

Some Sellars Quotes

Scientia Mensura:

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.” (EPM §41)

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

It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects...locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label. [CDCM §108]

[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*. [CDCM §79]

Although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*.... The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand. [CDCM §108]

To make first hand use of these [modal] expressions is to be about the business of explaining a state of affairs, or justifying an assertion. [CDCM §80]

What was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than supposed origin in experience, their primary feature.
[Autobiographical Reflections]

Kant was on the right track when he insisted that just as concepts are essentially (and not accidentally) items which can occur in judgments, so judgments (and, therefore, indirectly concepts) are essentially (and not accidentally) items which can occur in reasonings or arguments. [IM I-4]

...we have established not only that they are the expression of material rules of inference, but that the authority of these rules is not derivative from formal rules. In other words, we have shown that material rules of inference are essential to the language we speak, for we make constant use of subjunctive conditionals of the type we have been examining. It is very tempting to conclude that material rules of inference are essential to languages containing descriptive terms. [IM III-15]

The idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no modal expression is of a piece with the idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no prescriptive expression. [CDCM §80]

The language of modalities is ... a “transposed” language of norms. [IM V-21]

The “means” of semantical statements...is no more a *psychological* word than is the “ought” of ethical statements or the “must” of modal statements...[IM V-24]

To claim that the relationship between the framework of sense contents and that of physical objects can be construed on the [phenomenalist] model is to commit oneself to the idea that there are inductively confirmable generalizations about sense contents which are ‘in principle’ capable of being formulated without the use of the language of physical things. . . . [T]his idea is a mistake. [PH 285]

Anything which can properly be called conceptual thinking can occur only within a framework of conceptual thinking in terms of which it can be criticized, supported, refuted, in short, evaluated. To be able to think is to be able to measure one’s thoughts by standards of correctness, of relevance, of evidence. In this sense a diversified conceptual framework is a whole which, however sketchy, is prior to its parts, and cannot be construed as a coming together of parts which are already conceptual in character. The conclusion is difficult to avoid that the transition from pre-conceptual patterns of behaviour to conceptual thinking was a holistic one, a jump to a level of awareness which is irreducibly new, a jump which was the coming into being of man. [PSIM 374]

To say that a certain person desired to do A, thought it his duty to do B but was forced to do C, is not to *describe* him as one might describe a scientific specimen. One does, indeed, describe him, but one does something more. And it is this something more which is the irreducible core of the framework of persons.

In what does this something more consist? ... To think of a featherless biped as a person is to think of it as a being with which one is bound up in a network of rights and duties. From this point of view, the irreducibility of the personal is the irreducibility of the ‘ought’ to the ‘is’. But even more basic than this (though ultimately, as we shall see, the two points coincide), is the fact that to think of a featherless biped as a person is to construe its behaviour in terms of actual or potential membership in an embracing group each member of which thinks of itself as a member of the group. Let us call such a group a ‘community’. [PSIM 407]

[E]xemplification is a ‘quasi-semantic’ relation, and that it (and universals) are “in the world” only in that broad sense in which the ‘world’ includes linguistic norms and roles viewed (thus in translating) from the standpoint of a fellow participant. [NS 103]