

Descriptions, Implications, and Rules Articulating the Framework of Discursive Practices

Some Sellars Quotes

1. 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: The “*scientia mensura*” passage.]
2. 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]
3. 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]
4. 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]
5. 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]
6. [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]
7. [Already in his Oxford days, Sellars had realized that] 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]
8. 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]
9. ...we have established not only that they [subjunctive conditionals] are the expression of material rules of inference [cf. “space of implications”], 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....[M]aterial rules of inference are essential to languages containing descriptive terms. [IM III-15]

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

11. When we characterized a language as a system of norms, we did not stress what is now obvious, namely, that a norm is always a norm for doing, a rule is always concerning doing. [Outline 1.312] [K]nowing a language is a knowing *how*; it is like knowing how to dance, or how to play bridge. [LRB]

12. The meaning of a linguistic symbol *as a linguistic symbol* is entirely constituted by the rules which regulate its use. [LRB]

13. To talk about awareness₂ is to use a pragmatic metalanguage. A pragmatic metalanguage includes a semantic metalanguage as a proper part, just as a semantic metalanguage includes a syntactical metalanguage as a proper part. [Outline 1.63]

14. [I]t is only if there is a pragmatics that is *not* an empirical science of sign-behavior, a pragmatics which *is* a branch of the *formal* theory of language, that the term is rescued for philosophy. And ...that the analytic philosopher can hope to give a nonpsychologistic account of the key concepts of traditional epistemology. [PPE §7] [P]hilosophical propositions are propositions in the pure theory of languages (the pure syntax of pragmatic meta-languages)...[PPE §48:]

15. To say that man is a rational animal, is to say that man is a creature not of *habits*, but of *rules*. When God created Adam, he whispered in his ear, "In all contexts of action you will recognize rules, if only the rule to grope for rules to recognize. When you cease to recognize rules, you will walk on four feet." [LRB 5]

16. A rule, properly speaking, isn't a rule unless it *lives* in behavior, rule-regulated behavior, even rule-violating behavior. Linguistically we always operate *within* a framework of *living* rules. To *talk about* rules is to move *outside* the talked-about rules *into* another framework of living rules. (The snake which sheds one skin lives within another.) In attempting to grasp rules *as rules* from without, we are trying to have our cake and eat it. To *describe* rules is to describe the *skeletons* of rules. A rule is *lived*, not *described*. [LRB 13]

17. The language of modalities is ... a "transposed" language of norms. [IM V-21] [M]odal terms, normative terms and psychological terms are mutually irreducible. [IM V-23] 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-23-5]

18. [W]e now recognize that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it. [EPM §45]

19. 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 [subjunctive conditionals] 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]

20. 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 [justification]. 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]

21. [E]xemplification is a ‘quasi-semantic’ relation, and 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] “*Ontological* categories are the material mode of speech for *syntactical* categories.” [GE 159]

22. [T]he problem of “the one and the many” is in fact broader than the problem of universals... If, therefore, we can understand the relation of *the lion* (one) to *lions* (many) without construing *the lion* as a universal of which lions are instances; and if the looked-for singular term pertaining to pawns can be construed by analogy with “the lion”—indeed, as “the pawn”—then we would be in a position to understand how *the pawn* could be a one as against a many, without being a universal of which pawns are instances. This in turn would enable a distinction between a generic sense of “abstract entity” in which the lion and the pawn as well as triangularity (construed as the •triangular•) and that two plus two equals four (construed as the •two plus two equals four•) would be abstract entities as being ones over and against manys and a narrower sense of abstract entity in which qualities, relations, sorts, classes, propositions and the like are abstract entities, but of these only a proper subset, universals but not propositions, for example, would be *ones* as over and against *instances* or *members*. This subset would include the kind *lion* and the class of pawns, which must not be confused with *the lion* and *the pawn* as construed above. [AE 166-167]

23. “What, then, does it mean to say
That green a is a fact

Clearly this is equivalent to saying

That green a is true

which calls to mind the equivalence

That green a is true \equiv green a

This, however, is not the most perspicuous way to represent matters, for while the equivalence obtains, indeed necessarily obtains, its truth depends on the principle of inference—and this is the crux—

From ‘that green a is true’ (in our language) to infer ‘green a’ (in our language).

And it is by virtue of the fact that we *draw* such inferences that meaning and truth talk gets its connection with the world. In this sense, the connection is *done* rather than *talked about*.

Viewed from this perspective, Wittgenstein’s later conception of a language as a form of life is already foreshadowed by the ineffability thesis of the *Tractatus*. But to see this is to see that no ineffability is involved. For while to infer is neither to refer to that which can be referred to, nor to assert that which can be asserted, this does not mean that it is to fail to eff something which is, therefore, ineffable.” [NS 125]

24. 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]

25. Thus the conceptual framework of persons is the framework in which we think of one another as sharing the community intentions which provide the ambience of principles and standards (above all, those which make meaningful discourse and rationality itself possible) within which we live our own individual lives. A person can almost be defined as a being that has intentions. Thus the conceptual framework of persons is not something that needs to be *reconciled with* the scientific image, but rather something to be *joined* to it. Thus, to complete the scientific image we need to enrich it *not* with more ways of saying what is the case, but with the language of community and individual intentions, so that by construing the actions we intend to do and the circumstances in which we intend to do them in scientific terms, we *directly* relate the world as conceived by scientific theory to our purposes, and make it *our* world and no longer an alien appendage to the world in which we do our living. [408]