

# Sellars's Metalinguistic Expressivist Nominalism

## I. Introduction

The five years from 1958 through 1962 were extraordinarily productive ones for Wilfrid Sellars. His monumental “Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities,” appearing in 1958, was a suitable follow-up to “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (which had been delivered as three lectures at the University of London in 1956).<sup>1</sup> Sellars never further developed the expressivist approach to alethic modality that he sketched in that paper, apparently having taken the ideas there as far as he could.<sup>2</sup> In that same year, he delivered two lectures at Yale, under the title “Grammar and Existence: A Preface to Ontology,” (*GE*, 1958) which announced an expressivist, nominalist project in ontology that he then pursued in two other equally remarkable and original essays: “Naming and Saying” (*NS*, 1962) and “Abstract Entities” (*AE*, 1963).<sup>3</sup> Jumblese, dot-quotes, and distributive singular terms, the conceptual tools he developed and deployed in those essays to respond to the challenges to his approach to universals he

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<sup>1</sup> *CDCM* appeared in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume II: Concepts, Theories, and the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Herbert Feigl, Michael Scriven, and Grover Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p.225-308. *EPM* is reprinted in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Robert B. Brandom (ed.) [Harvard University Press, 1997].

<sup>2</sup> I assess how far he got, and speculate about the difficulties that could have prevented further progress, in “Modal Expressivism and Modal Realism, Together Again,” (henceforth *MEMRTA*) forthcoming.

had identified in *GE*, were to remain at the center of Sellars's philosophical enterprise for the rest of his life. Taken as a whole, these three essays provide an unusually detailed picture of the philosophical process through which Sellars progressed from an initial characterization of problems whose solutions he could not see clearly to the introduction of novel conceptual machinery that solved those problems to his durable satisfaction.

Sellars's point of departure is a view Carnap had put forward in *The Logical Syntax of Language*: to say that triangularity is a property is a way of saying in the material mode (the object language) what is said more perspicuously in the formal mode (in a certain kind of metalanguage) as "'triangular' is a monadic predicate."<sup>4</sup> This is the idea he is committed to making work in the three essays on nominalism. What Sellars calls "classifying contexts" are uses of ontological-categorial vocabulary, paradigmatically common nouns for ontological categories such as 'property' and 'kind' (and their genus, 'universal'), the property and kind names that fall under such common nouns ('triangularity', 'lionhood'), and the higher-order relations those properties and kinds are taken to stand in to their instances (such as 'exemplification' in "Anything that is triangular exemplifies triangularity."). The Carnapian idea is that vocabulary of these sorts is covertly *metalinguistic*. Its use appears to tell us something about the world: what kinds (ontological categories) of things are in it. There are not only particulars, but also their properties and kinds, related to those particulars by the distinctive relation of exemplification. But actually, the claim is, the information conveyed by the use of such ontological vocabulary concerns the syntactic form of language or thought, and is not

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<sup>3</sup> All three essays are reprinted in *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, Kevin \*Scharp and Robert Brandom (eds.) [Harvard University Press, 2007].

about the world talked or thought about. “Lionhood is a kind,” really means “‘Lion’ is a common noun (sortal expression).”

Such a metalinguistic species of nominalism about universals would have obvious attractions to those already of a nominalistic bent (perhaps due to a taste for desert landscapes). Is there any reason that those not already hagridden by nominalistic commitments should take it seriously? One potentially powerful argument is that anyone who knows how to use predicates such as “...is triangular” or common nouns such as “lion” already knows how to do everything they need to know how to do to use abstract terms such as ‘triangular’ and ‘lionhood’, and categorizing vocabulary such as ‘property’ and ‘kind’. Sellars says:

[T]o know how to use singular terms ending in '-ity' is to know that they are formed from adjectives; while to know how to use the common noun 'quality' is (roughly) to know that its well-formed singular sentences are of the form ‘— is a quality’ where the blank is appropriately filled by an abstract noun. (That the parallel points about '-keit' and 'Qualität' in German are genuine parallels is clear.)

Thus, while my ability to use 'triangular' understandingly involves an ability to use sentences of the form ‘— is triangular’ in reporting and describing matters of physical, extralinguistic fact, my ability to use 'triangularity' understandingly involves no new dimension of the reporting

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<sup>4</sup> Like Sellars, I will use “triangular” as short for “...is triangular”, where confusion is not likely to result.

and describing of extralinguistic fact—no scrutiny of abstract entities—but constitutes, rather, my grasp of the adjectival role of 'triangular'.<sup>5</sup>

'Triangularity' and 'lionhood' are singular terms formed by nominalizing adjectives and sortal common nouns, and 'property', 'quality', and 'kind' are categorizing sortals under which those nominalized adjectives and common nouns fall. Of course this consideration is not immediately decisive, since we can imagine a Bergmannian language in which one first learned to respond to triangular things by applying "...exemplifies triangularity," and only later, on that basis, learned to use "...is triangular." Nonetheless, it seems clear that one must begin by using expressions that are equivalent to predicates (adjectives): ground-level classifications. Even in the Bergmannian context, higher-order ontological classifiers such as 'property' will still be sortals that apply to nominalizations of these.

In *GE*, Sellars identifies two major objections that any metalinguistic nominalism about properties and kinds (universals) of this shape must face. The first is that ontologically categorizing statements such as "Triangularity is a property," do not mention linguistic expressions, while their proposed paraphrases, such as "'Triangular' is a monadic predicate," do. This difference becomes clear when we think about translating both the ontologically categorizing sentence and its explicitly syntactic paraphrase into another language. "'Triangular' ist ein Prädikat," and "'Dreieckig' ist ein Prädikat," are not equivalent. Which one is supposed to be the correct paraphrase of "Dreieckigkeit ist eine Eigenschaft," which translates "Triangularity is a property"? The difference between the material mode statement and its supposed paraphrase into the formal mode is even more striking when we consider counterfactuals involving them.

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<sup>5</sup> *GE* Section XIV.

Presumably, “Triangularity is a property” would still have been true even if the English language had never developed. Not so “‘Triangular’ is a predicate.”<sup>6</sup> If the claim that “‘Triangularity’ is a property,” is “covertly metalinguistic” or “quasi-syntactic” in character is to be sustainable in the face of these facts, the qualifications “covertly” and “quasi-” will have to be explicated in a way that avoids these consequences.<sup>7</sup>

The second objection Sellars considers is, in effect, that metalinguistic nominalism would be at best a half-hearted nominalism. For it does not avoid ontological commitment to properties (or universals, more generally). Rather, it eliminates nonlinguistic properties and kinds for linguistic ones. In place of *triangularity* and *lionhood* we get *predicatehood*, and *sortalhood*, the kinds to which belong everything that has the property of *being a predicate* or *being a sortal*. It seems that metalinguistic nominalism cannot do without expression-kinds and properties of linguistic expressions. Unlike the previous objection, this one does not directly address the adequacy of a metalinguistic account of the expressive role of ontological classifying vocabulary. It just points out that such an account is only *locally* deflationary about property-talk and kind-talk, remaining committed to it as regards *linguistic* properties and kinds.

In the large, the project Sellars announces in “Grammar and Existence”, motivates in “Naming and Saying,” and completes in “Abstract Entities” is to refine Carnap’s deflationary, expressivist idea that ontological category vocabulary is fundamentally

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Sellars’s Section XIV of *GE*.

metalinguistic, by developing it in a way that is immune to these two fundamental objections. In what follows, I describe how he does that, and critically assess the result. In brief, his response to the first objection is to introduce the technical apparatus of dot quotation, formed according to what Sellars calls the “illustrating sign-design principle.” His response to the second is to introduce further technical apparatus: the notion of distributive singular terms. This linguistic device plays a central role in drawing a distinction between what could be called “two grades of nominalistic involvement.” Sellars distinguishes a broader notion of repeatability from a notion of universality, under the slogan “the problem of ‘the one and the many’ is broader than the problem of universals.”<sup>8</sup> He designs his metalinguistic nominalism so that the linguistic repeatables that replace worldly universals in his theory are not universals in the narrow sense.

The main critical claim I want to defend is in three parts. First, Sellars’s subtle and sophisticated development of Carnap’s metalinguistic nominalism in fact gives us a good account of the expressive role characteristic of the vocabulary of ontological categories, in particular of terms such as ‘triangularity’, ‘lionhood’, ‘property’, and ‘kind’. Second, though, I want to claim that he misunderstands the significance of this penetrating analysis. What he offers is best understood as an account of what speakers are *doing* when they say things like “‘Triangularity’ is a property,” namely, classifying expressions that play the same conceptual role as the English “...is triangular” and the German “...ist dreieckig” as adjectives. The nominalistic conclusion he wants to support, however, concerns not what one is *doing* in saying “‘Triangularity’ is a property,” but

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<sup>7</sup> “Quasi-syntactic” is the technical term Carnap uses in *The Logical Syntax of Language* for material mode expressions that should be given metalinguistic analyses.

what one is *saying* by doing that. His analysis is properly understood as conducted in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary, but the conclusions he draws must be formulated in a *semantic* metavocabulary. Lacking the concept of a pragmatic metavocabulary, Sellars is not in a position to separate these considerations. Sellars's analysis is *compatible* with semantic nominalism about universals, but does not provide an *argument* for it.

Third, I discuss the largely independent motivation for nominalism about universals that Sellars offers in "Naming and Saying." This is epitomized in his introduction of a third bit of original technical apparatus: the language Jumblese. This argument, too, turns on the transition from a fundamental pragmatic observation about the *use* of language—that *predicating* is a kind of doing that is in principle only intelligible in terms of *saying* (asserting) and *naming* (referring), which are accordingly more conceptually basic kinds of discursive doing—to controversial claims about semantics and ontology. Its essential reliance on inferences of these forms, from what one is *doing* to what one is *saying* by doing that, shows Sellars's *metalinguistic* semantic and ontological *nominalism* to be a particular kind of *pragmatist expressivism*.<sup>9</sup>

## II. Dot Quotes and the Objection from Language Relativity

The divergent behavior of "Triangularity is a property," and "'...is triangular' is an adjective," under translation and in various counterfactual circumstances shows that ontologically categorizing vocabulary such as 'property' and property-terms such as

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<sup>8</sup> *AE* p. 166.

‘triangularity’ are not metalinguistic in the narrow sense (Tarski’s) of being common nouns and singular terms falling under them that refer to the expressions of a particular object-language, such as English. This does not mean that they could not be understood to be metalinguistic in a broader sense. To specify such a sense, Sellars introduces the idea of a special kind of quotation: dot-quotation. Generically, like other forms of quotation, it is a mechanism for forming expressions from expressions. It does not, however, form *names* of expressions. Indeed, it does not form singular terms at all. I have the impression that many readers of Sellars think of dot-quoted expressions as being names of functional or conceptual roles: that •triangular• names the conceptual role played by ‘triangular’ in English.<sup>10</sup> This is not right, and in the context of Sellars’s version of nominalism about properties, it is absolutely essential to see why it is not right.

The principal features of expressions formed using dot-quotes are:

1. All expressions formed by dot-quoting other expressions are common nouns (sortals), not singular terms. That is why their basic use is in conjunction with indefinite articles as in “‘dreieckig’ is a •triangular•,” (compare: “Rex is a dog,”) or, equivalently “‘dreieckig’s are •triangular•s” (compare: “Terriers are dogs”).
2. The items falling under this kind of common noun are expression-types.
3. All the items falling under a particular common noun formed by dot-quoting an expression stand to the type of that expression in the equivalence relation ...plays the same functional-conceptual role as \_\_\_\_.

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<sup>9</sup> I discuss this sense of “expressivism” in Chapter One of *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars* [Harvard University Press, 2014].

<sup>10</sup> I blush to confess that I have spoken and even written carelessly in this way myself—but even Sellars himself is not always as careful on this point as he teaches us to be in *AE*.

So if  $e$  and  $e'$  are specifications of expression-types,  $e'$  is a  $\bullet e \bullet$  just in case  $e'$  plays the same conceptual role in *its* language that  $e$  plays in its language. Because ...plays the same functional-conceptual role as \_\_\_ is an equivalence relation, one *could* treat it as an abstractor, and appeal to it to define an abstract singular term that *does* refer to the conceptual role shared by all the expression-types that stand in that relation to one another. (Perhaps one thinks of it as a name of the equivalence class defined by that relation—though that construal is certainly not obligatory.) But that is not what dot-quotes do. They would not be of much help to a program of working out a deflationary nominalist analysis of abstract entities such as properties if they did. They do serve a broadly *classificatory* function, producing a common noun that applies to all the expressions that share a conceptual role. But they do not do so by abstraction. This distinction, and the possibility it enforces of classifying without abstracting, is central to Sellars's response to the second objection to metalinguistic nominalism.

Sellars is rather casual about the equivalence relation other expression-types must stand in to the type of the illustrating expression in order to fall under the common noun that results from dot-quoting it. He talks indifferently about “playing the same role,” “serving the same function,” “performing the same office,” and “doing the same job.” He is happy to call it a “functional” role, or a “conceptual” role. He says that what is at issue is the *prescriptive* relations it stands in to other expressions, not the descriptive ones, so he is clearly thinking about roles articulated in *normative* terms. He explicates this point by analogy to the role played by the pawn in chess. In a footnote, he indicates that he thinks these roles can be specified in terms of (norms governing) the language-

entry, language-language, and language-exit transitions of a language.<sup>11</sup> I think Sellars's lack of specificity here should be seen as evidence that the relation ... (in English) functions similarly to \_\_\_ (in German) should be seen as a placeholder, or parameter. Filling in the respects of similarity in some definite way gives rise to a correspondingly definite specification of the meaning of a particular dot-quoting locution. Dot-quoting is intended to be a *kind* of quotation, comprising as many species as there are respects of similarity of function. The elasticity of the notion of prescriptive features of conceptual or functional role should be regarded as a feature of the account, not an oversight in it.

The expression-token that appears between dot-quotes specifies the class of role-equivalent expression-types that fall under the sortal formed by the dot-quotes by *illustrating* it. The class in question is all the expression-types that are role-equivalent to the type of the quoted token. This is the “illustrating sign-design principle.” This is a kind of use of the quoted expression that is more than a mere mention of it. For, unlike standard quotation, which does merely mention the quoted expression, one cannot *understand* something of the form •*e*• unless one understands the quoted expression *e*. For unless one grasps the conceptual role *e* plays in its home language, one does not know how to tell what other expression-types stand to it in the ... plays the same functional-conceptual role as \_\_\_ relation, and so does not know what expression-types fall under the sortal •*e*•.

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<sup>11</sup> Pp. 176-179. The footnote in question is #13.

Expressions formed using dot-quotes are metalinguistic in a straightforward sense. They are common nouns that apply to expression-types. Sellars's idea for developing Carnap's metalinguistic analysis of what appear on the surface to be names of properties or universals, like 'triangularity' and 'lionhood', is to analyze them semantically in terms of this sort of common noun. Ontologically classifying contexts, such as "Triangularity is a property," and "Lionhood is a kind," he analyzes as "•...is triangular•s are adjectives," and "•lion•s are common nouns." *This* kind of metalinguistic statement is not subject to the first objection to Carnap's simpler version. Though they are statements in English (extended by adding some technical apparatus), they do not *refer* specifically to expressions of any particular language. Unlike ordinary quotation, but like "Triangularity is a property," and "Lionhood is a kind," they can be translated into other languages. The illustrating expressions, from which the dot-quotes are formed, can be translated right along with the rest of the sentences in which they are used.

Besides the translatability complaint, one might object that Sellars's account in terms of dot quotation, no less than Carnap's original, supplies an analysis of what "triangularity is a property" means that is not guaranteed to be understood by anyone who understands "triangularity is a property"—not, for instance, by one who does not understand dot quotation. True. But Sellars rejects this criterion of adequacy. "'Triangularity is a property' means "•...is triangular•s are adjectives," is itself for him to be understood in terms of dot quotation, just as "'rot' means red", rendered as "'rot's are •red•s" is. One could understand 'rot' without understanding 'red' or *vice versa*, and still have this meaning statement be true. On Sellars's account of 'means', there is no

assumption of cognitive transparency associated with true ‘means’-claims. This is not a criterion of adequacy he accepts for the technical apparatus of dot quotation.

Just as it is true that even if there had never been English speakers, triangularity would still have been a property, it is true that even if there had never been English speakers, •...is triangular•s would still have been adjectives.” To deal with counterfactuals regarding the absence of language altogether, we must allow the expression-types that fall under common nouns formed by dot-quotation to include virtual ones, that is, expression-types in merely possible languages. This move was not available to Carnap, since his account essentially depends upon having terms in the metalanguage that refer to specific words in specific object languages. The introduction of the apparatus of dot-quotes sorts expressions, in effect, by their functional roles, and so opens up space to appeal to other possible languages. I conclude that the apparatus of dot-quotation permits Sellars to formulate a successor-theory to Carnap’s that retains the motivating strategy of metalinguistic analysis, while successfully immunizing itself against the first objection.

### III. Two Kinds of Repeatables, Two Grades of Abstract Involvement

Addressing the second principal objection to the claim that abstract entity talk is metalinguistic, requires more than the crafting of a sophisticated extended sense of

‘metalinguistic’ (epitomized by the technical notion of dot-quotation), however.<sup>12</sup> It requires thinking hard about the nature and motivation of nominalistic commitments concerning abstract entities. For understanding triangularity in terms of •triangular•s—as in the formulation “To say that triangularity is a property is to say that •triangular•s are monadic predicates,”—is understanding the candidate abstract entity triangularity in terms of the linguistic expression-*type* •triangular•. And expression-types are themselves repeatables, under which various possible expression tokenings (in different actual and possible languages) can fall. So it would seem that being a •triangular• is a property that expressions (for instance, “dreieckig” in German) can have. In that case, nonlinguistic abstract entities, such as the property of triangularity (which triangular things have), are being analyzed in terms of linguistic abstract entities, such as the property of being a •triangular•. That suggests that metalinguistic nominalism about abstract entities is only a half-hearted nominalism, rejecting, it seems, only nonlinguistic abstract entities, but embracing linguistic ones. Such a view would in turn raise the question of the motivation for such a metalinguistic form of nominalism. Why should it be seen as a responsive answer to the considerations that motivate nominalistic commitments in the first place? Indeed, it obliges us to ask the question: What do nominalists want? What are the rules of their game?

It cannot be that nominalism consists in insisting that all we do is refer to particulars using singular terms. Nominalists must allow that we also *say* things. Doing that is more

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<sup>12</sup> Sellars is happy to put his claim more baldly: “[A]bstract entities which are the subject of contemporary debate between platonist and anti-platonist philosophers—qualities, relations, classes,

than merely referring to things. Even in the simplest case, it is saying something *about* the particulars we refer to. It is classifying those particulars somehow. Classification involves some kind of repeatability on the part of the classifiers. Leo and Leona are both lions, and they are both tawny. Leo and Leona are classified together in that one can correctly say "...is a lion" and "...is tawny" of the two of them. Sellars thinks of explaining what we are saying when we say that as a modern version of the classical "problem of the one and the many." The beginning of wisdom in the area, for Sellars, is to distinguish that problem from the problem of universals: the problem of saying what properties are. His analysis

requires us to hold that not all *ones* over and against *manys* are universals (i.e. qualities, relations, sorts, kinds, or classes), and consequently to conclude that the problem of "the one and the many" is in fact broader than the problem of universals...<sup>13</sup>

That is, Sellars will distinguish a narrower class of abstract entities, what he calls "universals", from a broader class. He offers a deflationary metalinguistic nominalist analysis only of the narrower class. I will call this the strategy of distinguishing two grades of involvement in abstraction.

Following Carnap, Sellars is an ontological nominalist because he is a semantic nominalist. (And I will argue further along that that semantic deflationism is rooted in conceptual dependencies at the level of pragmatics—that is, in deep features of the *use* of the expressions addressed.) Here is a crude initial statement of the line of thought.

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proposition, and the like—are linguistic entities." [AE I, p. 163]. In the next section, I'll give reasons why we should resist this formulation.

Nominalism, as its name suggests, begins with views about *names*—or more broadly, singular terms. What there is can be named. (That is the connection between ontology and semantics, for nominalists of the sort under discussion.) What appear to be property-names or kind-names are not genuine names. So there are no such things. **Sellars takes it, though, that common nouns, sortal expressions, are part of the apparatus of naming.** For singular terms require criteria of identity and individuation that are supplied by covering sortals. The sortals also supply basic criteria and consequences of application for those singular terms (distinguishing them from mere labels).<sup>14</sup> Those sortals are, accordingly, a kind of “one in many” with respect to the objects that are referents of singular terms they govern. By contrast to the narrower class of universals, this, Sellars thinks, is a kind of one in many that the nominalist cannot and should not do without. He says:

[T]o refer to such a *one* we need a singular term other than the singular terms by which we refer to individual pawns, and yet which does not refer to a universal of which they are instances.<sup>15</sup>

If sense can be made of this kind of unity in diversity, then the way is open to understanding linguistic expression-types on this model, rather than on the model of universals and their instances or exemplifications. Doing so provides a way of responding to the second large objection to metalinguistic nominalism.

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<sup>13</sup> *AE I*, p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> Sellars discusses this distinction in *CDCM*:  
...although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*. 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.  
[§108]

I talk about it in Chapter Eight of *Reason in Philosophy* [Harvard University Press, 2009].

<sup>15</sup> *AE I*, p. 166.

For a paradigm of a “one against a many” that is *not* a universal, not an abstract entity in the narrower, objectionable sense, he offers *distributive singular terms* (DSTs), such as “the lion” or “the pawn”. We can use them to say such things as “The lion is tawny,” and “The pawn cannot move backwards.” These can be understood as paraphrases of “Lions are tawny,” and “Pawns cannot move backwards.” **These latter are things one understands as part of understanding how to use the common nouns, which is already part of understanding the use of singular terms such as ‘Leo’.** Here is the strategy:

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.<sup>16</sup>

The contrast between two levels of involvement in abstraction is then the contrast between two sorts of nominalizations of common nouns such as “lion”, “pawn”, and •triangular•. Nominalizing common nouns (deriving singular terms from them) in the form of DSTs such as “the lion” is perspicuous and nominalistically unobjectionable, while nominalizing them to form kind-terms, such as “lionhood” is not. I want to propose that **one lesson that can be drawn from Sellars’s is that we can understand nominalism in terms of differential attitudes towards different kinds of nominalization**. But we will have to work our way up to this point.

The capacity to use distributive singular terms can be algorithmically elaborated from the capacity to use the common nouns they are derived from, via the schema

$$\text{The } K \text{ is } F \equiv Ks \text{ are } F.$$

The right-hand side of this equivalence is not a conventional quantification. In the case of natural kind-terms, like “lion”, it is something like essential properties that matter.

The claim about Ks can be thought of as modified by something like Aristotle’s “generally, or for the most part” operator. (The existence of a non-tawny lion would not falsify “The lion is tawny.”)<sup>17</sup> The case we really care about, DSTs formed from

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<sup>16</sup> *AE I*, p. 167.

<sup>17</sup> What I say here should be understood as only a crude gesture at a complex and important topic. For a more nuanced discussion, see Part One of Michael Thompson’s pathbreaking *Life and Action* [Harvard University Press, 2008].

common nouns formed by dot-quoting expressions, has special features, however. Sellars introduces them by analogy to “the pawn”, rather than “the lion.” The features that determine the truth of statements of the form F(the pawn) (“The pawn cannot castle,”), he says, are *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive* features of pawns. He means that it is the normative features that define the role something must play in a game to be a pawn—what features of its behavior are obligatory or permissible for pawns—that determine the truth-value of statements in which the DST occurs essentially. Besides those properties, each pawn will have matter-of-factual properties, such as being carved of wood, or being less than one inch tall, which are contingent features of some realizers, some items that play the role of pawn. Those do not support statements using the DST “the pawn.” In this respect, “the pawn” is like “the •triangular•”. It is norms governing the use of •triangular•s that determine what is true of the DST, too—even though “the pawn”, unlike “the •triangular•” is not metalinguistic.

The equivalence schema shows that DSTs are just a special way of referring to Ks: to lions or to pawns. Not to one single K, but to all of them, distributively. **That the reference is distributive means that it is not to the *group* of Ks, but, as it were, to Ks as Ks.**<sup>18</sup> We can contrast this special mode of distributive reference with another bit of technical machinery that has been used by another kind of nominalist (Goodmanian nominalists) to do some of the same work Sellars wants DSTs to do: mereology.

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<sup>18</sup> Sellars says remarkably little about just how he thinks plural statements such as “Lions are tawny,” in terms of which statements formed using DSTs, such as “The lion is tawny,” are to be understood. He might have only a slippery grip on the point that what is true of “the mayfly” can be quite different from what is true of most mayflies. Michael Thompson offers a sophisticated discussion of this point in *Life and*

**Mereological sums, too, are “ones in many.” And they are different from universals. The part-whole relation they stand in to their mereological parts is not that of kind or property to *instance*. The difference is that mereological sums are a special kind of thing, over and above their parts. Singular terms referring to such sums are not special ways of referring to the parts, as DSTs are for particulars to which the common nouns from which they are formed apply. In this respect, mereological nominalism is *less nominalistic* than Sellarsian metalinguistic nominalism. For DSTs are not construed as singular terms referring to a different kind of entity from ordinary particulars. The mode of reference is different, specifically, distributive. But what is referred to is just what common nouns apply to. And that is the same particulars that singular terms refer to. There is no appeal to things of other ontological categories besides particulars. By contrast, mereological sums are formed from their parts, if not technically by abstraction, as sets are, nonetheless in a way intelligible as appealing to an equivalence relation. The difference between mereological sums and sets lies in the equivalence relation that is the abstractor, not, from this point of view, in their abstractness. Sellarsian nominalism must regard mereological sums, no less than sets, as ultimately metalinguistic in character.**

The case Sellars really cares about, of course, is where the common nouns from which DSTs are formed are themselves the result of dot-quoting expressions of some type. An instance of the DST equivalence is:

The **•triangular•** is a predicate  $\equiv$  **•triangular•s** are predicates.

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*Action* [Harvard University Press, 2008]. Ruth Millikan’s notion of Proper Function underwrites quite a different analysis of the same phenomenon.

And, given Sellars’s analysis of property-names, we can extend this to:

The ●triangular● is a predicate ≡  
 ●triangular●s are predicates ≡  
 triangularity is a property.

Unlike “the lion” and “the pawn”, “the ●triangular●” is a *metalinguistic* DST. It refers, distributively, to expression-types (in a variety of actual and possible languages). That is why this Sellarsian analysis is, like Carnap’s less sophisticated account, a *metalinguistic* nominalism about what is expressed by property-names as a subset of ontological category vocabulary. Triangularity-talk is understood to be a misleading (because not explicitly metalinguistic) way of talking about the ●triangular●, that is, ●triangular●s, that is, expression-types that stand to “triangular” in some suitable (not for these purposes fully specified) relation of functional equivalence.<sup>19</sup> **The equivalence relation is not, however, being appealed to as an abstractor that yields a singular term referring to an abstract object (perhaps identified with the equivalence class) that stands to the things it is abstracted from in a relation of exemplification. This is the difference between talking about the lion, or just lions—which is a way of referring to lions—as opposed to lionhood.**

That is the difference between two kinds of ones-in-many, which is the basis of Sellars’s response to the objection that metalinguistic nominalism about properties and kinds must just trade nonlinguistic universals for linguistic ones. **The strategy of**

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<sup>19</sup> I have suppressed niceties concerning Sellars’s distinction, in *AE*, between “triangular” and ★triangular★ (the first being a quote-name of a word type, the second a quote-name of a sign-design type). Expressions formed by dot-quoting are officially common nouns applying to the latter, not the former.

**distinguishing two grades of involvement in abstraction does trade nonlinguistic universals (lionhood, triangularity) for linguistic ones-in-many (the •lion•, the •triangular•), but not for linguistic *universals*.** The explanatory progress being made corresponds to crossing the line between two sorts of unity in diversity. Universals (properties, kinds) are eschewed entirely.

#### IV. Nominalism and Nominalization, Functions and Objects

I said above that a metalinguistic nominalism that relies so heavily on this distinction between different kinds of repeatables—abstract entities in a strict or narrow sense where singular terms and covering common nouns are introduced by abstraction using equivalence relations on their instances, and divided (distributive) modes of reference to particulars—raises questions about the motivation for nominalism of this sort. Nominalism can be thought of as a hygienic recommendation regarding the conditions under which it is appropriate to introduce names—or, more generally, singular terms. More particularly, I think **it is useful to think of nominalism as a policy concerning *nominalization*: the introduction of new singular terms (and common**

**nouns or sortal expressions governing them) by grammatically transforming other expressions.**

Sellars is concerned to distinguish two ways of nominalizing common nouns. **“Lion” can be nominalized by abstraction, to form the property-name “lionhood.” Or it can be nominalized by forming the distributive singular term “the lion,” which we can understand in terms of the plural “lions.”** The basic claim of this sort of nominalism is that nominalizations of the former sort are unperspicuous and misleading, requiring metalinguistic analysis in terms of operators that form common nouns applying to expression-types by dot-quoting expressions illustrating those types, and operators that form DSTs from those dot-quoted expressions. (Abstractive nominalizations are “quasi-syntactic,” that is, material mode versions of statements perspicuously framed in the formal mode, as Carnap describes them in *The Logical Syntax of Language*. Sellars’s corresponding term is “covertly metalinguistic.”) **Nominalizations of the latter sort are all right as they stand.** Adjectives such as “...is triangular” and “...is red” take only nominalizations of the misleading abstractive sort: “triangularity” and “redness.” Nominalism is a set of scruples about nominalization—a division of nominalization strategies into acceptable and unacceptable, or at least perspicuous and unperspicuous.

Although my focus here has been on predicate-nominalizations and properties, **Sellars also thinks that declarative sentences have only nominalizations of the**

**narrow sort, which purport to name abstract entities in the form of propositions.**

He proposes that these be analyzed metalinguistically, by equivalences of the form:

“That snow is white is a proposition.” ≡

“The •Snow is white• is a sentence.” ≡

“•Snow is white•s are sentences.”

So an extensional characterization of the split between nominalizations that unobtrusively invoke abstracta in the narrow sense (which are to be analyzed metalinguistically, using dot-quotes and DSTs), and nominalizations that invoke ones-in-many that are not covertly metalinguistic is this: **kind-terms (sortals, common nouns) can go either way, depending on what sort of nominalization is at issue.** Predicates (adjectives) and declarative sentences only take nominalizations that seem to refer to abstract entities in the narrow sense, and are to be understood by deflationary metalinguistic paraphrases. The only categories of expression-types that admit of nominalizations that are not to be construed as covertly metalinguistic are singular terms themselves (which are, as it were, their own nominalizations) and common nouns.<sup>20</sup> What is the motivation for this way of distinguishing the two grades of involvement in unobtrusive abstraction?

I said above that for the metalinguistic nominalist, **the reason common nouns take nominalizations that are not covertly metalinguistic (such as “the lion” and “lions”), is that they are already involved in the mechanism of singular reference to particulars—that is, broadly speaking, in naming.** They also take unobtrusive,

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<sup>20</sup> For a possible qualification, see the remarks about gerunds (present participles) at the end of Section VI.

covertly metalinguistic nominalizations, purporting to name abstract entities in the narrow, objectionable, sense, (such as “lionhood”) because besides incorporating criteria of identity and individuation (permitting plurals and so distributive reference) they are like predicates in incorporating criteria and consequences of application. This means **common nouns come with associated predicate-adjectives (“...is a lion”), which admit nominalizations purportedly naming abstract entities in the narrow sense the metalinguistic nominalist is concerned to deflate. But the reason common nouns also take nonmetalinguistic nominalizations must be that they can be construed as mechanisms of reference to particulars, albeit in the distinctive mode of plural, divided, or distributive reference**, not just that there can be no singular term reference in the absence of individuating sortals. For it is equally true that there can be no singular term reference (“naming”) in the absence of assertion of declarative sentences (“saying”) or (therefore) predicating. Yet nominalizations of expression-types of those grammatical categories admit only ontologically unperspicuous nominalizations.

At the end of “Abstract Entities” Sellars offers a further characterization of the difference between abstract entities in the narrow sense, invoked by unperspicuous nominalizations to be nominalistically paraphrased metalinguistically, and in the wider sense. It corresponds, he says, to the distinction between abstract entities which are not *objects*, but *functions*.<sup>21</sup> He explicitly mentions Frege in this connection (while denying that there is anything paradoxical about reference to functions). **Kind-terms (which have both criteria of application and criteria of individuation and identity) admit both readings, while predicate adjectives (which have only criteria of application)**

**initially support only the functional reading.** (They do admit of nominalizations that refer to objects, as we see below, but these are doubly unperspicuous and covertly doubly metalinguistic.)

The possibility that the word “kind” might have these two senses throws light on Russell’s erstwhile distinction between classes as ones and classes as manys. Or, with an eye to Frege, we can say that in contexts such as [“The •the lion• is a DST,” which reduces to “•the lion•s are DSTs”] kinds are *distributive objects*, whereas in [“The •lion• is a common noun,” which in turn reduces to “•lion•s are common nouns” (Sellars’s paraphrase of “Lionhood is a kind,”)]-like contexts they are concepts or functions.<sup>22</sup>

Again, he offers as examples:

Triangularity is a quality and not a (distributive) individual (i.e., The •triangular• is a predicate and not a DST).

*Triangularity* is a (distributive) individual and not a quality (i.e., The •the •triangular•• is a DST and not a predicate).<sup>23</sup>

Triangularity as a quality is a paradigm of a *function*, while *triangularity* as a distributive individual is a corresponding object. (Sellars marks the difference by using italics in the latter case.<sup>24</sup>) This sort of derivative nominalization corresponds to meta-metalinguistic DSTs.

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<sup>21</sup> *AE* VII, pp. 188-189.

<sup>22</sup> *AE* V, p. 186.

<sup>23</sup> *AE* VII, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> *AE* IV, p. 183-184.

While it is not immediately clear what Sellars means by saying that some of these nominalizations refer to functions rather than objects (and the invocation of Frege's views from "Concept and Object" and "Function and Concept"<sup>25</sup> threatens to explain *obscurum per obscurius*), it does seem that he is lining up abstract entities in the *narrow* sense with *functions*. Nominalizations that invoke functions are the unobtrusive ones (cf. "classes as ones"), by contrast to nominalizations that invoke objects, albeit distributively (cf. "classes as manys").

## V. Saying, Naming, and Predicating

**I think Sellars explains his reasons for drawing where he does the line between nominalizations of the two kinds—straightforward and covertly metalinguistic—and for the appeal to a distinction between objects and functions, in the third of the trio of essays I have been considering, "Naming and Saying."** The proximal topic of this essay is the contrast between two different approaches to universals: that of Gustav Bergmann (of the Vienna Circle) and one Sellars associates with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.<sup>26</sup> Of particular interest is that accounts of both sorts end by appealing to

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<sup>25</sup> In Peter Geach and Max Black (trans.) *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* [Blackwell, 1966], originally published in 1952.

<sup>26</sup> There are many fine things in this essay that I shall not discuss. Two subtleties worthy of at least passing mention are: i) Sellars's sensitive and judicious treatment of vexed interpretive question of exactly

something *ineffable*—though the ineffability arises at characteristically different places in the two. Though himself coming down firmly on the Tractarian side of the dispute, as he understands it, Sellars diagnoses the objectionable ineffability as having a common aetiology in the two cases—as being rooted in the same failure of understanding.

In its crudest terms, the Bergmann-*Tractatus* debate is about how many ontological categories of things there are in the world, and how we should understand their relations. For Bergmann, there are two kinds of things, particulars and universals, and just one relation, *exemplification* of a universal by particulars, that they can stand in.<sup>27</sup> Saying that two particulars stand in some relation, for instance that Ludwig is subtler than Gustav, is producing names of the two kinds (names of particulars and names of a universal) in a way that conventionally conveys that they stand in the relation of exemplification. The disappointing addendum is that that relation is ineffable. Naming (nominalizing) it, for instance, ‘exemplification’, is at best of heuristic and not analytic value, since the relation between it and the particulars and universal it relates (e.g. Ludwig, Gustav, and the relation of being subtler than) would itself have to be understood as...exemplification. And then we are off to the races on a Bradleyan regress.

By contrast, according to the Tractarian view Sellars considers, there is only one kind of thing in the world: particulars. They stand in a variety of relations. Saying that two

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what stand the *Tractatus* takes on the intelligibility of multiple distinct *monadic* facts (since facts are “arrangements” of objects); and ii) the distinction between color and shape predicates in this context: “green” has both adjectival and substantival uses, which invites confusion (it can serve as its own adjective-nominalization—“Green is a color”—though it also takes “greenness”), whereas “triangular” nominalizes *only* as “triangularity”.

<sup>27</sup> Sellars: “[F]or Bergmann there is...only *one* relation, i.e. exemplification, and what are ordinarily said to be relations, for example *below*, would occur in the world as *relata*.” [NS 109]

particulars stand in some relation, for instance that Ludwig is subtler than Gustav, is arranging names of the particulars in a way that conventionally conveys the fact that the particulars stand in that relation. The disappointing addendum is that the relation (picturing) between statement (the fact that the names are arranged as they are in the saying) and the fact (that the particulars stand in the relation) is ineffable. It is not itself a fact that can be stated, as a relation obtaining between a names-fact and a particulars-fact, but only something that can be shown. Here what threatens is not so much a regress as circularity: the explicit statement of the semantic picturing relation between statements and facts could be understood only by someone who already implicitly grasps the relation between statements and facts, and so could not substitute for or ground such a grasp.

Here is Sellars's summary:

To keep matters straight, it will be useful to introduce the term 'nexus' in such a way that to say of something that it is a nexus is to say that it is perspicuously represented in discourse by a configuration of expressions rather than by a separate expression. If we do this, we can contrast Bergmann and Wittgenstein as follows:

*Wittgenstein:* There are many nexus in the world. Simple relations of matter of fact are *nexus*. All objects or individuals which form a nexus are particulars, i.e. individuals of type 0. There is no relation or nexus of exemplification in the world.

*Bergmann*: There is only one nexus, exemplification. Every atomic state of affairs contains at least one...individual which is not a particular.

If one so uses the term ‘ineffable’ that to eff something is to signify it by using a name, then Wittgenstein’s view would be that what are ordinarily called relations are ineffable, for they are all nexus and are expressed (whether perspicuously or not) by configurations of names. For Bergmann, on the other hand, what are ordinarily called relations are effed; it is exemplification which is ineffable.<sup>28</sup>

Notice that Sellars here expresses the nominalism being opposed to Bergmannian ontological profligacy as a restriction on what can strictly be *named* (hence how nominalizations are to be understood: where straightforwardly and where in terms of metalinguistic paraphrase). **An assumption taken to be common to all concerned is that what can be named and what is “in the world” coincide, and that anything else is strictly “ineffable”.** One might rather tie ineffability to what cannot be *said* (explicitly) but at most only shown or otherwise conveyed (implicitly). I’ll return to this question.

Sellars sensibly takes the invocation of something ineffable as a symptom of analytic and explanatory failure. His diagnosis (repeated with emphasis in the concluding sections of both *NS* and *AE*) is that **the surplus beyond what is named when**

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<sup>28</sup> [NS 109].

**we say something, what shows up on these mistaken accounts as ineffable, is not a *thing* but a *doing*.**

Thus the “relation” of exemplification which for Platonists binds the realm of becoming to the realm of being, and which for more moderate realists binds the “real” order to the “logical” or “conceptual” order, is an offshoot of the “relation” of truth, which analysis shows to be no relation at all, but a sign of something to be **done**. [AE 203]

The supposedly ineffable alternatives, exemplification (Bergmannian platonism) and the relation between statements and facts (Tractarian nominalism) are both manifestations of what is invoked by truth-talk. And that, Sellars thinks, is best understood not in terms of a word-world relation but in terms of the propriety of a metalinguistic *inference*.

What, then, does it mean to say

That green a is a fact

Clearly this is equivalent to saying

That green a is true

...

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]

A number of moves are being made here. First, the "two ineffables", exemplification and the relation between statements and facts, are both being traced back to what is expressed by statements using 'true'. "a *exemplifies* green" is a way of *stating* the *fact* that a is green. (Stating is the paradigmatic kind of saying.) Second, "A fact is a thought that is true" (Frege, in *The Thought*).<sup>29</sup> (Keep in mind the "notorious 'ing'/'ed' ambiguity here: he does *not* mean 'thought' in the sense of a thinking, an act, but in the sense of what is thought—or better, thinkable—a content.) Third, talk about truth is (as Frege also recognized), misleading talk about what one is *doing* in saying something in the sense of making a statement: the use of 'true' is to be understood in terms of the platitude that asserting is taking-true. Fourth, the way 'true' expresses what one is doing in asserting is also expressed in the propriety of the disquotational *inferences* codified in Tarskian T-sentences.

All of these moves are contentious. I am not concerned to defend them here. I am concerned to understand **the original motivation and general rationale for connecting nominalizations the Sellarsian nominalist wants to treat as not referring to things, such as “triangularity”, with discursive doings.** For this, I want to suggest, is what becomes of the otherwise puzzling distinction, evidently intended to be coextensional, which we worried about at the end of the previous section, between referring to *objects* and invoking *functions*. As we might break things down, in the first step, functions are what articulate functional roles. In the second step, functions, as Sellars is thinking of them, are things only in the sense of things *done*: doables.

**Nominalization of functions is what Sellars’s nominalism invites us to forbid in perspicuous languages, and to give a deflationary treatment of the functioning of, in unperspicuous ones.**

I think we can begin to understand the idea behind this line of thought if we look at the activities of that give “Naming and Saying” its title, and how the relations between them are thought to be made more perspicuous by the third technical innovation (besides dot-quotes and DSTs) that Sellars uses to articulate his nominalism. This construction, introduced in that essay, is the language-form he calls “Jumblese.”<sup>30</sup> **We can sum up the line of thought in NS that I have been considering in the slogan: Appeal to an**

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<sup>29</sup> “The crucial ineffability in the *Tractatus* concerns the relation between statements and facts. Is there such a relation? And is it ineffable? The answer seems to me to be the following. There is a meaning relation between statements and *facts*, but both terms are in the linguistic order.” [NS 124]

<sup>30</sup> The name comes from Edward Lear’s nonsense poem “The Jumblies”, Sellars tells us, because “Far and few, far and few, are the lands where the Jumblies live.” (He does not mention that “Their heads are green, and their hands are blue...”, though his topic is the significance of just such predications. Greenness and

ineffable semantic relation is a sign that one is trying to do in one's *semantic* theory what can only be done in the *pragmatic* theory, the theory of the *use* of the language. *Saying*, putting something forward *as* true, asserting—the central and paradigmatic use of declarative sentences—is a *doing*, not a semantic relation. So is *naming*, in the sense of referring (using an already established term, rather than naming in the sense of introducing such a term). Referring is the central and paradigmatic use of singular terms.

If the first lesson Sellars wants us to learn is that the result of trying to explain what one is *doing* in *saying* something (a pragmatic matter), in terms of the semantic relation between a name and what is named, is an appeal to an ultimately magical, ineffable version of that relation, then the second, nominalist, lesson is that even within the realm of semantics, the name/named model cannot be used to understand the use of predicates or sentences. In particular, predication, in the sense of the act of predicating (classifying something nameable) is a *derivative* speech act. It does not belong at the same level of analysis as the more fundamental acts of saying and naming. **Predicating something (universal) of something (particular) is just saying something *about* something. It is to be understood in terms of the relation between a kind of *doing*, asserting, which in the base case essentially involves the use of singular terms, and the semantic relation of referring, which holds between a name (singular term) and what is named (referred to).**<sup>31</sup>

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blueness are not mentioned on the inventory of things they took with them when they “went to sea in a Sieve.”)

<sup>31</sup> Though he does not say so, I expect that Sellars learned from Kant the lesson that one cannot, as the pre-Kantian tradition tried to do, understand *saying* in terms of *predicating*. I explain how I take Kant to

It is because the speech act of predicating is a derivative one that predicative expressions play a subordinate role to singular terms and sentences.

[T]he classical problem of universals rests in large part on the fact that, in such languages as English and German expressions referring to universals are constructed on an illustrating principle which highlights **a design which actually plays a subordinate role**, and consequently tempts us to cut up such sentences as

Triangular (*a*)

into two parts, one of which has to do with the universal rather than the particular, the other with the particular rather than the universal, and tempts us, therefore, to construe the statement as asserting a dyadic relation (“exemplification”) to obtain between the particular and the universal.<sup>32</sup>

**Jumblese is designed to make *syntactically* vivid the derivative *pragmatic* role of predication, which in turn underlies the deflationary, nominalist metalinguistic semantic analysis Sellars is recommending for *nominalizations* of predicative expressions, such as “triangularity.”** Jumblese has no predicative expressions. Its sentences consist entirely of names (singular terms). The names specify what one is talking *about* (referring to). What one is *saying* about what one is talking about is expressed by *styles of arrangement* of those names. So, in one version the claim that Wilfrid is subtler than Gustav might be expressed by juxtaposing them and writing the

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have learned this lesson, and the central role it plays in his thought, in Chapter One of *Reason in Philosophy*.

first name in larger type than the second: Wilfrid Gustav. That Gustav was Austrian might be expressed by writing his name in a distinctive font: *Gustav*. Jumblese, we might want to say, overtly marks only naming and saying: what one is referring to, by the singular terms used, and what one is asserting about it, by the style in which the terms are written (including the relations between the singular terms). **Predication is only implicit in what one is doing in saying something about something.**

A consequence of the absence of overt predicate-expressions is that there is nothing to nominalize into an analog of “triangularity.” There is nothing to which to apply the “illustrating principle” that forms •triangular•s, which could tempt one to introduce the new common noun “property”, enabling one to say “Triangularity is a property,” that is, •triangular•s are predicates (the •triangular• is an adjective). Of course, we *could* introduce nominalizations of predicate-adjectives even into (a dialect of) Jumblese, perhaps by using names of the styles the level-0 names are written in. Since it is the *fact that* “*Gustav*” is written in the Script-MT-Bold font that *says that* Gustav is Austrian, we could say that •...is Austrian•s are predicates (that is that being Austrian is a property) by saying that Script-MT-Bold is a predicate-indicating font—or, in a Jumblese metalanguage, by asserting “**Script-MT-Bold**” (where writing the font-name in the Berlin Sans FB font indicates that it is the nominalization of a predicate).<sup>33</sup> But

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<sup>32</sup> [AE 201].

<sup>33</sup> In Section VIII of *AE*, Sellars considers how bound variables might work in Jumblese. (But do his readers care? The result of this expository choice is an *extremely* anticlimactic ending—one could not say conclusion—to the already long and technical essay.) Elsewhere in the same piece, he indulges himself in speculations about Jumblese metalanguages (*inter alia*, for Jumblese), and about the adventure that would consist in translating Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality* into Jumblese. Oddly, he says nothing about the *spoken* version of Jumblese—the version in which, we are authoritatively informed, the Jumbles said “How wise we are! Though the sky be dark and the voyage be long....” One version of spoken Jumblese

while Jumblese *permits* such nominalizations, it does not *encourage* them. And it does not even *permit* the formation of those nominalizations according to an *illustrating* principle, which is what makes ontological-category talk such as “Triangularity is a property” *covertly* metalinguistic (Carnap’s “quasi-syntactic”): a formal-mode statement masquerading in material mode. “**Script-MT-Bold**” is *overtly* metalinguistic, consisting, as it does, of a name of a style of writing, here, a font (itself, of course, written in a particular style).

## VI. From Semantic to Pragmatic Metalanguages: Assessing Metalinguistic Nominalism

In the earliest of the three essays I have been discussing, Sellars identifies two major objections to Carnap’s metalinguistic nominalism about ontological category vocabulary, principally predicate-nominalizations (such as “triangularity”) and their associated common nouns (such as “property”). First, statements such as “Triangularity is a

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would be tonal: melodic. The effect would be reminiscent of Gregorian chants. A written Jumblese *pragmatic* metavocabulary for such spoken Jumblese would resemble musical notation (and *its* use, a

property,” do not mention any linguistic expressions, and so are not metalinguistic in the classical sense. Unlike Carnap’s proposed paraphrase, “ ‘Triangular’ is a predicate,” they would be true even if no-one had ever spoken English, and do not change their reference or become unintelligible to monolinguals if translated into German. Second, it seems such an approach just trades non-linguistic universals, such as “being triangular” for linguistic ones, such as “being a predicate.” Sellars’s response to the first objection is that it turns on too narrow and undifferentiated a conception of the metalinguistic. He offers a more capacious and nuanced one, reformulating Carnap’s paraphrase using dot-quotation to form common nouns that functionally classify expression-types using the “illustrating sing-design principle.” He responds to the second by conceding that classification under repeatables is not to be explained away, but insisting that we should distinguish the broader “problem of the one and the many” from the narrower “problem of universals.” The formation of plurals from common nouns (including those formed by dot-quotation of illustrating expressions: “•triangular•s are predicate-adjectives”) and their nominalization by forming distributive singular terms instead of kind-names (“the •triangular•” rather than “•triangular•ness”—in the non-metalinguistic case, “the lion” rather than “lionhood”) allows the metalinguistic nominalist to endorse a version of Carnap’s paraphrase without commitment to linguistic (or any) universals in the narrow, objectionable sense.

I think these responses are wholly successful in producing a development of Carnap’s idea that is immune to the objections that prompted them. The second move,

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Glasperlenspiel).

however, prompts the question of why we should resist reifying universals in the form of properties and kinds. **Why should we insist on metalinguistic paraphrases of claims made using *these* nominalizations, and hence reject a straightforward referential semantics for these singular terms, which understands them as referring to abstract entities? Sellars’s argument, as presented in “Naming and Saying,” turns on the second-class (“derivative”, “subordinate”) character of *predicating* (and, more generally, classifying), relative to saying and naming. That is, the basis for metalinguistic nominalism about property and kind nominalizations in *semantics* is to be found in considerations proper to *pragmatics*: considerations concerning what we are *doing* when we use various expressions. I think we can and should resist this move.**

Sketched with a very broad brush, I think the argument goes like this. **Predicate-adjectives have a very different function and use than do singular terms. Hence, it is misleading to understand singular terms formed by nominalizing them as referring to a special kind of *thing*: abstract entities.**<sup>34</sup> I don’t think this is a good inference. It is true both that predicating is not naming, but must be understood in terms of the relations between naming and saying, and that one can only understand singular terms formed by nominalizing predicates in terms of the use of the underlying predicates. On this latter point, Sellars argues in effect that the capacity to use ontological category

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<sup>34</sup> A corresponding argument goes through for common nouns, which are like predicate-adjectives in having classifying criteria of application, even though they are unlike predicate-adjectives in also having criteria of identity and individuation for the singular terms associated with them. Also, Sellars wants to adopt the same sort of metalinguistic paraphrase strategy for nominalizations of sentences (“that snow is white,” together with the corresponding common nouns such as “proposition”). Again, the avowed motivation for this is that what one is *doing* in *saying* something is different from *referring* (though

talk—predicate- and kind-nominalizations, such as “triangularity” and “lionhood”, and the common nouns that govern their identity and individuation, such as “property”<sup>35</sup> and “kind”—is *pragmatically dependent* on the capacity to use the underlying predicate-adjectives and common nouns. In the terms I use in *Between Saying and Doing*, this is a PP-necessity claim.<sup>36</sup> **Unless one has the capacity to use the nominalized terms, one cannot count as having the capacity to use their nominalizations.** Further, his version of the Carnap metalinguistic paraphrase strategy shows us how the capacity to use predicate-adjectives (“...is triangular”) can be *algorithmically elaborated* into the capacity to use the nominalizations (“triangularity”).<sup>37</sup> This is a special kind of PP-sufficiency claim. I agree with all this, and think that showing how to algorithmically elaborate the ability to use adjectives into the ability to use nominalized property-talk is a significant achievement. Further, I agree that the pragmatic dependence (PP-necessity) claim suffices to show that Bergmann is wrong to think of the nominalization-talk as *conceptually prior* to the use of the predicate-adjectives and ground-level common nouns.

**Bergmann is right that there is a *semantic* equivalence between saying that a**

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referring to particulars is in the base case included as one aspect of saying). Nonetheless, for simplicity, in this summary, I focus on the predicate-adjectives and their nominalizations.

<sup>35</sup> And, though he doesn’t say so, others such as “trope”, understood as something like “unrepeatable instance of a property.”

<sup>36</sup> Oxford University Press, 2008. Hereafter “*BSD*”.

<sup>37</sup> Sellars suggests that the fact that some kind-terms mark *functions* rather than *objects* (discussed in Section IV above) means that thinking of them as naming universals is committing something like the naturalistic fallacy. In this respect, he seems to be putting abstract-entity-talk in a box with normative vocabulary. Normative vocabulary, like modal vocabulary, he takes to play the expressive role, not of describing something (“in the world in the narrow sense”), but of explicating the *framework* within which alone describing is possible. (I discuss this Kantian move in Chapter Five.) These vocabularies are what in *BSD* I call “universally LX”: elaborated from and explicative of every autonomous vocabulary. I have just been claiming that the use of ontological-category vocabulary (such as “property” and “proposition”—the common nouns that govern singular terms purporting to pick out abstract objects such as universals like triangularity) can indeed be elaborated from the use of ordinary predicates and declarative sentences. One very important question that I do not address in this essay is whether (for Sellars, and in fact) such vocabulary is *also* explicative of essential features of the framework within which ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary functions, and if so, of *which* features.

exemplifies triangularity and saying that a is triangular. However, there is an underlying *pragmatic asymmetry*. One *could* learn how to use “...is triangular” (•triangular•) first, and only then, and elaborated solely on that basis, learn how to use “...exemplifies triangularity”, and the property-talk that goes with it (as the common noun to this nominalization-by-abstraction). One could *not* learn it the other way around. In this sense, property-exemplification talk is not *pragmatically autonomous* from the use of predicate-adjectives, as Bergmann’s priority claim commits him to its being. This sort of *pragmatically mediated conceptual dependence* is the same sort of priority claim that Sellars makes for “is”-talk over “seems”-talk, in *EPM*.<sup>38</sup> So far, so good.

More particularly, Sellars’s claim is that what one is *doing* in saying that triangularity is a property is classifying •triangular• as predicate-adjectives. That is a metalinguistic doing—of a distinctive kind, marked out by the use of the illustrating principle, to get a common noun, •triangular•, that applies to expression-types that stand to the displayed “triangular” in a parameterized functional-role equivalence relation. So it is fair to conclude that the *use* of ontological-categorical vocabulary involves a distinctive kind of metalinguistic expressive role. The question remains: what conclusions should one draw about the *semantics* of such expressions? Does playing that *pragmatic* metalinguistic expressive role *preclude* understanding the nominalizations (“triangularity”, “lionhood”—or “being a lion”) as *also* standing in referential (“naming”) relations to *objects*? I do not see that it does. The fact that

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<sup>38</sup> See chapter One of *BSD*.

“good” essentially, and not just accidentally, has as part of its expressive role the possibility of being used to *commend* does not mean that it does not *also* describe in the sense of attributing a property. A corresponding point goes through for *modal* vocabulary.<sup>39</sup> From that fact that what one is *doing* in *saying* that triangularity is a property is classifying •triangular•s as predicate-adjectives, it does not follow that that is what one is *saying*. It certainly does not follow that that is *all* one is saying. Sellars’s analysis leaves *room* for denying that “triangularity” refers to a property. It provides an alternative. But he has not shown that these are *exclusive* alternatives, that we must *choose between* them. The singular terms formed by nominalizing parts of speech other than singular terms are, we might agree, distinguished by having a metalinguistic expressive function. But that is not yet to say that they do not *also* refer to a distinctive kind of object: property-universals (and propositions, including the true ones: facts).

Traditional Tarskian metalanguages—the kind we normally think about in connection with “metalinguistic” claims—are *semantic* metalanguages. They contain the expressive resources to talk about aspects of discursive *content*. Accordingly, they let us discuss truth conditions, reference relations, inferential relations, and the like. Carnap also deploys *syntactic* metalanguages, that let us talk about syntax, grammar, and lexical items (though Carnap himself uses “syntax” in an idiosyncratically wide sense in *The Logical Syntax of Language*). *Pragmatic* metalanguages have the expressive resources to talk about the *use* of language and the proprieties that govern it, for instance the activities of asserting, inferring, referring, predicating, and so on.<sup>40</sup> **If I am right that the**

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<sup>39</sup> As I argue in Chapter Five, “Modal Expressivism and Modal Realism, Together Again.”

<sup>40</sup> Pragmatic metavocabularies are one of the topics discussed at length in *BSD*.

**principle insight driving Sellars’s metalinguistic nominalism is the idea that what one is *doing* in deploying concepts such as triangularity, lionhood, property, and kind is functionally classifying expressions using metalinguistic vocabulary of a distinctive kind (nominalizations formed according to the “illustrating sign-design principle”), that is an insight properly expressible in a *pragmatic* metalanguage.** The conclusion he wants to draw, however, concerns the *semantics* proper for that class of nominalizations and covering common nouns. The inferential relations between claims couched in pragmatic metalanguages and claims couched in semantic metalanguages are quite complex and little understood, however.<sup>41</sup> The inference Sellars is committed to here would go through only in the context of one or another set of auxiliary hypotheses, many of which would be implausible, or at least controversial, none of which does he discuss.

Sellars makes this slide unaware (to be sure, in the good company of expressivists addressing other sorts of vocabulary) because he doesn’t have available the distinction between semantic and pragmatic metalanguages. According to that diagnosis, his argument is vulnerable because it relies on too crude and expressively impoverished a concept of the metalinguistic. This is an ironic situation, because I am accusing Sellars of making a mistake (or suffering from a disability) of a piece with the ones he discerns in the opponents he discusses in these essays. As we have seen, the first principal objection to Carnap’s metaphysical nominalism that Sellars addresses he diagnoses as the result of appealing to insufficiently nuanced concepts of being metalinguistic. He

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<sup>41</sup> *BSD* introduces the topic, and provides a wealth of examples of the sort of complex relations between meaning and use that can be discerned once we start to think systematically about their relations.

responds by giving us more nuanced ones, which evade the objection. **I am claiming that his notion of the metalinguistic is still too crude.** Again, he diagnoses Bergmann and the *Tractatus* as running together *pragmatic* issues, of what one is *doing* in saying something or *predicating* something, with *semantic* issues. In particular, he claims that attempting to understand what one is *doing* in predicating or claiming by forcing it into the form of a semantic relation inevitably results in commitments to the ineffability of that relation. This is the same genus as the mistake I am claiming he is making: running together *pragmatic* issues, of what one is *doing* in saying something, with *semantic* issues of what is *said* thereby.

This line of thought suggests that there are a number of different strands of broadly nominalistic thought in play. One genus is what might be called **“nominalization nominalisms.”** These views make an invidious distinction between two classes of singular terms. *Genuine* singular terms are *referential*. They are to be understood semantically in terms of reference relations (the “name-bearer” relation), and successfully using them is referring to a referent. *Genuine* singular terms in this sense can fail to refer, but they, as we might say, *perspicuously purport* to refer to particulars. They are not *grammatically* precluded from being used to refer, and in any case are to be semantically assessed in terms of reference relations (or the lack thereof). By contrast (almost all) singular terms formed by nominalizing other parts of speech are grammatically misleading. These merely *ostensible* singular terms only grammatically, but *unperspicuously purport* to refer to particulars. On Sellars’s development of Carnap’s view, they are to be given

*metalinguistic* readings. All singular terms have criteria of identity and individuation lodged in associated common nouns or sortals, which accordingly can also be divided into genuine and ostensible. **This division generally corresponds to that between nouns that are not, and those that are, formed by nominalizing other parts of speech. The exception is that *some* nominalizations of common nouns or sortal expressions are sometimes counted as genuine** (for instance, by Sellars and Kotarbiński).<sup>42</sup>

In these terms, I **want to distinguish semantic and pragmatic species of the genus of nominalization nominalisms.** The first kind of nominalization nominalism addresses the semantic *content* of the two classes comprising genuine and merely ostensible singular terms (the latter consisting of transcategorial nominalizations). Only genuine singular terms are to be understood in terms of their referential relations to particulars. The latter kind of nominalization nominalism addresses the pragmatic *use* of the two classes of terms and associated common nouns. **The pragmatic nominalization nominalist understands the *use* of transcategorial nominalizations in metalinguistic terms of classifying linguistic expression-types. By contrast, the use of genuine singular terms is to be understood exclusively as *referring*, which is one essential feature of *saying anything about particulars*.** I have claimed that the step from pragmatic to semantic nominalization nominalism is not straightforward. For one might

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<sup>42</sup> It seems, for the same reason: otherwise the nominalization nominalist about the “problem of universals” has difficulty addressing the “problem of the one and the many.” Kotarbiński, T., *Gnosiology. The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*, trans. by O. Wojtasiewicz. [Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1966]. This is a translation of Kotarbiński’s *Elementy teorii poznania, logiki formalnej i metodologii nauk*, Lwow: Ossolineum, 1929. Kotarbiński distinguishes between “genuine” and “non-genuine” names, and between semantic and ontological nominalisms.

distinguish transcategorial nominalizations from other singular terms by seeing their use as involving metalinguistic classification without thereby concluding that they do not *also* stand in referential relations to a distinctive kind of abstract entity. They just have this *extra* expressive function that *ordinary* singular terms do not have. Perhaps there is an illuminating and important relation between playing that distinctive expressive role and picking out the kind of object they do.<sup>43</sup>

In any case, when we discover that some kind of linguistic expression plays a distinctive expressive role (one not played by paradigmatically referring singular terms, for instance), we would seem methodologically to have two choices. We can think about that new expressive role in an *exclusionary* or in a *permissive* way. The exclusionary reading claims that the expressive role that has been discovered must exhaust what is available to determine semantic content. The contrasting permissive reading allows that playing that expressive role might be compatible with also playing other expressive roles (for instance, referring), and so not ruling out the corresponding semantics still being applicable. The fact that expressivists who want to adopt the exclusionary reading should argue for adopting this stance rather than the permissive one (as should those who want to adopt the less common permissive stance), of course, is not limited to the case of expressive nominalists.

What I have called “nominalization nominalisms” concern the use and content of linguistic expressions. Nominalism is usually thought of as an *ontological* thesis, however. Sellars endorses such a view:

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<sup>43</sup> I have in mind determining the equivalence relation that is the abstractor.

It is also argued that exemplification 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.**<sup>44</sup>

I take it that being **“in the world in the narrow sense” means being in the *nondiscursive* world: the world as it was before there discursive beings, or a counterfactual world in which there never were discursive beings.** If this is indeed the narrow sense of “in the world” that contrasts with the broad sense invoked in this passage, then it seems to me that there is a tension between this claim and the response to one version of the first objection to naïve Carnapian metalinguistic expressivism about transcategorial nominalizations. This objection is that it cannot be right to understand sentences such as “Triangularity is a property,” metalinguistically, because they would still have been true even if there had never been discursive beings. Sellars’s response commits him to the claim that “•triangular•s are predicates” would still have been true even if there never had been discursive beings. Perhaps there are ways to vindicate this claim without being committed to •triangular•s being “in the world” in the narrow sense, but it is hard to see how. I suppose that he thinks that •triangular•s *are* “in the world in the narrow sense,” but that that is compatible with his claim, since •triangular•s are not universals and are not exemplified by the expression-types they classify. (They are “ones in many”, but not universals.) The presumptive presence of •triangular•s “in the world in the narrow sense” suggests that some work will need to be done to clarify and entitle oneself to appeal to this “narrow sense.”

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<sup>44</sup> [NS 103].

Be that as it may, what is “in the world in the narrow sense” is being taken to exclude universals because they are not, as we first might have thought, referred to by *genuine* singular terms, but only by *ostensible* ones. Nominalism in the ontological sense is the thesis that the world (“in the narrow sense”) consists exclusively of *nameables*: things that could be referred to by *genuine* singular terms. This connection between *semantic* nominalism, which distinguishes genuine from merely ostensible ‘names’ (singular terms), and *ontological* nominalism, which restricts the real to what is nameable by genuine ones, is explicit in Kotarbiński. It seems to be Sellars’s picture as well.

Now I am not at all sure that ontological nominalism in this sense is in the end so much as intelligible. In Sellars’s version of semantic nominalization nominalism, among the transcategorial nominalizations that are analyzed metalinguistically, and which accordingly show up as not genuine singular terms, are *sentence* nominalizations, and their associated common nouns such as “proposition” and “fact”. (“That snow is white is a proposition,” is analyzed as “•Snow is white•s are declarative sentences.”) Although “Naming and Saying” defends a Tractarian view against Bergmann on *some* important points, Sellars parts company with the *Tractatus* in taking a reistic position according to which the world (narrowly conceived) is *not* everything that is the case, a world of facts, but is rather a world exclusively of particulars, nameables not stateables. As far as I can see, Sellars is envisaging a world in which the “ones-in-many” needed to make sense of an *articulated* world are such as could be referred to by common nouns (sortals). That is the alternative to universals he seems to be working with. But to avoid commitment to

universals, it seems that the criteria of identity and individuation associated with the (already, as it were, nominalized) common nouns must either do *all* the work, or must somehow immunize the criteria (and consequences) of application from supporting or making intelligible the contribution of the universals that threaten when predicate adjectives, which *only* have circumstances (and consequences) of application, but not criteria of identity and individuation, are nominalized. I don't pretend to know that this strategy cannot be made to work. But I also don't see that Sellars has given us many of the tools that would need to be deployed to make it work. Perhaps more fundamentally, I don't see that we have the makings of a story on the ontological or the semantic side of what corresponds on the pragmatic side to *saying* (claiming, believing) something. If the world is a collection of particulars—of course, collections are not “in the world in the narrow sense” either—what is one doing in *saying that* things are thus-and-so? How are we to understand *either* the “thus-and-so” *or* the “saying that”? I am buffaloed.

Here is a potentially more tractable puzzle. I have interpreted the semantic side of Sellars's nominalism as what I have called a “nominalization nominalism,” which distinguishes two classes of singular terms, genuine and merely ostensible. The merely ostensible ones are to be read metalinguistically, in the broad, nuanced sense of “metalinguistic” that applies to DSTs formed from dot-quoted expressions using the “illustrating sign-design principle.” More specifically, I have claimed that all transcategorial nominalizations count for Sellars as merely ostensible singular terms according to this classification, and so, according to the ontological side of his nominalism, do not correspond to anything “in the world in the narrow sense.” One kind

of transcategorial nominalization, starting with a non-nominal part of speech and forming singular terms from it, is gerunds or present participles, such as “doing”, “making”, “breaking”, “swimming”, and “heating”. These constructions form common nouns and singular terms from verbs. If my account of how the motivation of “Naming and Saying” shapes the account of “Abstract Entities” is correct—if being a transcategorial nominalization is sufficient for not being a genuine singular term for Sellars—then all singular terms formed from verbs must be merely ostensible, and correspond to nothing in the world construed narrowly. Sellars never discusses this case. Would he offer a broadly metalinguistic account of these terms and common nouns? If so, how would it go? Does his nominalism allow that the world “in the narrow sense” can include particular swimmings and heatings? These seem like particular events, rather than universals. A particular swimming falls under the common noun “swimming” as a particular dog falls under the one-in-many “...is a dog,” rather than by way of exemplification. And the processes of Sellars’s late ontology can be thought of just as extended events, and seem naturally to be picked out by gerunds and present participles. So it seems that either there is a tension in Sellars’s nominalism on this point, or I have characterized his nominalization nominalism too broadly. But if that is so, how should we determine which nominalizations of verbs and adjectives are alright, forming genuine singular terms and common nouns, and which are not? The considerations of “Naming and Saying” do not seem to give us adequate guidance here.

I want to close with the observation that, putting aside the slide I have accused Sellars of making from pragmatic to semantic considerations (via an exclusionary expressivism), however well semantic nominalization nominalism *fits with* ontological nominalism, the semantic thesis is not in the right shape to provide an *argument* for the ontological one—as Sellars in effect claims that it is in the passage from *NS* I quoted above. Even if the semantic claim that transcategorial nominalizations are not genuine (referring) singular terms is accepted, that in no way entails that only what *can* be so referred to exists in the real world. Such an ontological stipulation is at most *compatible* with the semantic commitment. So I do not think that there is an argument from Sellars’s metalinguistic pragmatic and semantic nominalization nominalism to his ontological nominalism.

Nor can I see that the scientific realism epitomized in Sellars’s *scientia mensura* passage—“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,”—yields an argument for reistic ontological nominalism.<sup>45</sup> That is, it would not help to restrict what exists in “the world in a narrow sense” to what can be *described*. The descriptive language of science is just as much up for alternative interpretations, nominalistic and otherwise, as ordinary language. If all that is right, then we should see Sellars’s commitment to a reistic ontological nominalism of the sort epitomized by Kotarbiński (before his pan-somatist turn) as rock-bottom, not derived from or supported by other commitments. His metalinguistic expressivism about transcategorial nominalizations

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<sup>45</sup> *EPM* §41.

should be understood as aimed at showing that one *need* not countenance universals and propositions to understand the use of the expressions that ostensibly refer to them.

I conclude that **Sellars has introduced and deployed the metalinguistic machinery of dot-quotes, distributive singular terms, and Jumblese to offer a sophisticated account of a distinctive metalinguistic role that transcategorial nominalizations and their associated common nouns play. That account, though, operates primarily at the level of *pragmatics*: as part of a theory of the *use* of these expressions. He has *not* thereby put himself in a position to be entitled to draw nominalistic *semantic* or *ontological* conclusions from the identification of that distinctive expressive role.** In the absence of a fuller analysis of this case, we should no more draw that conclusion from Sellars's expressivist analysis of the use of property-terms than we should from his expressivist account of the use of alethic modal vocabulary.