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Passages from Sellars's "Outlines of a Philosophy of Language" (1950)

[Ms. unearthed from the Sellars archive by Boris Brandhoff]

[All bolding is BB's.]

I. Possible worlds

1.13 Reality consists of all possible worlds.

The world is the possible world which includes this.

Since the difference between the world and other possible worlds is a **pragmatic** one (**token-reflexives belonging to the subject-matter of pragmatics**), rather than a **logical** one in the narrower sense, we shall avoid confusion if we speak of worlds instead of possible worlds.

In the pragmatic sense of "exist" only the world exists.

1.132 Worlds come in families. To each family belongs a set of simple characteristics (qualities and relations), and each world of the family exhibits a set of uniformities involving these characteristics.

These uniformities are the non-logical necessities (natural laws) of the family.

1.1343 Just as each family of worlds is associated with a set of simple characteristics private to that family, so each world has its own private set of particulars. The worlds of a family exemplify the same characteristics, but no particular is common to two worlds.

II. Norms, roles and rules

1.2 "A language exists as a system of **norms** and **roles**."

1.221 The norms and roles making up a language are spoken about in a **metalanguage**.

The formulation of a linguistic **norm** in its metalanguage is a **rule**.

1.221: Corresponding to logical **necessities** in Reality, we have logical **norms** of the language, and L-**rules** (Formation and Transformation) in the **metalanguage**. Corresponding to natural **necessities** we have the non-logical (physical, synthetic) **norms** of the language, and P-rules (Conformation rules) in the metalanguage. The nonlogical norms of the language **implicitly define** the primitive predicates of the language, just as the logical norms implicitly define its logical terms and categories.

1.23 **The roles which make up a language may be "played" by differing "materials"**. Thus French, German, Turkish can be regarded as different specifications of one system of norms and roles in terms of different qualities, relations, principles of composition, etc.

1.231 Thus we must distinguish between a word as a role in a pure system of norms and a word as a pattern of sounds, say, which plays this role in a "materialized" system of norms. Finally...we must distinguish between a pattern of sounds as universal and a particular realization of this pattern...a word as **type (role)**, as **token-class**, and as **token**. In the case of linguistic expressions which are capable of truth and falsity, we distinguish in this way between propositions, sentences, and statements.

3.4211 [Shd be 3.421]: An assertion is a tokening of a sentence.

To assert that p is to token a sentence designating p.

3.4211: An assertion...is not an attitude.

3.4222: A belief manifests itself in assertions, emotions, actions.

III. Awareness and Metalanguages

1.3: Let us next, continue [as] the phenomenologist, introduce some considerations concerning **metalanguages**.

1.31: In the case of a syntactical metalanguage, the **meanings constitute a system of norms and roles**. The metalanguage is itself a “higher level” system of norms. In being **aware** of the meanings of a language other than a metalanguage, we are being aware of a system of states of affairs. **In being aware of the meanings of a metalanguage we are being aware of a system of norms and roles**.

1.311 But should we be startled at speaking of **being aware of linguistic norms**? We are aware of non-linguistic norms. Thus we are aware of moral obligations; And is not a moral obligation formulated by a rule in a language (though not a metalanguage)?

1.312 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**.

1.3221: ...does a system of roles and norms become a system of roles and norms for a language user merely by virtue of is being aware of it? [Referenced below in 2.22, 2.22221.]

More generally, **is the relation between a norm and me whereby it is “binding” on me one of awareness?**

1.3222: We get an overwhelming impression...that a language...is somehow a duplicate of its subject-matter. Indeed, if it were not for **the normative character of a language**, we might be tempted to identify it with its world. In this event, the semantic metalanguage of a language would consist in a series of statements of identity. Was it not Bradley who said that the Ideal of thought is to be Reality? For “thought” read “language.”

1.4: A language contains a map of its world.

In mapping its world, a language maps the users of the language who belong to that world.

In using a language, a language user carries with him a map of a world.

The language-user’s meta-language says that its object language contains a map, but not that its map is the map.

Does not one find out which map is the map, and where one is on this map, by virtue of being **aware** of the world?...No.

1.442: We must distinguish between two senses of awareness (1) that in which we are aware of items in the domain of worlds, (2) that in which we are aware that this is the world.

1.52211 **Awarenesses are mental symbol events or tokens**. The relation aware of turns out to be identical with the relation of aboutness which relates language to its meanings.

1.53: Awareness (in the first sense) turns out to be the use of the very language whose meaningful use it was to explain.

1.532: **To talk about awareness (in the first sense) is to use a semantical metalanguage**.

1.6 We can now distinguish the second sense of awareness from the first. Let us speak of awareness₁ and awareness₂.

1.61: **Awareness₁ is thinking of an object or state of affairs by having a mental token of the expression or sentence which designates that object or state of affairs**.

We can be aware₁ of what might go on in any world. We can be aware₂ only of what is actually going on in this world. **Awareness₂ presupposes awareness₁**. One isn’t aware₂ of something unless one is thinking of it, and hence tokening an expression which refers to it.

1.62: **To be aware₂ of something, one must not only be thinking of it, it must be “present to” the thought**. To be aware₂ of something is to token an expression designating it, and for the item designated to be “present to” the token...Present to is the relation called “Coex” in my early papers.

1.63. **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**.

One can talk in a pragmatic metalanguage about items being present to language users (minds) in many worlds.

To talk about awareness₂ is not to be aware₂ of something.

To be aware₂ of something involves the use of a language, but it involves more than the use of a language. It involves something more than norm-conforming tokening. This something more is not [more] norm-conforming. It is not a doing, but a being confronted by the world. [BB: Cf. passages 2.3233 to 2.34 below.]

IV. Phenomenology and Awareness

2.1: **Phenomenology is the exhibition of the norms of a language** or region of language **by** painstakingly and explicitly **describing** the structure of what one is conscious of in thinking about the subject-matter of the language. It is the exhibition of the norms of a language **by the use of that language**.

Phenomenology is rule-governed behavior enjoyed.

Science is rule-governed behavior on trial.

Phenomenology is contemplation, science is adventure.

2.22: **A norm is formulated by a rule. Awareness of a norm, then, is tokening the rule.**

Normative activity is activity in which the rule formulating the norm...enters as a causal factor. [His ellipsis.]

The features of a rule-sentence which indicate that it formulates a norm (the occurrence in it of “ought”, “it is correct to”, “it is not correct to”, and other expressions of this type) express its causal role in shaping behavior.

This explains our dis-satisfaction with accounts of norms which make oughtness into a quality or relation. (1.3221)

2.223 **The tokening of a rule is the phenomenological given-ness of ought.**

2. 224 A rule is not the rule of a person unless it is causally operative in his activity. Here is the sound core of Kant’s Autonomy.

2.32 **Behaviorism** is both a methodology and a psychological thesis. [BB: See 2.34 below]

As a **methodologist**, the Behaviorist conceives his task to be the elaboration of a system of concepts and laws in terms of which the observable behavior of organisms can be predicted and controlled.

In short, the concepts of psychology, according to the behaviorist, must be **related by explicit and/or implicit definitions to concepts relating to observable behavior**.

Formulated this way, Behaviorism is a more elastic methodological conception than many Behaviorists would allow. A narrower behaviorism would insist on restricting psychological concepts to those **explicitly definable in terms of observable behavior**.

2.3231 The prejudice in favor of restricting scientific concepts to those explicitly definable in terms of observables rests on a mistaken theory of concepts relating to observables. It rests on the illusion that these concepts (words) gain their meaning as concepts by association with observables.

The truth of the matter is that **all words have conceptual meaning by virtue of their role in a system of rule-governed behavior**. All conceptual meaning is, in the last analysis, **implicit definition**.

2.3233 What, then, do “**observation words**” have that other words do not? The answer is that in addition to their conceptual meaning, **these words are related in a non-rule-governed manner to environmental and intraorganic sensory stimuli**.

The tie-up between rule-governed language and the world is not itself rule-governed.

Could there be a rule “When X token ‘X’”? No. To take account of (be conscious of) in a rule-governed way is to token.

2.3241 One and the same kind of utterance may serve **both a rule-governed function** (play a role in the language) **and be a conditioned response** to an external or internal stimulus.

2.3243 **Observation expressions** are expressions which **play this dual role**...[The noise “Daddie” was a conditioned response before it became a word, and observation word.]

2.34 Behaviorism as a psychological thesis (as contrasted with methodology) is the denial of consciousness. This denial, however, has been much misunderstood.

To deny consciousness in the sense in which the Behaviorist denies it...is to deny the ultimacy of cognitive consciousness.

The sober Behaviorist does not deny that organisms have color sensations...

What the Behaviorist does deny is that there is any consciousness...that which isn't a matter of a...complicated learned system of stimulus-response connections of the sort I should analyse by the concept of **rule-governed behavior**. [BB: ellipsis his]

In short, **cognitive activity is overt and covert rule-governed behavior tied to the world by conditioned responses.**

2.343 The Behaviorist rejects awarenesses of universals, of propositions, intentional acts, judgments, etc., conceived as they have been by traditional epistemology.

2. 5113 To talk a semantic metalanguage is to talk about a system of norms and its being about a world. **To use a semantic meta-language is to be conscious of a language as a system of norms, of oughts.** The psychologist is conscious of norms only in the statistical sense of this dangerously ambiguous word.

The psychologist, then, talks and thinks in his object-language, even when he is talking and thinking about language behavior.

2.513 We must distinguish carefully between "speaking a metalanguage" in the sense of being conscious of a system of linguistic roles and norms. The latter activity is the phenomenology of language, if reflectively and contemplatively indulged in. It is then Pure Semiotic.

The "idealization" involved in "constructing semantic systems" does not consist in supposing that people talked in uniform ways and formulating the empirical psychology of such a happy world. It is the "idealization" involved in the consciousness of a system of norms... [BB: his ellipsis]

Passages from "Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology"

[Bolding added by BB.]

§1: **The attempt to draw a clear distinction between philosophy and the empirical sciences** can almost be taken as the defining trait of the analytic movement in contemporary philosophical thought.

Characteristic, then, of analytic philosophy has been the rejection of what it terms *psychologism*,

The analytic movement in philosophy has gradually moved towards the conclusion that the defining characteristic of philosophical concepts is that they are **formal** concepts relating to the formation and transformation **rules** of symbol structures called languages. **Philosophy**, in other words, tends to be conceived of **as the formal theory of languages**.

§2 The analytic philosopher establishes his right to attack **psychologism** with respect to a given concept if he is able to show that it is capable of treatment as a concept the nature and function of which is constituted by its role in **rules** definitive of a broader or narrower set of calculi.

These **rules** constitute a logic of **implication** and deducibility. In this stage of the battle against psychologism, an apparently clear-cut distinction arose between *symbol-behavior* and *formal system*, a distinction sometimes summed up as that between *inference as fact* and *deducibility as norm*.

§3: As a result, **factualism** and **psychologism** are flourishing in analytic philosophy, and by no means on the fringes only. The invasion stems in part from **a carry-over from the psychologism that characterized much of the**

controversy over sense-perception in the 'teens and 'twenties; but in part also, and this is indeed the decisive factor, to the incompleteness of semantics (at least as at present constituted) as a foundation from which to launch a decisive attack against these **enemies of philosophy**.

§4: I am now in a position to define the topic of this paper. **If an analytic philosopher wishes to attack psychologism in epistemology**, what fundamental concepts should he claim to be mistakenly treated as **psychological** or, in general, **factual** concepts? In other words, from the standpoint of analytic philosophy, which concepts of those traditionally classified as epistemological properly belong to philosophy? This we have interpreted to mean, *which of the concepts traditionally classified as epistemological can be interpreted as concepts of which the function and essence is to serve in rules definitive of a type of object calculus?*

§7: The use of the '**pragmatics**' in connection with verification, confirmation, and **meaningfulness** is now an established one, though these items are but a small part of what is now included under this heading. Shall we as philosophers extend the term 'semantics' or narrow the term 'pragmatics'? In any case, **it 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 it is only if there is such a new dimension of calculus structure, whether its analysis be called 'Pure Pragmatics' or 'Pure Semantics' that the **analytic philosopher** can hope to give a **nonpsychologistic** account of the key concepts of traditional **epistemology**.

§8: ..two purposes, that of introducing a key concept in linguistic analysis, and that of weakening the grip of **naive realism**.

Syntactical predicates (for example) have as their domain expressions in a calculus which is a model or **norm** for symbol-behavior. (The terms 'model' and 'norm' are here used to suggest a problem, rather than indicate a solution). We should point out that the decidability of syntactical predicates with respect to these expressions, and, in general, the properties to which the calculus **owes its status as a norm for symbol behavior**, are due to the fact that **it is constituted by formation and transformation rules**. We should recognize that it is nonsense to say that human symbol behavior is constituted by syntactical formation and transformation rules.

§9: ...drawing a distinction between language *as behavior* (that is, as the subject matter of empirical psychology), and language behavior *to the extent that it conforms, and as conforming, to the criteria of language as norm*; or, in the terminology we shall adopt, between language behavior *qua* behavioral **fact**, and **language behavior qua tokens of language as type**.

§10: To recapitulate: the solution of our dilemma appears to require a three-fold distinction between (1) **language as norm or type**, (2) language as behavioral **fact**, and (3) items in the second class which token, and as tokening, items in the first class. In doing this, **it requires that the language-behavior of (3) belongs to both the domain of fact, and the domain of language as norm**. This is only possible if the domain of fact, and the domain of language as norm turn out to be the same. But language as norm is such as being posited by metalinguistic rules. We have consequently been led from a problem to a paradox.

§11: the clarification of the status of formal systems is the culminating task of a philosophy of language, *and must be treated as such*. If the question is put too soon, the answer will inevitably be **empirical in a bad sense, in a word**,

scientism. If it is asked, Are you consistent in calling your position a form of Logical Empiricism? How can philosophy, which on your interpretation is a purely formal science, give an *empirical* answer to the above or any other question?”, it may suffice for the moment to point out that **an empiricist answer need not be an empirical (as being factual) answer**...the thesis of empiricism is a *formal* rather than a *factual* truth.

§18: the fundamental concept of pure pragmatics is that of a certain *formal* restriction on the calculi to the expressions of which pragmatic predicates are assignable. If we were putting the matter in a non-technical way, we would say that *the minimum formal requirement which a formal system must fill in order to be a candidate for the position of empirically meaningful language is that it be capable of being ‘about’ a world in which it is used.*

§33: Our concern in this paper is with the most general topics that arise at the very **foundations of pure pragmatics**, that is to say, with **the formal features common to all languages** the expressions of which qualify for characterization by pragmatic predicates.

§39: Returning, then, to formal considerations (even though from the standpoint of behavioral science we are talking schematically), we must come to a final reckoning with **naïve realism**. This reckoning will consist in a clarification of the relation between an object-language and “the world it is **about**.” The usual temptation has been to argue that if a language is meaningful, then its expressions mean items and classes of items in the world; while if the language is meaningless, then there is no problem as to what its expressions mean. Reasoning of this type is a perfect illustration of the way in which **a factualistic interpretation of ‘meaningful’** inevitably leads to **factualism in semantics**, for it implies that all semantic statements are false except those relating to “the empirically meaningful language.”

§43: We are now in a position to characterize **the pragmatic concept of a story** in a way which brings out the status of this concept as a **regulative idea**. ...The requirement that a story contain a verification base amounts to the requirement that the world designated by the story include items which are tokens of sentences in the story, which tokens are co-experienced with the items designated by the sentences they token, which latter items they themselves also designate as being tokens of these sentences. These tokens are the clarified equivalent of the *Konstatierungen* or *Protokolsaetze* of that stage of Logical Positivism which came as close as can any theory of psychological *evidenz* to the view that epistemological predicates have the same type of decidability as do those of pure mathematics.

§45: ...clarify the notion of one fact in a world being **about** another fact in the same world, **in a formal as opposed to psychological factual sense of ‘about.’**

§46: We are led to distinguish between **stories-cum-worlds** belonging to higher and lower constitutive levels, for the above notion turns out to be that of a world which includes not only items which are tokens of first-level sentences, but also items which are tokens of pragmatic meta-sentences constituted in a pragmatic meta-language. **It must be constituted in a meta-meta language which pictures both a pragmatic meta-language and its first-level language, just as a pragmatic meta-language contains the picture of a first-level language.**

§48: [P]hilosophical propositions are propositions in the pure theory of languages (the pure syntax of pragmatic meta-languages)...