories of the Understanding," when that idea is transposed into a pragmatic metalinguistic key. That these various parts of Sellars's corpus are tied together in this way is not something he ever explicitly *says*. It is my description of what he in fact *does*. That the systematic character of Sellars's work can be illuminated by following this categorial Ariadne's thread from one region to another is the hypothesis I am arguing for in this book. In good Hegelian fashion, I am trying to understand Sellars better than he understood himself—and then to figure out where to go on from there. The title of this book, *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, is an attempt to characterize in general terms the trajectory that led him to a Kant-inspired pragmatic expressivism from the criticisms he mounted of empiricism—and has led me to try to push that line of thought further.

I wish that I could have figured out this story in time to try it out on Wilfrid. I feel as though I finally know what I *should* have been saying to him all those years ago. Now, it seems to me, we could *really* have a talk. But one of the happy features of conversations between philosophers is that they need not stop when one—or even both—of the parties dies. This one hasn't yet.

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<A>Notes

¹ In Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. I (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956); reprinted in Sellars's *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956; reissued Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1991); reprinted as a monograph, with an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). §36. Hereafter EPM.

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² "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities," in H. Feigl, M. Scriven, and G. Maxwell (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. II (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), [ref.] §79. Hereafter CDM. [AU: [ref.]?]

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³ "Realism and the New Way of Words" and "Epistemology and the New Way of Words," both reprinted in J. Sicha (ed.), *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1980). Hereafter PPPW.

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⁴ On the first page of "Epistemology and the New Way of Words," PPPW, p. 31 (p. 645 in original publication); henceforth cited as p. 31/645). [AU: if page number of original

publication cited, seems it might be helpful to give publication details of first publication.]

⁵ *Naturalism and Ontology* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1979). [AU: please check.] p. 1. I am grateful to Boris Brandhoff for pointing out this passage.

⁶ Michael Williams, *Groundless Belief*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999; originally published by Blackwell in 1977). *Locus classicus* for Sellars's argument is EPM (1956) and for Quine's, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953). [AU: please check.]

⁷ In his classic, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁸ In his Carus lectures, "Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process," published in *The Monist* 64(1) (1981): 3–90. [AU: please check.]

⁹ EPM §41.

¹⁰ Flower in the crannied wall,

I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,

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I should know what God and man is. (1863)

¹¹ [EPM](#), §36.

¹² [CDCM](#) §108.

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