



Normativity, Lifeworld, and Science in Sellars' Synoptic Vision

Dionysis Christias

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“What will philosophy look like in the future? Dionysis Christias makes a case here that Wilfrid Sellars offers us the best path to moving philosophy into the future. Sellars realized that the problematic of contemporary philosophy is generated, not by a metaphysical clash between two orders of being, say, mind and body (or world), or the concrete and the abstract, but by the conceptual clash between a thoroughly naturalistic descriptive framework spawned by the sciences and the norm-laden (and therefore prescriptively oriented) framework in which we conceptualize and intend our activities. The key to resolving this clash is rejecting the Myth of the Given. We can then properly understand the relations between these frameworks, that is, we can take science seriously while acknowledging that personhood is a normative and communal phenomenon. This will enable us to form “a non-alienated experience of ourselves-in-the-world.” Christias puts Sellars into fascinating dialogue with continental philosophy and its emphasis on the life-world (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Meillassoux and Deleuze), but does not infer that it is incompatible with a scientific world-view. Philosophy in the future will be a wider-ranging conversation than was available in its immediate past, and Sellars was ahead his time. Christias makes a strong case that his time has come.”

—Willem de Vries *is Professor of Philosophy in the University
of New Hampshire*

“Wilfrid Sellars is an anomalous figure in 20th century philosophy: a Kantian who proclaimed both the irreducibility of the normative and the ontological primacy of science; an analyst of meaning who insisted that language does not mirror the world; a scientific realist who espoused a metaphysics of pure processes. Sellars fits into neither the analytic nor Continental traditions. In this brilliant book, Dionysis Christias shows how Sellars’ singular oeuvre harbors a hidden thread that unravels the dichotomies around which the analytic and Continental traditions constituted themselves. Christias’ starting point is the insight that Sellars’ metalinguistic expressivism and his process naturalism are not incompatible but interdependent. On this basis, Christias proposes a daring rapprochement between Sellars’ expressivism and phenomenological critique of representation. While Sellars exposes phenomenology’s reliance on the myth of the categorial Given, his non-representational model of lifeworld and science points towards a post-phenomenological stereoscopy of manifest and scientific images which is at once practically and cate-

gorially transformative. But Christias goes beyond reconstruction to augment Sellars' philosophy. He shows how to provide conditions of individuation for pure processes; how to distinguish between the emancipatory and oppressive aspects of science; and how to reconcile instrumental rationality with intrinsic purposefulness. Perhaps most importantly, Christias shows how Sellars provides us with the resources for reconciling collective emancipation with natural necessity. This is not only a groundbreaking contribution to Sellars scholarship but a profoundly audacious work of philosophy in its own right."

—Ray Brassier *is Professor of Philosophy in the American University of Beirut*

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Dionysis Christias
Research Center for Greek Philosophy
Academy of Athens
Athens, Greece

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Wilfrid Sellars is one of the most important twentieth-century analytic philosophers. This, among other things, can be shown by the fact that, primarily due to his own influence, many analytic philosophers gradually came to endorse the view that a host of many important but seemingly loosely connected philosophical problems—for example, about the relations of mind and body, the place of persons, intentionality, meaning, intention, action, moral or aesthetic facts within the natural world—are essentially different forms of expression of a more fundamental philosophical problematic: the problem of the place of *normative* facts—that is, of facts which are not just descriptions of what *is* the case but essentially involve in their identity and individuation facts about what *ought* to be the case—within a *naturalistically* described world, bereft of any norms.

The view that philosophical questions at their deepest level take this form was largely Sellars' own original idea. Indeed, he believed that a similar view about the nature of philosophical problems can already be found—in nascent and not fully self-conscious form—in Kant. This general metaphilosophical viewpoint was adopted and creatively elaborated by post-Sellarsian philosophers such as Rorty, McDowell and Brandom, notwithstanding their objections to Sellars' 'scientism' and his overall vision of integrating the manifest and scientific image of ourselves-in-the-world. Indeed, as Rorty argued, Sellars' influence was such as to usher analytic philosophy from its empiricist to its Kantian stage, while post-Sellarsians,

such as Brandom, have been said to further move analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage.¹

It is important to remember that the above philosophical problematic about the place of normative facts within a naturalistically described world, which Sellars and his followers take to be at the heart of a host of other more specific philosophical problems, had not always been formulated in these terms. The first signs of its recognition and thematization as an important philosophical problem can be traced back to modernity as a result of the gradual depersonalization of the natural world due to the huge success of the natural sciences from the sixteenth century onward in explaining and predicting observable natural phenomena. This process of depersonalization, which had wider social consequences (e.g. the demystification of God-given state power, the transition toward a secular form of state power based on the ‘general will’ of the people), has been famously called ‘the disenchantment of the world’ (Weber, 1919). This ‘disenchantment’ is here understood as the gradual overcoming of magical or, in general, anthropomorphic ways of understanding the world and our place in it, through the gradual elimination of capacities and abilities of persons (intentions, purposes, life-plans) in explaining the emergence and course of natural phenomena. Consider, for example, how pre-modern humanity understood reality and its place in it. External objects were thought to be internally related to human needs and purposes, in that they were understood as having an intrinsic value within a teleologically structured ‘closed’ and hierarchical world where everything had its proper place according to its ‘value’ (Koyré, 1957). In the context of this pre-modern worldview, natural happenings were conceived teleologically, as striving to conform to their internal life-plan or purpose. By contrast, after the huge success of the natural sciences from the seventeenth century onward in predicting and explaining the course of natural phenomena, the world is understood as populated with value-free material unobservable objects or bodies governed by mathematically described natural laws and related through mechanistic causation, thereby eliminating the need for invoking teleological, value-laden normative categories or perceptible features for explaining their behavior. An important consequence of this cultural process of disenchantment in the field of philosophy was the eventual

¹This post-Sellarsian analytic tradition was and still is a minority view within analytic philosophy. Contemporary analytic philosophy mostly comes in the form of analytic metaphysics and is heavily influenced by Quine, Kripke and Lewis, rather than Sellars.

challenge and overcoming of the pre-modern conception of normativity as something imposed upon us from a transcendent source which fixes how we ought to think and act independently of our recognition of this normative force in the context of our social practices. The norms to which we are committed are prescribed neither by God nor by Nature. We are only answerable to one another for the commitments and the actions we undertake.

However, the process of disenchantment also created new forms of alienation not only in practice (where people could no longer give meaning and purpose to their life by invoking a transcendent authority) but also in theory, where an almost unbridgeable gap was opened between persons and the radically depersonalized natural world. Since the essential properties of persons (rationality, purpose, will, perceptual qualities) could no longer be attributed—not even by analogy—to external natural objects, they were salvaged by being confined to a supposedly ontologically and epistemologically autonomous sphere, the human ‘mind’. Yet, in this way, and to the extent to which even our own body was thought as part of the disenchanted natural world, a gap was opened within human beings themselves between their minds and their bodies. In this sense, it started to become clear that the price that human beings had to pay for disenchanting the external world was their confinement within a ‘subjective’ sphere within which they could have complete cognitive and practical autonomy and transparency, but which completely alienated them from their own bodily existence and contact with the external world. The Cartesian ‘modern’ subject conceived itself as a thinking and non-extended substance which has direct and transparent access to its perceptual states and is characterized by complete freedom of the will within the private sphere of the ‘mind’, yet without being capable of understanding how it can be so much as *possible* for it to transcend this private sphere of the mind and reach out to the external world.² Perception and action cannot directly connect us to external reality since they are both conceived as essentially *mental* states. In this way, the ‘thinking subject’ of modern philosophy is alienated from its bodily and worldly existence in a radical sense: its perceptual capacities and its free will, being confined to the private sphere of the mind, do not

² Descartes himself invoked God’s power to solve this problem, but this arguably amounts to explaining the *obscurum per obscurius*.

suffice to connect its thought contents to action and to a world existing independently of the subject.³

However, it must be stressed that while this distinctively modern skeptical gap between mind and the external world and the ensuing problem of the relation between mind and the external world is intimately related to that of the place of normative facts in a non-normative world, the two problems are not identical. Sellars' genius, in this case, consists in his application of Kantian critical transcendental tools to contemporary philosophical problems in a way that brought to light a deeper conception of their content from modernity onward. According to the 'pre-critical' views of rationalists and empiricists alike, modern 'disenchanted' philosophy takes for granted that there is a fundamental categorial distinction between the 'physical' and the 'mental' which is ontological in nature and subsequently attempts to understand how the human mind, with its capacity for rational thinking and freedom, can be ontologically connected with external, mind-independent, reality. Yet, according to Sellars, Kant's transcendental and critical turn already marks the beginning of a radical change in our conception of the content of fundamental philosophical questions in the face of Weberian disenchantment. The traditional *ontological* distinction between the physical and the mental is replaced with the *deontological* distinction between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom: the realm of nature consists of 'things' which are *non-normatively* related, while the realm of freedom includes *normatively* individuated things (Brandom, 2009). In this way, pre-critical ontological questions about the relation between the physical and mental realms become questions about the source and nature of *normativity*, namely, the *bindingness* and objective *validity* of our *concepts* of the 'mental' and the 'physical'.

This change of the very *questions* that must be properly asked in order to have any chance of finding a philosophically correct account of ourselves-in-the-world in the face of Weberian disenchantment was so radical that even Kant cannot be said to have been fully aware of it. In fact, it is clear that many remnants of the old, 'ontological' way of thinking still survive in Kant's novel transcendental-critical metaphysical framework and make their presence felt by creating a host of unresolved 'tensions' in the latter (the most important being, arguably, the controversial notion of the

³In this way, ironically, that which distinguishes humanity from the rest of (animate and inanimate) nature, namely, mind, no longer results in a higher integration of its being into the totality of being, but on the contrary marks the unbridgeable gulf between itself and the rest of existence (Jonas, 2001, 214).

‘thing in itself’). Indeed, this tendency of understanding the formulation of fundamental philosophical problems about the place of mind in nature in directly metaphysical terms, completely bypassing the phenomenon of normativity (in our perception, thinking and acting), is present and prevalent in contemporary analytic philosophy, as can be seen in recent discussions about modality and grounding in analytic metaphysics, about the relations between mind and body in philosophy of mind or about meaning, truth and reference in philosophy of language. Within this, mostly hostile, philosophical landscape, Sellars—himself a highly systematic philosopher and deeply knowledgeable in the history of philosophy—saw that the fundamental theoretical challenge posed in philosophy by the Weberian disenchantment of the world was not so much the connection of two separated ontological realms (‘mind’ and ‘world’) but the way in which normatively individuated phenomena—which are now what makes us distinctive as ‘rational animals’—are connected with and are about a natural world which is described in exclusively non-normative terms. Human beings are not distinguished from animals or nature due to their having ontologically emergent ‘minds’ over and above physical bodies, but because their mental states are understood *normatively*, as *loci* of normative authority and responsibility. This construal of ‘human nature’ in terms of sensitivity and commitment to norms attempts to account for the distinctiveness of humanity within nature, albeit in a non-metaphysical way that does not present humanity as a ‘kingdom within a kingdom’ (as a separate ontological realm within nature) and is thus fully consistent with the lessons of Weberian disenchantment.

This way of understanding the theoretical predicaments of contemporary philosophical thinking in the light of continuing Weberian disenchantment forms a central metaphilosophical backbone of this work. Another related and equally important predicament of contemporary philosophy as a result of the disenchantment of nature and ourselves in late modernity, again originally proposed by Sellars, is the indispensability yet at the same time lack of coherence between two equally fundamental ways of understanding ourselves-in-the-world, namely, the categorial framework of the *manifest* image and that of the *scientific* image. The gap between those two equally central ways of understanding ourselves-in-the-world becomes obvious if we consider that in the context of the manifest image, human perception, thought and action are understood as essentially norm-governed and conceptually structured capacities of persons, whereas, in the context of the scientific image, these phenomena can be exhaustively explained, at least in principle, in terms of pre-personal,

non-normative and non-conceptual mechanisms or processes. Again, here the deeper issue comes down to accounting for the place of persons, construed as *loci* of normative authority and responsibility, within a scientifically, naturalistically described world, bereft of values and norms. Philosophy stands or falls by its success in accounting for this possibility in the domains of theoretical and practical reason alike.

Sellars notoriously takes both the framework of persons and science seriously and thinks that this implies the need not just for reconciling the manifest and scientific images but for *fusing* them into one stereoscopic vision of reality and our place in it. Taking as our point of departure the above project and metaphilosophical framework, one of the main aims of this book is to address head-on the issue of the form which a non-alienated experience of ourselves-in-the-world would take in the Sellarsian cryptic stereoscopic fusion of the manifest and the scientific image. Since our aim here is to focus on the concrete experience that this fusion would produce at the level of the everyday lifeworld, this project can perhaps be seen as a non-traditional, non-descriptive, *revisionary phenomenology* which, *pace* phenomenology, takes science and scientific realism seriously. I will attempt to show that, in many respects, this novel lifeworld experience would turn us into a new kind of person-in-the-world (Chaps. 4, 8 and 12). The transformation would be no less—in fact, far more—radical than that of the development of our manifest-image conception of persons-in-the-world in modernity out of our original-image conception of ourselves-in-the-world, where everything was some kind of person. Post-modern persons would be ‘open’ to the world through sensibility and action in a different way than we currently are. The very contents and kinds of affordances and solicitations that constitute our perceptual-practical awareness of the natural and social world would be transformed by the direct incorporation into them of scientific knowledge about the world’s causal contribution in their phenomenological structure. A corresponding transformation would take place also in the very *categories* through which we conceive and perceive ourselves-in-the-environment. For example, the social and environmental world would not anymore be open to us in a reified sense, as external alien forces, but would be directly perceived as a product of our own instituting activity (social world) and our own evolutionarily developed sensory-motor-affective activity (the organism-environment system). In this sense, our environmental *niche* itself (including the perceptual features of what we now categorize as ‘external objects’) would be understood and experienced as a functional component of our sensorimotor system, rather than something external to it, to

which we may be ‘intentionally directed’. Moreover, such transformations would also have momentous practical implications, as they could open the way for an unprecedented enhancement of our freedom and autonomy, but also lead to new forms of alienation and ‘enslavement’ (Chap. 12). Our Sellars-inspired wager here is that *in* this next ‘post-modern stage of categorial evolution, when the scientific image will have fully demystified persons, depriving them of any metaphysical essence, *persons*, precisely through this demystifying process, will have self-consciously come to ‘own’ their ‘essence’ by realizing that the latter is normative and communal (a matter of collective self-determination based on symmetrically cognitive normative attitudes) and not ontological and individualistic (a matter of a ‘unique human nature’ transparently given to individuals).⁴ There are no natural or social forces that dictate what we ought to do and to which we must ‘submit’ in order to successfully navigate and flourish in our environment. The liberating—yet potentially frightening and paralyzing—dimension of disenchanting reason is the gradual realization that our successful survival and flourishing in the world ultimately depends on our collective commitment to *make* the natural and social world a place (a co-evolved symbiotic environment) worth living and striving for.

With this general aim in mind, let me now focus on the more specific objectives of this book.

(1) A major aim of this book is to highlight the importance of Sellars’ attack on the myth of the Given to phenomenology in particular and to continental philosophy in general by arguing that such diverse philosophical views as Husserl’s notion of the lifeworld, Merleau-Ponty’s and Heidegger’s post-Husserlian rendering of the latter, as well as contemporary speculative realist brands of continental philosophy (Meillassoux’s anti-correlationist mathematical rationalism) all fall prey to its most basic version, namely, the ‘categorial Given’. The resort to the categorial Given (in the form of an ‘eidetic intuition’ of the essential features of the lifeworld and of science) turns out to be the unacknowledged cost of anti-naturalism in the Continental tradition and of its systematic distortions of the categorial structure of the lifeworld and of science (Chap. 3). And while Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger depart from Husserl’s transcendental methodology and uncover deeper phenomenological structures not explored by Husserl, such as the non-apperceptive bodily correlation

⁴This acknowledgment makes meaningful the regulative ideal of a ‘post-modern’ community of persons in which each member identifies with all the others, at once expressing and sacrificing their own particular attitudes by taking co-responsibility for the practical attitudes of everyone (Brandom, 2019, 757).

between mind and world (Merleau-Ponty) and our non-intentional existential openness to the world based on a non-thematic and non-theoretical ‘pre-understanding’ of its basic features (Heidegger), both end up, in different and more subtle ways than Husserl, privileging the intuitive structures of the lifeworld over the non-intuitive world of science, a move that is ultimately unjustifiable (Chap. 4). An alternative, non-representational model of both lifeworld and science, which asserts their inextricable entanglement, will be provided as a way toward a post-phenomenological philosophy free of the myth of the Given in all its forms. In this context, it will be proposed that the Sellarsian scientific image must be understood as radically non-representational and as operating at all levels with the evolutionary selectional mode of explanation (Chap. 5).

(2) I will attempt to show the fertility of Sellars’ philosophy and its relevance for continental philosophy by putting his views on ontology and normativity in conversation with one of the most important figures of contemporary continental philosophy, Gilles Deleuze, who was perhaps the most systematic and rigorous defender of an unabashedly metaphysical picture of the world as a ceaseless processual becoming. I will argue that some features of Deleuze’s ‘monistic pluralist’ process metaphysics—especially his notions of virtuality and intensity—could put some flesh in the bare bones of Sellarsian process nominalism. Conversely, the Sellarsian resolutely non-representationalist notion of normativity can be used to amend a blind spot of Deleuze’s thought, as it shows that normativity is an indispensable form of thinking and a necessary condition of our individual and collective freedom in a way that does not fall foul of what Deleuze calls ‘the image of representational thought’ (which, according to Deleuze, reduces the creative, differential and processual dimension of being to a static conception of the world and ourselves based on the substance-property categorical framework of traditional thought). This will be the topic of Chap. 7.

(3) I will provide a novel interpretation and articulate in some detail Sellars’ central but cryptic and elusive notion of the stereoscopic fusion between the manifest and the scientific image at the level of *concrete lifeworld experience*. It will be argued that the stereoscopic fusion of the images can be understood in terms of the concrete realization of our practical ability for absorbed skillful coping within an ever-expanding range of (linguistic and non-linguistic) environments (Chap. 8). It is also suggested that in this envisaged situation of the fusion of the images in the concrete context of the lifeworld, the latter will radically change not only in its specific content but also in its very categorial form.

(4) I shall attempt to show how Sellars sees the manifest and the scientific image as crucial metaphilosophical concepts capable of throwing ample light on the historical evolution and contemporary scene in both analytic and continental philosophy in the face of the continuing Weberian disenchantment. Based on this analysis, I propose that the scientific image, in its role as a critical metaphilosophical tool, and suitably enriched by sociological supra-personal explanations (*à la* Marx, Weber), can be used for criticizing Sellars' own conception of science (Chap. 11).

(5) I shall provide the beginnings of an account about how—the hinted at but somewhat underdeveloped by Sellars—process-oriented (as opposed to a substance-property) ontology can function as a metaphysical model that overcomes and critically delimits Aristotelian and Kantian substance 'manifest-image' ontologies (Chaps. 6 and 9). Process metaphysics in this sense can be seen as a non-representationalist ontology from the point of view of which, at one stroke, we can understand 'how things really are' without succumbing to the metaphysical and epistemological impasses of a representational 'substance-property' ontology. In this connection, I also attempt to fill another important gap in Sellars' process ontology by sketching a response to the objection that we cannot make full sense of how processual entities can have *determinate* identity and individuation conditions. Moreover, I consider the manner in which persons, conceived as *loci* of normative authority and responsibility, can be integrated in such a radically nominalistic world (Chap. 9). It is argued that persons can be so integrated in the sense that although a nominalistic process world does not admit persons in its ontology, persons do exist in such a world in the sense that, like money, they exist only to the extent to which certain organisms, through the 'activation' of recognitive we-attitudes of authority, responsibility and trust, bootstrap themselves into (normative) existence, the latter being thus always precarious and dependent on the sustenance and constant reproduction of those we-attitudes.⁵ In the context of this wider

⁵Of course, there is a crucial difference between the mode of normative existence of money and that of persons: money is ultimately a means for fulfilling the ends of persons, while persons are not further means for the satisfaction of something other than persons, but have 'intrinsic value'. But the point of this resolutely normative rendering of the existence of persons in terms of the sustenance and reproduction of recognitive we-attitudes is precisely to show that even the intrinsic value of persons (their self-recognition as free and equal individuals) is not a metaphysical fact of the 'nature' of persons, but something that it must be *treated* as such in order to *exist* at all. And in this sense, persons as normatively instituted entities actually do resemble money and other institutions.

investigation, I shall examine how free will can be incorporated—and indeed vindicated—within a scientifically disenchanted world (Chap. 10).

(6) I shall develop a neo-Sellarsian framework, close to the spirit—if not the letter—of Sellars’ philosophy, for distinguishing between an emancipatory and a non-emancipatory dimension of science. This shows how Sellars can contribute to discussions, most often conducted by continental philosophers, about the moral and political dimension of science, or more specifically, about the precise sense in which science can be said (or cannot be said) to objectify important non-instrumental epistemic and moral values, central to our human flourishing. Here, among other things, I shall provide a framework that challenges deeply ingrained assumptions in the fields of ethics to the effect that the process of disenchanting physical and human nature through techno-scientific means, practices and procedures necessarily drains persons of their freedom and autonomy, by ‘objectifying’ them, thereby making them prone to viewing others—and, ultimately, even themselves—on the model of ‘human resources’, fit to be mastered and controlled, rather than persons which ought to be treated as ends in themselves. In this context, it will be argued that the best way to make sense of an eventual integration of a radical scientific naturalism with the non-instrumental character of the moral point of view is by envisaging a post-human community of reciprocally recognized persons that directly relate the world to their purposes by construing their intentions and actions in scientific terms. I will also briefly discuss the political implications of this vision of (post)-humanity-in-the-world⁶ (Chap. 12).

Two central ideas and unifying threads connecting nearly all the Sellarsian themes discussed in this book are the following:

(1) In opposition to a widespread tendency of contemporary philosophers to view Sellars’ own critique of the myth of the Given as incompatible with a radical scientific naturalism (and more congenial to a ‘liberal’,

⁶For example, one important such implication is that while ‘disenchanting reason’, and the ‘promethean freedom’ it promises, does not by itself imply unconditional respect for persons, it transforms nature, individuals and society in such a way that the stakes of *not* respecting persons become explicit and existentially transparent to everyone. Correlatively, as this disenchanting process unfolds in time—with its increasing techno-scientific sophistication making the end of domination and the achieving of unconditional respect a live option for everyone ‘here and now’—the demand for equality in possession and distribution of socially significant goods would gradually lose its ideal and semi-abstract status and would be motivationally salient and concrete for everyone (which is not of course to say that the demand in question is guaranteed to be realized).

non-scientific naturalism), I take seriously Sellars' claim that the 'normative turn' (e.g. about meaning, thought, action, perception) must simultaneously be a radical naturalist—and even nominalist—turn, because to not do so requires accepting the Given in its most basic form, 'the categorial Given' (i.e. the view that the categorial structure of the world imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on a melted wax). And this, in turn, entails accepting (an epistemically privileged access to) abstract entities that are recalcitrant to naturalistic treatment.

(2) There is an important sense in which we must overcome ordinary anthropocentric manifest-image categories for conceiving ourselves-in-the-world. Yet, this overcoming cannot be achieved by recourse to some kind of mythically Given element in perception, intuition or thought, but through those very categories *themselves* reinterpreted as having epistemological, expressive, metalinguistic import, which, in conjunction with the explanatory resources of the scientific image, can enable us to understand the world and ourselves non-anthropocentrically without in the least compromising personhood. Thus, at the most general level, it is argued that through a scientifically informed metaphysics, constrained by the normative theoretical and practical collective ideals of the space of reasons, we can diachronically remove the subjective (sensible, phenomenological, conceptual) means that condition what we synchronically take to be an objective access to the world and ourselves and critically revise them so as to achieve a better understanding of—and practical comportment to—our environment.⁷ It is, of course, also true that we cannot understand the 'really real' unless we first understand the structure of the lifeworld into which we have our everyday being. But to understand the structure of the lifeworld is not to conceive it as categorially transparent in such a way as to determine or limit our access to the real in an absolute, non-revisable manner. It is to reinterpret its basic categories and semantic-epistemic functions in non-descriptive, normative terms and to understand that this normative rendering of the mind-world relation embodies regulative ideals that put pressure on the categorial autonomy of the structures of the lifeworld, in a way that ultimately leads to an (a-categorial and

⁷ Brassier makes a similar point when he says that "there are two dimensions of spatiotemporal structure: the one which we represent, and the one in which our representing unfolds. The goal of cognitive enquiry consists in incorporating ever more facts about the structure of representing into every represented fact. This would be the naturalization of the involuted spiral of absolute knowing" (Brassier, 2016).

nominalistic) picture of the world and ourselves as patterns of absolute processes. In this process, paradoxically, we come to realize that a resolute non-anthropocentric conception of the world and ourselves not only does not entail nihilistic conclusions, but, guided by the collective theoretical and practical regulative ideals of the space of reasons, is in fact necessary for the satisfaction of our most basic needs and interests in the long run. This book is an attempt to show that this is one of the deepest lessons of Sellars' philosophical vision and a reason that Sellars' legacy is of lasting importance and continuing relevance for twenty-first-century philosophy.

The 'big picture' that emerges out of all this shows Sellars' highly creative and deeply innovative conception of ourselves-in-the-world, which unfortunately is at best underappreciated and at worst completely non-existent as a philosophical position in the literature: Sellars, in effect, formulates the (essentially non-representational) semantics and ontology of a consistent modern materialism, in the form of a nominalistic process naturalism, and shows how space-of-reasons semantic-categorial-intentional-modal-moral vocabulary at bottom function as collectively instituted tools for making explicit, reproducing in a dynamic temporally extended way, and critically revising our conceptual responses to the world. This is ultimately a vision of a nominalistic process world within which some complex physical systems coordinate themselves by collectively producing (externalizing themselves as) linguistic 'marks and noises', gradually attempting to 'seize the means of semantic production' (make explicit, regulate, control, reproduce and critically change this patterned structure, purging it of its metaphysical-ideological dimension) in their striving to obtain ever-increasing levels of collective 'resonance' (skillful coping) in the natural and social environment so as to freely exercise their sensory and intellectual powers as joyful ends in themselves.

At bottom, this book aspires not so much to be faithful to the letter of Sellars' philosophy, by just providing interpretative suggestions and solutions to issues surrounding Sellars' scholarship (although it does attempt to do this at times and in a suitably broad sense), but to follow the spirit of Sellarsian *Weltanschauung*, by offering Sellars-inspired critical philosophical tools for handling contemporary problems both in analytic and continental philosophy, in a broad range of philosophical issues. The critique of Husserl's, Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's scientific instrumentalism (Chaps. 3 and 4), the non-representationalist version of scientific realism based on evolutionary theory (Chap. 5), the justification and development of a corresponding non-representationalist process ontology

(Chaps. 6, 7 and 9), the connection of normativity to novelty and positive freedom (Chap. 7), the specific characterization of the Sellarsian stereoscopic fusion of the manifest and scientific images (Chap. 8), the proposed reconciliation of free will and science (Chap. 10), the distinction between emancipatory and non-emancipatory science (Chaps. 11 and 12) and the ethico-political implications of the Sellarsian commitments to naturalism and normativism (Chap. 12) are nowhere to be found in Sellars' texts, and some of these themes might even lie beyond his explicit philosophical interest. Moreover, the distinction between emancipatory and non-emancipatory science and the development of a non-representationalist process ontology, though proposed in the spirit of friendly amendment, are based on direct criticism of Sellars' positions (and omissions) in these matters. Hence, perhaps this book should have been called 'Normativity, Lifeworld and Science in a *Post-Sellarsian* Synoptic Vision'. The original title, however, reflects the fact that while my thoughts and suggestions at times may go beyond what Sellars took himself to have been saying, they were directly inspired by the spirit and general orientation of his philosophy. Be that as it may, I hope that this book will be a timely and relevant contribution not only to Sellars' studies but also to the critical assessment and wider application of the ideas concerning scientific naturalism and rational normativity that Sellars investigated in innovative and currently much-discussed ways.

Some chapters of this volume (Chaps. 6, 8, 11 and 12) include material from previously published articles which were written for different occasions and in the context of a different overall argument. In preparing this volume I have transformed and updated the originals, introducing new sections, themes, positions and arguments, with the view to strengthening the overall argument of the book. I also return many times in certain themes and passages from Sellars, but I would like to think that the price paid by such repetition brings with it a certain gain. The repeated passages or arguments throughout the book have been so far relatively neglected in the literature or else developed in a very different way from the one proposed here. Thus, repetition can serve, in the different thematic contexts in which it is found, as a form of emphasis and reframing.

There are many topics relevant to Sellarsian philosophy that are not discussed in detail in the book, such as Sellars' views on meaning, justification, truth or practical reasoning. One reason for this is that there are excellent monographs, papers and edited volumes in which many aspects of these Sellarsian themes are thoroughly discussed (Lance & O'Leary-Hawthorne,

1997; deVries, 2005; O’Shea, 2007; Shapiro, 2013, 2020; Koons, 2019). Moreover, I would like to think that the aspects of Sellars’ philosophy that are here taken to be of central importance (manifest-scientific image, myth of the categorial Given, nominalistic naturalism, process ontology, normativity of persons) do indirectly provide for some of the other aspect of his philosophy, not discussed here (e.g. his non-relational theory of meaning or his anti-foundationalism in epistemology).

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Prelude: Sellars' Project and Its Essential Tension

1 THE REJECTION OF THE MYTH OF THE GIVEN

As is well known, Sellars is mostly famous for his rejection of the 'myth of the Given' in all its forms, epistemic, semantic and categorial. The concept of the Given is supposed to give content to our conviction that our only guarantee of a non-circular, solid (infinite regress stopper) and objective (non-arbitrary) access and knowledge about reality is the existence of a point of *immediate contact* between subject and object that enables the former to have immediate (non-inferential) knowledge of the latter. This immediate epistemic connection between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge makes the cognitive contact between them absolutely immediate, transparent, 'diaphanous', independent of any other knowledge and is precisely what constitutes Given knowledge, which, by serving as a foundation on which other bits of knowledge could be justified, guarantees the very possibility of knowledge. (If we substitute 'meaning' for 'knowledge' and 'semantic' for 'epistemic' in the last sentence above, we arrive at a notion of 'Given meanings', i.e. of the semantic Given.) More precisely, a certain (usually mental) state functions as an epistemic Given if (1) it is *epistemically independent*, that is, has an epistemic content independently of any (formal or material) inferential relations to which it may stand in with other such contents and (2) it is *epistemically efficacious*, that is, capable of 'transmitting' its epistemic status to other states or contents, thereby accounting for the possibility of objective knowledge (deVries &

Triplett 2000: xxv-xxvi). (Again, if we substitute ‘semantic’ for ‘epistemic’—and ‘purport’ for ‘knowledge’—in the above definition, we arrive at a definition of the semantic Given.) It is important here to note that Sellars, by characterizing the Given as a myth, does not object to the notion of immediate, non-inferential knowledge (i.e. knowledge that is not inferred by other knowledge). What he objects to is the idea that the immediate, non-inferential knowledge in question is *presuppositionless*, that is, that it is ‘there’ (in the world or in the mind) independently of its position (functional role) within a historically evolved categorial framework transmitted through language from generation to generation.

In his later work (1981), Sellars suggests that the most general form of the myth of the Given is that of the categorial Given, namely, the view that “if a person is directly aware of an item which [in fact] has categorial status C, then the person is aware of it *as* having categorial status C” (Sellars 1981: I §44). The categorial Given is intimately related to the epistemic or semantic Given: it is what *explains why* and *how* certain mental states can be semantically or epistemically independent and efficacious, that is, it provides the ‘ontological’ foundation for the semantically or epistemically ‘Givenist’ functions of those states. The Given can play its foundational role (i.e. has epistemic and/or semantic independence and efficacy) just because the categorial structure of reality is imposed on—or ‘discloses’ itself to—the subject who ‘receives’ it as it really is in perception, thought, volition, intention and so on. One falls prey to this version of the myth if one takes it that there is a direct classificatory awareness of categories such as ‘sorts’, ‘resemblances’, ‘facts’, ‘universals’ or even ‘particulars’, independently of our acquisition of a logical and categorial framework—that is, of a whole language (Sellars 1997: §29-31). The categorial structure of the world or of the mind cannot be somehow directly ‘read off’ or intuited on the basis of the basic descriptive and explanatory concepts of the categorial framework we actually employ in our everyday language.¹ Those concepts, which constitute what Sellars terms the ‘manifest image’ of

¹ A note here is in order for clarifying the use I will make throughout this book of the terms ‘diaphanous’ and ‘transparent’ as a characterization of the immediacy of contact between mind and world. An experiential or in general mental state is ‘diaphanous’ or ‘transparent’ if by just *undergoing* such an experience, its mode of being is thereby given *in propria persona* (as it really is), or, in other words, if by just *having* an experience one is thereby aware of its *categorial* status. I (and, for that matter, Sellars) do not deny that an experiential or mental state can be directly present to ‘consciousness’, in an unmediated manner. The sense of ‘diaphanous’ or ‘transparent’ access to these states that is in dispute is the further view that

humanity-in-the-world, although capable of yielding 'direct knowledge' of the world and our place in it in the context of categorial system of which they are part, are nonetheless not unchangeable essences which put us in direct conceptual contact with the essential categorial structure of the world or the mind. As Sellars puts it: "*To reject the myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorial structure of the world - if it has a categorial structure - imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on a melted wax*" (emphasis original) (Sellars 1981: I: §45). The bottom line of the critique of the semantic, epistemic and categorial Given is that for something to function in semantically or epistemically significant ways is for it to be a 'node' (play a functional role) within what Sellars calls the 'logical space of reasons' or the 'language game' of 'giving and asking for reasons'. The 'space of reasons' is a socially articulated logical space in which persons have their being. To be a denizen of the space of reasons is to be sensitive to certain collective pattern-governed behavioral habits regarding 'language-entry' transitions (perception), intra-linguistic transitions (inference) and 'language-exit' transitions (action), in a way that places them in a network of reciprocally recognized rights and duties ('cans' and 'oughts') pertaining to meaning, knowledge and action (Sellars 1954). And the important point regarding the categorial status of claims placed within the space of reasons is that the rationality of the latter—and thus, derivatively, of the categorial status in question—does not depend on it having any synchronic foundations, but in its diachronic *self-correcting* character, namely, the fact that, within it, *any* claim can be put into jeopardy, though not *all* at once.

2 THE RELATION BETWEEN MIND AND WORLD IS NOT REPRESENTATIONAL

Now, an important consequence of the rejection of the myth of the Given on Sellars' part (although highly contested by many of his admirers including McDowell and Brandom) is that all our central semantic concepts of meaning, reference and truth that at first glance seem to directly connect language or thought to the external world are not in the business of representing the world but are actually metalinguistic expressive devices that monitor our epistemic and semantic inferences *within* the space of reasons

this kind of direct, unmediated awareness amounts to a direct awareness of the categorial status of that experiential, mental state, external world fact and so on.

(as opposed to denoting a relation *between* conceptually shaped space of reasons contents and non-conceptually worldly events). According to this non-relational view, semantic terms and descriptions provide functional classifications of linguistic tokens. Sellars' analysis of meaning statements such as 'Rot', in German, means red, or 'Brother', means male sibling, treats them as statements that convey the information that the word mentioned on the left-hand side has a relevantly similar usage to the phrase on the right-hand side. These meaning statements do not explicitly say that the two expressions they each contain have the same usage. Rather, each sentence presupposes that the person it is directed at already understands the background language and uses the expression on the right-hand side as an illustrating sortal to form an indexical predicate (forming a predicate by giving an example bearing the relevant property), which is then applied to the tokens picked out by the expression on the left-hand side of the sentence (deVries 2005, 2021).

For Sellars, this resolute non-relational, non-representational function of meaning, truth and reference, which is internally connected to the critique of the Given, has the important consequence that worldly objects and processes, to the extent to which they are non-conceptually and non-normatively articulated, cannot be conceived as directly justifying our beliefs about them, as their only direct relation to our belief is in causally evoking or non-epistemically shaping them and not in justifying them. The very intentionality, conceptual directedness of language and thought (their capacity to point to something outside themselves, the world) can be understood in terms of inferential relations between token linguistic expressions, as opposed to representational or intentional relations between linguistic or mental expressions and extra-linguistic, non-conceptually structured reality. Non-conceptual reality poses only causal, evolutionary or, in general, non-epistemic constraints upon our beliefs, thought and actions, not epistemic or logical ones.

Here Sellars (and his followers, Rorty and Brandom) rejects a widely held view about the way in which the content of our empirical beliefs and thoughts is fixed. According to this, orthodox view of content determination, the content of an empirical belief is given by its truth conditions. One understands the content of the empirical proposition 'the streets are wet' if one knows what it is for the streets to be wet, that is, under what conditions the streets are actually wet. In this particular case, the knowledge in question stems from perceptual experience as it seems to be precisely through our sensory modalities that we understand the kinds of

things referred to by our empirical beliefs and the conditions under which they are actualized in the world. From this point of view, meaning is understood in terms of propositional contents which function as such by being internal representative signs of objective states of affairs in the external world, independently of their inferential connections to other contents within the space of reasons. Further, in the context of this representational orthodoxy in contemporary analytic philosophy of language, truth is understood in terms of 'representational accuracy' while its inferential transition to other contents is effected by formal rules of inference. This means that our communal normative practices of giving and asking for reasons do not play any *essential* explanatory role in accounting for meaning, reference and truth, but whatever role they are to play must be strictly derived from the truth-conditional relations of linguistic contents as the latter are expressed in formal logic. Yet, from this point of view, it is difficult to explain the epistemic and semantic powers of the 'material' non-logical content of empirical thought, except by appeal either to a self-justifying Given element in experience or to relations of correspondence between the empirical content in question and its truth conditions which are epistemically and semantically invisible ('external') to the subject (we can call this 'the thermometer view of content'²). And both these solutions seem unsatisfactory (Rorty 1979; Brandom 1994).

It must be mentioned here that Sellars' objections to representational or 'relational' theories of meaning, truth and reference are not immediately effective against more sophisticated relational theories of meaning and truth, such as McDowell's (1987, 1998, 2000), which construe *both* parts of the word-world relation as belonging within the space of reasons. Yet, Sellars would surely not accept even this more refined version of representational theories of meaning and truth, although they avoid the classic objections against more mainstream such theories in contemporary philosophy of language. Very roughly, this is because relational theories of McDowell's stripe which place the truth or meaning relation *within* the space of reasons (thereby conceiving the very externality and independence of the world in conceptual, normative, space of reasons

²The 'thermometer model' compares non-inferential knowledge with a good thermometer. The temperature readings of a good thermometer reliably indicate the actual temperature. In a similar manner non-inferential knowledge is a matter of a belief reliably covarying with the environment irrespectively of whether the subject understands its content or has reasons for taking it as true. This 'externalist' view first came under attack in Sellars' EPM (1956), as part of a general attack on the whole framework of Givenness.

terms) *presuppose* that language is always already categorially fit to represent the structure of the world and cannot independently explain the construction of those very categories themselves through language. Sellars thinks that there must be some such explanation of the very categorial space connecting language and world, without appeal to space of reasons concepts, such as those of linguistic or mental ‘content’, or else we succumb to a version of the categorial Given (according to which there is a ‘pre-established harmony’ between our categories and the world). As we shall see later (Chaps. 6 and 9), Sellars’ notorious concept of an a-categorial, non-normative mode of correspondence between mind, language and world, namely, *picturing*, will be used for this purpose.

3 SCIENCE AND NORMATIVITY: AN INTERNAL TENSION IN SELLARS’ PHILOSOPHY?

Another major pillar of Sellars’ philosophical system, besides the attack on the myth of the Given, is the ontological primacy he accords to the scientific image, in a radical sense which eventually ontologically commits us to a completely disenchanting, non-normatively described world, bereft of logical or conceptual structure, in which there is no (ontological) place for natural purposes, intentions, ethical or aesthetic facts. Yet, this radical naturalism seems to be in tension with Sellars’ rejection of the Given: an important consequence of the rejection of the Given is that the meaning, justification and truth of our empirical beliefs are always determined from within the (conceptually, normatively structured) space of reasons, while scientific naturalism of the Sellarsian stripe commits us ontologically to a picture of a radically disenchanting, non-conceptually structured world, bereft of any norms and situated firmly outside the space of reasons.

Indeed, as is well known, this seeming tension between the above equally fundamental Sellarsian philosophical commitments have led many philosophers influenced by Sellars to a division between ‘left-wing’ and ‘right-wing’ Sellarsians. Left-wing Sellarsians, such as Rorty (1979), McDowell (1994) and Brandom (1994), emphasize the Kantian and Hegelian aspects of the Sellarsian view about the necessity of placing meaning, justification, knowledge and truth firmly within the space of reasons and consider Sellars’ naturalistic tendencies as an expression of an unfortunate and indefensible scientism. By contrast, right-wing Sellarsians, such as Churchland (1981, 1988), Dennett (1987), Millikan (1984,

2005) and Rosenberg (1974, 1980, 2002), endorse Sellars' scientific realism and embark on a project about how to reconcile our self-understanding as persons that perceive, think and act in the world with what science tells us about the latter, by explanatorily reducing the normativity of persons to non-normative physical, neurophysiological and evolutionarily developed structures posited by the scientific image.³

What is important in this dispute or division between left- and right-wing Sellarsians, if they are to be judged from a standpoint that remains faithful to the Sellars' overall philosophical vision, is that they give disproportional emphasis to only one of the two fundamental pillars of Sellars' philosophy, thereby ending up seriously distorting the spirit of Sellarsian philosophy as a whole. Along with a new generation of philosophers (such as Brassier, Sachs, Stovall, Seiberth), I believe that there is no tension or inconsistency in Sellars' commitments to the ontological primacy of science and to the irreducibility of the normative. And I would be willing to go so far as to say that there is also no tension between Sellars' particularly radical vision of scientific naturalism, namely, process nominalism, and the reality of the normative. One of the major aims of this book is to overcome the supposed divide between 'left normativism' and 'right scientism' and to show that the commitments to the autonomy of the normative and to the ontological primacy of science are not only compatible but also *mutually presupposing and reinforcing*. For example, as we shall see in Chaps. 3–5, the rejection of the myth of the Given far from being in tension with scientific realism or scientific naturalism (as the left-wing Sellarsians argue), when correctly understood (namely, as a critique of a supposed ability to discern the categorial structure of world and mind

³Note that in the case of the division between left-wing and right-wing Hegelians, it was the left-wingers that took science to be the key for knowledge and human emancipation. By contrast, the post-1960s cultural left has been increasingly skeptical of science's ability to emancipate us through the provision of a more accurate knowledge of the physical and social world and instead highlights the dependence of the orientation and of the very content of scientific research to 'external' political and economic factors. While it is undeniable that twentieth-century science did not fulfill the promises of universal emancipation and became even more entangled with political and economic power relations, it is unfortunate that whatever emancipatory potential science still has to offer is not explored by the left but has been handed over to the right. There is no reason why this unfortunate political situation should be reproduced in theory. A corrective here can be provided by Sellars himself whose overall position, as we shall see in this book, is such as to transcend the divisions between his left- and right-wing followers, while preserving some of their more important and radical elements.

independently of self-correcting empirical inquiry), actually goes hand in hand with a commitment to scientific naturalism. And in Chaps. 6 and 9, I shall further argue that a resolute rejection of the myth of the Given not only is consistent with scientific naturalism, but, when all its consequences are properly drawn (one of them being the phenomenality, in the Kantian sense, of the manifest-image categorial framework and of its ‘general skeletal entities’ such as properties and relations, if they are interpreted ontologically), actually opens up the space for a plausible defense of a particularly radical version of scientific naturalism, namely, Sellarsian process nominalism.⁴

It was Rorty in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) who brought back Sellars into prominence in analytic philosophy of the 1980s and 1990s when a turn to rationalist metaphysics and ultimately away from central Sellarsian concerns was beginning to take place. This was admittedly a good thing, as it led at least two extremely talented analytic philosophers, McDowell and Brandom, to develop their highly original views through a direct and sustained engagement with Sellars’ work. This enabled the drawing of another more Kantian and even Hegelian path in analytic philosophy, in stark contrast to the prevailing ‘Leibnizian’ rationalist metaphysics of contemporary analytic philosophy. But Rorty’s exclusive distinction between ‘left’ and ‘right’ Sellarsianism, and the endorsement of this dichotomy by McDowell and Brandom, who opted for the left-wing dimension of Sellars’ thinking, skewed the interpretation of Sellars’ work and obfuscated his overall philosophical relevance, achievement and significance for contemporary philosophy. One of the major aims of this book is to undo this situation by providing an interpretation and extension (at times, based on criticism in spirit of friendly amendment) of Sellars’ philosophy that restores the critical, systematic and metaphysically ambitious character of his work and shows how and why it is pertinent and relevant to contemporary philosophical controversies not only in analytic philosophy, but also in contemporary phenomenology and continental philosophy.

⁴As we shall see in Chap. 9, this Sellarsian view has the radical consequence that, *contra* McDowell and Brandom, the world, conceived as nothing other than the world of true thinkables, the set of conceptual contents, such that, if we think them, we think truly, though genuinely intersubjectively available, is ‘only’ phenomenal in the Kantian sense: it exists only *as represented*, not as it is in itself.