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FROM PRAGMATICS TO SEMANTICS AND BACK.
WILFRID SELLARS 1947-1954

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Abstract

My dissertation is devoted to an analysis of the early writings of Wilfrid Sellars, which I take to span from 1947 to 1954. The topic has been chosen based on the disproportion between the ever-expanding stream of publications devoted to Sellars' philosophy on the one hand, and the considerable lack of attention accorded to his so-called "early phase" on the other.

In chapter 1, I focus on Sellars' earliest project of pure pragmatics. Contrasting the only interpretation available in literature, I argue that the project is consistent with Sellars' later, better known and more successful philosophy, and I show how several themes that would characterize his later project have their roots in pure pragmatics.

In chapter 2, I analyze the essays published after the apparent abandonment of pure pragmatics. I contextualize them by providing, for each of them, the more or less covert background from which Sellars drew. I show how in these years (1948-1950) the way is paved to the overcoming of relational theories of meaning through the development of Sellars' nominalism.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a series of long and sophisticated essays published at the end of the "early phase". Here, functional role semantics is given a comprehensive exposition and some related problems are discussed. The adoption of a pragmatist stance towards conceptual frameworks grants Sellars' philosophy with the ability to be responsive both to human interests in the broad sense, and to the ontologically grounded scientific advancements of any epoch. Finally, Sellars' characteristic tension concerning the place of norms in nature is eased by combining his reflections on the "double life" of linguistic behavior with the formulation of the irreducibility-*cum*-reducibility principle.

We must all be pragmatists, but pragmatists in the end,
not in the beginning.

(C.I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, p. 267)

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Sellars' works are cited using the standard abbreviations as listed below.

Citations of the essays collected in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds* (PPE, ENWW, RNWW, CIL, LRB, LCP, QSMP, SSMB, IM) and in *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics* (KTE, OAPK) will be to the numbered paragraphs that have also become standard in references to Sellars' works, enabling cross-referencing across electronic editions (example: "LCP 25" refers to paragraph number 25 of the essay "On the Logic of Complex Particulars"). The same goes for NAO, PR and SM.

The other essays, including those collected in *Science, Perception and Reality* (PSIM, EPM, TC, P, ITSA, SRLG), will be cited by page number. The page number is always preceded by "p." (example: "ITSA, p. 317" refers to page 317 of the essay "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?").

APM (1949) "Aristotelian Philosophies of Mind"

AR (1975) "Autobiographical Reflections"

CIL (1948) "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable without Them"

EAE (1963) "Empiricism and Abstract Entities"

ENWW (1947) "Epistemology and the New Way of Words"

EPM (1956) "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind"

ILE (1950) "The Identity of Linguistic Expressions and the Paradox of Analysis"

IM (1953) "Inference and Meaning"

ITSA (1953) "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?"

KTE (1967) "Some Remarks on Kant's Theory of Experience"

KTM (2002) *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics* (collection of essays)

LCP (1949) "On the Logic of Complex Particulars"

LRB (1949) "Language, Rules and Behavior"

NAO (1980) *Naturalism and Ontology*

OAPK (1970) "Ontology, the A Priori and Kant"

OPL (1950) "Outlines of Philosophy of Language"

P (1952) "Particulars"

PPE (1947) "Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology"

PPPW (2005 [1980]) *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds* (collection of essays)

PR (1954) "Physical Realism"

PSIM (1962) "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man"

QMSP (1950) "Quotation Marks, Sentences, and Propositions"

RNWW (1948) "Realism and the New Way of Words"

SM (1967) *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*

SMMB (1953) "A Semantical Solution of the Mind-Body Problem"

SPR (1963) *Science, Perception, and Reality* (collection of essays)

SRLG (1954) "Some Reflections on Language Games"

SRPC (1978) "Some Reflections on Perceptual Consciousness"

TC (1963) "Truth and Correspondence"

TTC (1970) "Toward a Theory of the Categories"

TTP (1983) "Towards a Theory of Predication"

Further Abbreviations:

Kant:

KrV (1999 [1781/1787]), *Critique of Pure Reason*

C.I. Lewis:

AKV (1946), *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*

MWO (1929), *Mind and The World Order*

Introduction

a. *Status Quaestionis*

In an insightful essay from 2004, André Carus mentions Sellars as one of the first philosophers who, in an epoch characterized by the general hegemony of logical empiricism, challenged the assumption according to which genuine knowledge is limited to what can be successfully traced back to atomic sentences within a formally specified language system (Carus 2004). Carnap's arrival in the United States of America in the late 1930es influenced the American postwar philosophical landscape for long (Verhaegh 2020) and, even though Sellars' philosophical views grew out of this distinctively watered soil, he came to embrace a view of rationality that, according to Carus, echoed the Kantian perspective according to which "science is not all there is to our human capacity for rational thought", and "there is a kind of reason or reasonableness, consistent with science but not exhausted by it, that can be applied not only in choosing means for given ends, but in the development and choice of ends themselves" (Carus 2004, p. 317).

Sellars' eclectic and multifaceted relationship with different philosophical doctrines and movements, either belonging to the history of philosophy, or being it the latest philosophical debate on the scene, is a hallmark of his philosophizing. A bird's eye view on his philosophical production reveals a vast picture of interrelated themes, influences, and conceptual connections, such that it is not surprising that his views did not enjoy much popularity during his lifetime. The fact that his *oeuvre* consists of dozens of articles, ranging from short to extra-long ones, with only one book-length work, does not help. To make his thought known in the philosophical community, John McDowell and Robert Brandom's original exploitations of their teacher's lessons were needed (McDowell 1994, Brandom 1994). The latter recalls, in the context of some biographical reminiscences, that "while Sellars always had readers and admirers, he remained a relatively unusual acquired taste within the larger philosophical community" (Brandom 2015, p. 21).

The complexity and multi-layered character of Sellars' philosophy reflects the peculiar environment from which it evolved. His *Bildungsroman* took shape in a time of transition, during which the debates on pragmatism, naturalism, realism, and idealism typical of the first decades of twentieth century American philosophy were coming to an end, quickly replaced by the new

wave of emerging analytic philosophy.[1] The latter, inspired by Carnap, Hempel, Reichenbach and the other "intellectual immigrants" coming from Europe, displaced the philosophical spotlights on questions about language and meaning, pushing the "linguistic turn" at the center. The complex fresco of people and trends characterizing philosophy in mid-century U.S. is not the only reason behind Sellars' distinctive ability to discuss, with the same effortlessness, with philosophers spanning from Plato and Kant to C.I. Lewis and Roderick Chisholm. An additional reason has to do with the philosophical inheritance from his father, Roy Wood Sellars, who was a philosopher himself. Besides influencing him on the theoretical side,[2] his father's work gave to the young Wilfrid the chance to enjoy some long trips across Europe (mainly France and Germany), where he learned both languages and received a "continental" education based on the study of philosophical classics. In his "Autobiographical Reflections" (AR, 1975), he recalls having always enjoyed the study of the history of philosophy, which he taught during the period spent at the Iowa State University. Countering the hostility with which the history of philosophy was then handled, Sellars remembers having studied "the whole range of the history of philosophy with a burning intensity", and quickly became persuaded of the possibility to exploit it "with current conceptual tools" (AR, p. 290). This, however, contributed to further alienating him from the American philosophical scene. As Richard Rorty recalls:

> His work was often criticized for its obscurity. This obscurity was partially a result of Sellars's idiosyncratic style, but some of it was in the eye of the beholder. For Sellars was unusual among prominent American philosophers of the post-World War II period […] in having a wide and deep acquaintance with the history of philosophy.
> (Rorty 1997, p. 3)

In any case, the hybrid nature of Sellars' education played a long-lasting effect on both his philosophical methodology and content. As DeVries claims, he exploited "the full panoply of analytic tools and methods, including careful attention to ordinary language and the sophisticated deployment of formalisms, but he did so in the service of a unified vision of the

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[1] A compact resume of these years can be found in O'Shea (2008). A more in-depth and detailed account of American philosophy "pre-analytic" era is Nunziante (2012) (in Italian).

[2] I find honestly unfortunate that to the relationship between Wilfrid and Roy Wood Sellars have not been devoted more than a couple of articles (luckily of excellent quality: I am talking about Gironi (2017) and (2018)). In the pages that follow, it will be clear that Sellars' father had a deeper influence on him than the one resulting from the scattered references disseminated in the son's production. I briefly remark on this influence later in the Introduction.

world and our place in it" (DeVries 2005, p. 1). This distinctive feature makes of Sellars one of the few philosophers of the last century to which the labelling of "continental" or "analytic" does not really apply.

One of Sellars' most recognized and recognizable themes is the relation between science and the "common sense" conceptual framework. This theme runs throughout his entire philosophical work, and it constitutes one of its most debated points, being at the roots of an actual separation, among his most notable students, in two different "schools" (more on this below). Sellars' views on the topic are usually condensed in his popular distinction between "scientific" and "manifest" images of man in the world. The explicit formulation of this dichotomy is dated December 1960 when Sellars, then 48 years old, gave two lectures at the University of Pittsburgh that would later be collected in the essay "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (PSIM, 1962). In most general terms, manifest image can be described as "that conception of the world and the place of persons in it that has been the focal concern of the 'perennial philosophy', from the great speculative systems of Plato and Aristotle to their humbler descendants in the Moorean-Austinian-Strawsonian dimensions of contemporary Anglo-American thought that emphasize 'ordinary usage' and 'common sense'" (Rosenberg 2007, p. 13). The complex, dialectical relationship of this image with the scientific one is developed by Sellars in the context of the ever-expanding, apparently irreconcilable gulf between the scientific picture of man in the world and everyday life that was consuming after the extraordinary scientific advancements of nineteenth century. The contrast between the two images was exacerbated by the ambition of the scientific image "to be a *complete* image, i.e., to define a framework which could be the *whole truth* about that which belongs to the image" (PSIM, p. 20), which puts the manifest image under the threat of being swollen up – or declared fictitious – by the former. Sellars' conviction that the two rival images could, in the end, be reconciled into a "stereoscopic" vision could be seen as the regulative ideal guiding (and inspiring) all his philosophical reflections. To this aim, he relentlessly worked towards for all his life.

Thanks to its "narrative" setup, PSIM has been frequently exploited as the entrance door to Sellars' philosophy,[3] and it is often presented as a sort of "manifesto" of his thinking. A profound impression left by this writing, however, is the idea that Sellarsian philosophy is basically a

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[3] For example, the contrast between the two images is utilized as the opening to DeVries 2005, Rosenberg 2006, and as both the opening and the ending to O'Shea 2007. It is also the first chapter of the excellent Introduction to the Italian collection of Sellars' papers (Marletti & Turbanti 2013) written by Carlo Marletti.

philosophy of contrasts: manifest *versus* scientific image, logical space of reasons *versus* space of causes, norms *versus* nature.

As anticipated above, alternative commitment to one or the other pole of these dichotomies have given rise to two opposing philosophical schools into which Sellars' direct students have united after his death in 1989: the so-called "right-wing" (whose best-known members are Millikan, Dennett, and the Churchlands) and "left-wing" Sellarsians (Brandom, McDowell, Rorty). The line of separation between the two parties runs through some crucial knots concerning various topics, such as the role of non-conceptual content in perception, the scope of the Myth of the Given, the ultimate meaning of the theory of *picturing*, and the question whether or not Sellars did actually succeed in "fusing" the two images into a single, synoptic vision.[4] However, one could argue that at the bottom of such disagreements there is precisely the problem of how to interpret the relationship between the two images: on the one hand, right-wingers have emphasized the *scientia mensura* principle according to which "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 it is not that it is not" (EPM, p. 173), thus granting primacy to the scientific image. On the other hand, left-wingers have united themselves under the flag of the irreducibility of the normative domain to the causal one, expressed by the equally iconic passage from the same essay, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (EPM):

> [I]n characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.
> (EPM, p. 169)

"Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", published in 1956 and collecting three lectures given by Sellars in London during the same year, is widely considered Sellars' masterpiece. It is known as one of the gravestones of logical empiricism − one which contributed to the shift from the crude empiricism characterizing the beginnings of analytic philosophy to a mature, richer, and more sophisticated phase. The transition from one phase to the other is often associated with Sellars' famous remarks about the aim of his philosophy being "an attempt to usher analytic philosophy out of its Humean and into its Kantian stage" (Rorty 1997, p. 3). In Rorty's words:

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[4] For more details on the division between right- and left-wing Sellarsians, see O'Shea (2009).

> The shift from the earlier to the later form of analytic philosophy, a shift which began around 1950 and was completed around 1970, was a result of many complexly interacting forces, the pattern of which is hard to trace. Nevertheless, any historian of this shift would do well to focus on three seminal works: Willard van Orman Quine's 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1954), and Wilfrid Sellars's 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (1956).
>
> Of these three, Sellars's long, complicated, and very rich essay is the least known and discussed. (Rorty 1997, p. 2)

The twenty-five years that separate us from 1997 – the year in which Rorty's Introduction to the text was written – have shown quite a remarkable turn of the tide concerning Sellars' fame. Already in 2007, Rosenberg was registering that "Quine's work unquestionably had the stronger initial impact, but as I read the current philosophical scene, Sellars' influence is now waxing and Quine's waning – and that, I think, is as it should be" (Rosenberg 2007, p. 2). But that was nothing compared to the exponential growth of materials started a few years ago, when collections and even monographs about Sellars' work have literally started to sprout.

Besides three foundational introductory textbooks that appeared roughly in the same years of Rosenberg's comment above (DeVries 2005, O'Shea 2007, Rosenberg 2007), more recently, several works devoted to one or more aspects of Sellars' philosophy have seen the light. They have explored his relationship with the history of philosophy (Corti & Nunziante 2018, Brandt & Breunig 2020) and with contemporary philosophy (Pereplyotchik & Barnbaum 2017, Christias 2023), his broadly conceived legacy (O'Shea 2016), his ethics (Koons 2018, Koons & Loeffler 2023) and nominalism (Reider 2017), his relationship to phenomenology (De Santis & Manca *forthcoming*), to Kant (Gironi 2018b, Seiberth 2022, Seiberth & Ranaee *forthcoming*), and even Buddhism (Garfield 2018).

Validating Rorty's remark about EPM being "the most widely read and the most accessible" Sellarsian text in the analytic philosophical landscape, almost all the collections mentioned above are focused on writings from EPM *onwards*. The first part of Sellars' philosophical production – his so-called "early phase", spanning approximately from 1947 to mid 1950es – has, on the contrary, received very little scholarly attention. A simple explanation for this fact is related to the distinctive "aura" surrounding Sellars' early writings. As Rosenberg recalls, "[t]his early period saw the appearance in print of over two dozen substantial essays, typically

manifesting singularly demanding levels of dialectical and expository complexity that rapidly earned Sellars the widespread reputation of being 'difficult to read'" (Rosenberg 2007, p. 10). Combined with Sellars' own infrequent reference to his early production in his later, more well-known essays, this can give the impression that not much can be "extracted" from Sellars' early writings, which can explain why the essays in literature devoted to Sellarsian writings antecedent 1956 were exceptions. As Olen states, "most of Sellars' early publications are simply absent from the literature" (Olen 2016a, p. 4).

Between 2015 and 2016, two volumes changed this course: Robert Brandom's collection of essays *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars* (Brandom 2015) and Peter Olen's *Wilfrid Sellars and the Foundations of Normativity* (Olen 2016a). Brandom, one of the philosophers who has developed Sellars' legacy in the most brilliant way, has exploited several themes from Sellars' early papers to defend his distinctive brand of pragmatic expressivism. In this sense, he contributed to redeem some early ideas from Sellars that scholars seemed to have relegated to the backseat.[5]

However, the book which appears to be truly responsible for the early writings' fifteen minutes of fame was Peter Olen's *Wilfrid Sellars and the Foundations of Normativity* (Olen 2016a). Published in 2016, the volume has quickly caught the interest of Sellars' scholars not only because it provided Sellars' literature with something that had never been done before – that is, an extensive, in-depth analysis of Sellars' early writings in light of the context in which they were written – but also because it put forward quite a radical new line of interpretation according to which Sellars' early writings pursue a project which is basically *inconsistent* with his later philosophy. In this sense, Olen granted those writings the recognition they had never been accorded before, but on the other hand he also corroborated the view that, at the end of the day, the efforts they require to be understood were not entirely worth it.

In this work, I argue precisely for the opposite view. Not only will I defend the thesis of a continuity between Sellars' early essays and his later works. I will also show that the early essays are philosophically valuable both in themselves, and with respect to an understanding of Sellars' philosophy as a whole. In what follows, I explain how I plan to argue for it.

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[5] Some of the ideas contained in Brandom (2015) were already incorporated and exploited in the monumental Brandom (1994). Brandom's semantic theory is directly inspired by Sellars' functional role account of meaning, and it accords great importance to material rules of inference (Brandom 1994, chapter 2) – a notion that will be central to my reconstruction too.

a. *Prospectus* (chapter 1)

Although the abundant use of formal languages and technical jargon does not help the reader (and in fact, at times, almost covers up the most interesting theoretical issues), the early writings of Sellars contain several ideas that deserve to be explored by anyone who wants to get a full picture of his philosophy. However, my choice to focus on these writings outweighs the mere historical interest in the completeness of the picture. I believe indeed that the early writings illuminate some points in Sellars' philosophical development that otherwise are just unintelligible. Among these, his relationship with logical empiricism (especially as depicted by left-wing Sellarsians) is just one.

Sellars' relationship to empiricism is hardly reducible to a simple *overcoming*. The restricted focus on his production from EPM onwards, typical of much Sellarsian scholarship, risks making one forget that this alleged overcoming is much closer to a Hegelian *Aufhebung* than to crude refutation. His earliest project of pure pragmatics, for instance, was conceived *within* the framework of logical empiricism – or, to say it better, was conceived as a new, more authentically philosophical, non-reductivist phase of logical empiricism. To the discussion of this project, I devote the first chapter of my work.

On my reading, the central point of the project of a pure pragmatics, pursued in three essays dated 1947-1948, is Sellars' attempt to substitute the narrow account of language in terms of *calculus* – as it appears in Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language* (Carnap 1937) – with the richer notion of *empirically meaningful language* (PPE, ENWW, RNWW, *passim*). The dimension proper to the latter (and lacking in the former) is precisely the pragmatic dimension according to which a language is meaningful if applied, by the subject, to the world in which the subject herself exists. This dimension is what Sellars calls the "aboutness" of a language. Pure pragmatics aims thus at carving out and formally reconstruct (in a way that I will define) the conditions of possibility of the subject's reference to the world around her, accounting for her intentionality. In this sense, I take this endeavor to be a *transcendental* enterprise.

Key to this reading of pure pragmatics will be my interpretation of what the formalism of pure pragmatics truly amounts to. The formalization of pragmatics has been strongly criticized and identified with *the* problem plaguing Sellars' project. As such, it has generally been regarded as the main reason behind its failure (Neuber 2017, Olen 2012 and 2016a, Westphal 2015). However, the definition of *formalism* that I argue for, reads it as an anticipation of Sellars' later

functional role approach to semantics. Indeed, I take the formalism of pure pragmatics to be a metalinguistic treatment focused on the functional role played by certain special predicates. These predicates – "means", "designates", and so on – are *normative* with respect to the structure of the object-language. It is precisely the "rulish" function that Sellars accords to semantic vocabulary that enables him to formulate, in its first approximation, the overcoming of relational theories of meaning that he is going to pursue for the rest of his career.

How does pure pragmatics work, more in detail? Sellars' strategy consists of an enrichment of the *Logical Syntax*'s toolbox with more instruments. Among the various additions, I focus especially on the conformation rules that Sellars adds to formation and transformation rules of language. The role accorded to conformation rules in defining the meaning of the primitive predicates of a language allows me to highlight a crucial aspect of Sellars' early philosophy: his sensitivity to the extra-logical, non-formalizable (this time in Carnapian, and not Sellarsian, sense) aspects of language, which are strictly linked to the subject's ability to *use* language – an aspect, this one, that will come up again in the following chapters of this dissertation.

My reconstruction of Sellars' pure pragmatics enables me to contrast Olen's thesis about the alleged "rupture" marked by the 1949 essay "Language, Rules, and Behavior" (LRB). According to Olen, the rupture consists in the "liberalization" of Sellars' metaphilosophy according to which the early formalism is abandoned in favor of a view that includes, and even relies on, psychological concepts. Psychological concepts, such as behavioristic stimulus-response sequences, would then contribute to the development of a new conception of linguistic rules that Olen describes as "unthinkable" in the context of pure pragmatics. Olen is convinced indeed that "the behavioral explanatory resources required for talking about patterned-governed behavior are not available from within pure pragmatics", and that "[i]n order to present a rival conception of rules […], Sellars must abandon the formalism of his earliest publications" (Olen 2016a, p. 134).

In the final part of the first chapter, I contrast Olen's thesis with two moves. First, I show how Sellars' metalinguistic type/token distinction, which in "Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology" (PPE) gets spelled out as the distinction between "language as behavior" (that is, as the subject-matter of empirical psychology) and "language behavior *to the extent that it conforms, and as conforming, to the criteria of language as norm*" (that is, as the proper subject-matter to pure pragmatics) anticipates the distinction, introduced in LRB, between free, rule-regulated linguistic activity and tied, causally elicited linguistic behavior. Even though it is only the latter that properly

corresponds to the subject-matter of pure pragmatics, the metalinguistic, formal analysis that pure pragmatics provides addresses both "language behavior *qua* behavioral fact, and language-behavior *qua tokens* of language *as type*" (PPE 9).

The point spelled out above is reinforced by the second reason that I add in favor of the possibility to include behavioral concept within pure pragmatics. As I will show, Sellars' sophisticated and non-standard definition of anti-psychologism foresees indeed the possibility to include psychological concepts into a formal analysis, provided that such descriptive concepts are acknowledged for what they are. The version of anti-psychologism defended by Sellars is affected by his endorsement of naturalism: while usually anti-psychologism and anti-naturalism come in pair, Sellars endorses both anti-psychologism *and* naturalism. By stating this, however, nothing has really been said. The question shall indeed be asked: what kind of naturalism? Let me briefly pause the overview of my work to provide some clarifications on this issue.

b. About Sellars' Non-Reductive Naturalism

To have a glimpse on what Sellars could have in mind with the term "naturalism", one cannot avoid considering his father's perspective, which conjoined precisely Critical Realism with *Evolutionary Naturalism*.

Naturalism was at the center of a lively debate characterizing the "pre-analytic" era of American philosophy, roughly from 1920s to the end of the 1940s, to which Roy Wood Sellars took part vigorously.[6] In particular, Roy Wood put himself at the forefront of the debate by editing, together with Marvin Farber and Vivian J. McGill, a counter-manifest (Sellars, McGill & Farber 1949) to the softer, "liberal" version of naturalism represented by the publication of "Naturalism and the Human Spirit" in 1944 (Krikorian 1944).

With respect to methodological or "procedural" naturalisms, Roy Wood Sellars' perspective was quite radical. However, this never implied an overlapping of his proposal with crude, reductive physicalism. In fact, Roy Wood's stance was that of a sophisticated theory enriched by biological, psychological, and even sociological insights, distant from a Victorian, positivistic kind of naturalism that explained reality through mechanistic principles alone. What enabled the birth of a new kind of naturalism was, in his eyes, Darwinism: it was only with Darwin's

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[6] The influence that themes from the early mid-century played in shaping Sellars' thought is deeply under-examined (especially the debate between New Realists and Critical Realists), being those very years, themselves under-examined. For an overview on contemporary naturalisms, see De Caro and MacArthur (2010).

evolutionary theory that the old mechanistic cosmology had been superseded once and for all, replaced by much more complex and fine-grained scientific explanations revolving around concepts such as "emergence" and "organization" (Gironi 2018a). In this sense, and this is the crucial point, Roy Wood's evolutionary naturalism could marry both a hardcore materialist ontology while remaining non-reductivist: the concept of "matter" as he conceives it welcomes indeed multiple levels of more or less complex organization, without tracing everything back to chemical-physical laws that would be insufficient to explain natural objects as products of evolution.

(Wilfrid) Sellars' naturalism is deeply affected by the paternal stance in its staunch non-reductivist approach.[7] A passage from the Introduction to "Naturalism and Ontology" (NAO, 1983), a late text where Sellars shows the deep connection of his nominalism to naturalism, provides us with some key elements in this regard. I quote the passage in its entirety:

> When I was coming to philosophical consciousness, the great battles between the systems which began the Twentieth Century were drawing to a close, although the lightning and the thunder were still impressive. I cut my teeth on issues dividing Idealist and Realist and, indeed, the various competing forms of upstart Realism. […] After striking out on my own, I spent my early years fighting in the war against Positivism – the last of the great metaphysical systems; always a realist, flirting with Oxford Aristotelianism, Platonism, Intuitionism, *but somehow convinced, at the back of my mind, that something very much like Critical Realism and Evolutionary Naturalism was true* [my emphasis, CC].
>
> […] As for Naturalism. That, too, had negative overtones at home. […] One could believe almost anything about the world and even *some* things about God, and yet be a Naturalist. What was needed was a new, nonreductive materialism. My father could call himself a Materialist in all good conscience, for at that time he was about the only one in sight. I, however, do not own the term, and I am so surprised by some of the views of the *new*, new Materialists, that until the dust settles, I prefer the term 'Naturalism', which, while retaining its methodological connotations, has acquired a substantive content, which, if it does not entail scientific realism, is at least not incompatible with it.

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[7] The debt of the son to his father, along with the similarity of their views, is explicitly acknowledged at the beginning of the essay "Physical Realism" (PR), where Wilfrid wrote: "A discerning student of philosophy, familiar with the writings of Sellars *pere*, who chances to read Sellars *fils*, and is not taken in by the superficial changes of idiom and emphasis which reflect the adaptation of the species to a new environment, will soon be struck by the fundamental identity of outlook. The identity is obscured by differences of terminology, method, and polemical orientation, but it is none the less an identity. How natural, then, and, in a sense how true to say that Critical Realism, Evolutionary Naturalism, and all that they imply are part of my paternal inheritance" (PR 1).

(NAO 1-2)

In the first half of the quotation, Sellars accords to Critical Realism and Evolutionary Naturalism a privileged position with respect to all the other mentioned *-isms*. Then, the second part of the quotation provides the reason behind the suspicion towards the term "naturalism" shared by both the Sellars. Their suspicion stems from naturalism's too vaguely defined boundaries. The kind of naturalism to which they are committed is indeed not limited to the methodological side: rather, it is an ontological thesis regarding the fact that everything that exists is an element in the spatiotemporal causal nexus – *including* the process of the acquisition of knowledge itself.

Though such a physical realist view is usually paired with the thesis that cognitive psychology will ultimately replace epistemology, this is not how things stand for either Sellars *pere*, or *fils*. In fact, especially for the latter, the challenge lies precisely in showing how epistemology can be accommodated within a naturalistic framework without renouncing to its normative dimension – a challenge that, as I see it, is prefigured already in pure pragmatics.

To reconnect with the ending of the previous section, Sellars' anti-psychologism, thus, does not rhyme with anti-naturalism. On the contrary, everything that, according to him, is infused with normativity – meaning, intentionality, mentalistic vocabulary, and so on – can, and in fact must, be analyzed in terms of complex physical systems. However, and this is crucial, "if normativity is thought of in [exclusively, CC] causal-explanatory terms, as capable of receiving or providing an adequate causal explanation of events in spatiotemporal reality, its own normative force, that is, what defines it as such, simply evaporates (Christias 2014, p. 350). This is why to Sellars the distinction between different logical dimensions is so important: for instance, in pure pragmatics we shall not confuse genuine epistemological content with psychological content (a mistake which he calls "epistemologism", RNWW 15 fn3), or reduce epistemological content to descriptive analysis (which he calls psychologism "in the narrow sense", *ibid.*). In this sense, crucial to my reading is that while it is pivotal not to conflate epistemological with psychological analysis, nothing forbids the philosopher from resorting to psychological concepts, granted they are not mistaken as philosophical.

Sellars' thoughts on matters related to the place of phenomena like meaning and intentionality in nature are complex and not unambiguous. In trying to do justice to Sellars' balanced views and avoid the excesses of both right- and left-wing Sellarsian, Jim O'Shea came to define Sellars' perspective as a "naturalism with a normative turn" (O'Shea 2007, *passim*). At the core of Sellars'

normative naturalism lies the distinction between "causal reducibility" and "logical irreducibility". The so-called reducibility-*cum*-irreducibility principle, according to which the normative dimension is logically irreducible, yet causally accountable from the perspective of an ideal scientific conception of nature and men, is foreshadowed as early as 1949 in LRB, and explicitly formulated few years later in the essay "A Semantical Solution of the Mind-Body Problem" (SSMB, 1953). From this point of view, Sellars' early essays already contain the entire core of his philosophy. Far from being a crude or inexpert attempt, they show mature and sophisticated thinking. Not only do they already provide the distinctive − although not unambiguous, or definitive − solution to the tensions plaguing Sellars' philosophy, but they also show their true origin as an attempt of translating rationalist ideas in naturalistically acceptable terms, fusing two contrasting views into a unified, perspicuous view of the place of man in the world. In the second and third chapter of this work, I delve into the structure of such an account.

c. *Prospectus* (second and third chapter)

According to Olen, one of the main reasons why Sellars abandoned pure pragmatics is to be traced to the alleged radical change in his metaphilosophy, which draws a line before and after 1949. Olen's conception of what count as "metaphilosophy" for Sellars *avant* 1949 is limited to pure pragmatics' formalism. However, part and parcel of Sellars' metaphilosophy *from the very outset* is also his strive toward a "stereoscopic" fusion of rationalist insights with the empiricist methodology. In Sellars' words, if on the one hand deflating the platonic, rationalistic lexicon was the key move to pave the way for a fully naturalistic ontology (in the sense defined above), still, on the other hand, what was needed for a renewed and more effective, *authentically philosophical* empiricism was to "absorb the insights of rationalism" (LRB 19). This had to be done by translating these insights into the vocabulary made available by the *New Way of Words* he was developing. This goal, formulated in pure pragmatics as the search for a "via media" between rationalism and empiricism, is realized precisely in LRB's claim about developing a "sound pragmatism" (LRB 5) between rationalistic apriorism and descriptivism. The second chapter of this dissertation, in which I analyze (some of) the essays produced between 1948 and 1950, is devoted to Sellars' attempt to lay the groundwork for this pragmatism of the *via media*.

The structure of the second chapter is meant to bring to the surface what, in my view, corresponded to Sellars' closest sources of inspiration (or confrontation) for each one of the three themes that I analyze: namely, the synthetic *a priori*, universals, and particulars.

The first theme, that I exploit to bridge the gap from pure pragmatics' essays and the complex "Concept as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (CIL), is the transformation of conformation rules into synthetic *a priori* laws. Before delving into the topic, I antecede Schlick's criticism of the Husserlian notion of *material a priori*, and I show how conformation rules can be seen precisely as the response to the problem at the center of the debate between phenomenologists and logical empiricists.

The discussion of conformation rules as synthetic laws opens the problem of laws of nature, to which Sellars devotes CIL. In the background of the discussion there is C.I. Lewis' treatment of implicative relations, of which I offer an overview. In my reading, Sellars' discussion of the extra-logical necessity underlining laws of nature has at its core the account of modal lexicon in terms of metalinguistic rules. In this sense, the "pure pragmatic treatment" described in chapter 1 is applied to modal vocabulary and universals and reveal them for what they are: that is, reifications of conceptual norms, or, with a more suggestive expression, "shadows cast [on the object-language, CC] by the norms themselves" (Kraut 2016, p. 61).

Once the problem of universals has been revealed as part of Sellars' nominalistic strategy, I devote the third section of the chapter to Sellars' re-thinking of predication through his analysis of particulars. Here, Sellars does not content himself with finding a "third way" between bare particularism and bundle theories. Rather, he dismantles the very framework in which subject-predicate relation is embedded, by showing that the propositional function Fx is dangerously misleading in projecting an illusionary distinction between a *this-factor* (x is…) ontologically distinct from a *such-factor* (…is F). This distinction, which leads directly to the hypostatization of universal qualities and bare *substrata* and, consequently, to the *impasses* faced by any attempt to explain the process of the particularization of universals into individual objects, is dissolved through Sellars' notion of *complex particulars*: qualitative episodes where the "ingredients" are *functionally* connected and, in this sense, need not be grounded either in a relationship to abstract entities, or sense-data.

At the end of the second chapter, it becomes clear that both the treatment of universals and the treatment of particulars are parts of the same picture. This picture is the increasingly defined functional role semantics. Abstract entities shall undergo to a functionalist interpretation in

order to be welcomed into a naturalistic framework. Once they have been given linguistic clothes, the analysis of particulars shows how even apparently unmovable linguistic structures (such as the subject-predicate structure) are not: thus, foundationalism in epistemology is avoided. Even though the name is not used anymore, the core assumptions of pure pragmatics are thus still in place after 1949.

The problems plaguing non-relational accounts of meaning such as Sellars' functional role semantics are obvious and profound: the famous deadly image of the Hegelian serpent hovers above the whole philosophical picture he provided, which is dangerously close to linguistic idealism. This is probably the biggest crux of Sellars' entire philosophy of language (or, given the close relationship of language with thought and intentionality as he conceives them, it is probably the biggest crux of Sellars' philosophy *tout-court*). In the third chapter I present Sellars' full-fledged functional role semantics, including a discussion of this problem.

Between 1953 and 1954, Sellars publishes a series of splendidly articulated essays: "Inference and Meaning" (IM), "A Semantical Solution of the Mind-Body Problem" (SSMB), "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?" (ITSA), "Some Reflections on Language Games" (SRLG), and "Empiricism and Abstract Entities" (EAE – written in 1954, even though published in 1963). These essays, gathered all together, represents hands down the most complex and complete formulation of Sellars' early production, and the publication of EPM can be now seen as coming.

In the first half of the third chapter, I present a crucial distinction within Sellars' functional role semantics: that between formal and material rules of inference. The discussion of this distinction gives the occasion for a deepening of Sellars' confrontation with Carnap, and two criticisms to his philosophy are set forth: first, the indispensability of material rules of inference in natural languages (or, more precisely, in languages making use of subjunctive conditionals) is confronted with Carnap's dispensability of P-rules in calculi in the *Logical Syntax*. Second, Carnap's notion of linguistic rule is enriched with the emphasis posed by Sellars on its practical and normative dimension: "a rule is always a rule for *doing* something […]. It is the performance of this action (in specified circumstances) which is enjoined by the rule, and which carries the flavor of *ought*" (IM 33).

Sellars' material principles of inference, by implicitly defining the meaning of descriptive concepts, make up the synthetic *a priori* core of our conceptual framework. This core is discussed by Sellars in light of C.I. Lewis' notion of pragmatic *a priori*: his appropriation of the pragmatic theme, along with a less rigid and less flawed epistemological setup than the Lewisian, really

makes Sellars "the best contemporary example of a realist, naturalized Kantianism" (Gironi 2015, p. 91).

In the final and second part of the chapter, I try to pull the strings and offer a view on the relationship between norms and nature anticipated above as problematic. How shall we understand the "Janus-faced" character of languagings as belonging both to the causal, and to the normative realm? The key will be given through the analysis of pattern governed behavior as a mediating concept between the two realms in SRLG, and of the already mentioned reducibility-*cum*-irreducibility principle in SSMB.

CHAPTER 1.

The Long Ride:

Kantian Roots of Sellars' *Pure Pragmatics*

By surveying the literature devoted to the Sellarsian *corpus*, there stands out a voluminous group of writings which, up to now, received particularly little scholarly attention. This group consists of the writings published by Sellars between 1947 to the mid-1950s,[8] most of which have been collected by Jeffrey Sicha in the volume *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds* (PPPW, 2005 [1980]). There are several reasons behind the lack of recognition of Sellars' so-called "early writings", chief among them the fact that Sellars himself rarely refers to them in his later, more well-known production. This, together with the aura surrounding them – that is, of obscure writings devoted to tedious issues in debates which today are almost forgotten, or are marginal at least – has discouraged interpreters from serious engagement, and their poor reception in literature has, in turn, contributed to eclipsing the fact that during the early years of his career, Sellars addressed many of the issues that would shape his later and far more successful philosophical project.

By now, the only major work in secondary literature entirely devoted to an analysis of Sellars' early writings is Peter Olen's *Wilfrid Sellars and the Foundations of Normativity* (Olen 2016a). Olen has done an excellent job in carefully reconstructing not only the conceptual enterprise with which Sellars engaged in his early philosophical career, but also the historical context in which it took place. Much of the originality of his work lies in his proposal of what he calls an "externalist" reading of Sellars' philosophy. Indeed, Olen observes that, in the rare cases in which Sellars' philosophy has been considered as a whole – therefore, *including* the early publications –, this has always resulted in an "internalist" reading in which "interpreters draw no substantive distinction between Sellars' early and later publications and, therefore, see no relevant philosophical difference between Sellars' early and later works" (*ibid.*, p. 71). On the contrary, Olen's externalist account describes Sellars' philosophical development in a way that is reminiscent of more famous distinctions, like that between early and later Wittgenstein, or

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[8] While the starting date simply coincides with the year of his first published essay (1947), the end of Sellars' "early period" is placed slightly differently by scholars. For instance, Rosenberg identifies it as being in 1955 (Rosenberg 2007, p. 9); Jeffrey Sicha in 1953 (Sicha [1980] 2005, p. 11). The general agreement is that marking the shift from the early to the mature phase of Sellars' thought is the publication of "Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind" (EPM) in 1956, which inaugurates the most fecund, influential, and well-known period of his career. In my dissertation, I treat the end of Sellars' "early years" as being in 1954. This allows me to include "Empiricism and Abstract Entities" (EAE) among the early writings, which is an essay written in 1954, even though it was technically published only in 1963.

pre-critical and critical Kant: that is, in a way that sharply distinguishes an "early phase" from a later one, possibly considering the latter to be richer and more intriguing than the former. In support of this distinction are, according to Olen, two separate and even *incompatible* meta-philosophies resulting from Sellars' "initial" and "mature" phase: the first, which characterizes three articles published between 1947 and 1948 devoted to the project of a *pure pragmatics*, consists of a formalistic and fiercely anti-psychologistic conception of philosophy that banishes all possible reference to psychological facts of any kind. These articles, which I am going to discuss extensively in what follows, are "Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology" (hereafter: PPE, 1947), "Epistemology and the New Way of Words" (ENWW, 1947), and "Realism and the New Way of Words" (RNWW, 1948).

With the publication of "Language, Rules and Behavior" (LRB) in 1949, however, a different phase would begin. This later phase presents a "liberalized" metaphilosophy that not only accommodates, but even *relies on*, psychological facts to account for the same set of problems addressed by pure pragmatics. In Olen's words,

> Despite the rapid appearance of publications in the late 1940s, Sellars' strident insistence on a formalist meta-philosophy and a 'pure' conception of philosophical concepts quietly disappeared from his articles by 1949-1950. Not only did his explicit pronouncements that "philosophy is pure formalism" disappear but also Sellars' reliance on a strict demarcation between formal and factual concepts was no longer used to pick out the necessary features of specifically philosophical concepts. Beginning with "Language, Rules and Behavior" in 1949, Sellars' exploration of linguistic rules and rule-regulated behavior presupposes psychological facts and explanations that would have been relegated to the factual, non-philosophical dimension of concepts within pure pragmatics.
> (Olen 2016a, pp. 69-70)

Among the most popular internal lines of interpretation – and corresponding to the one most frequently contested by Olen – is that the influence of Kant, which openly characterizes Sellars' philosophy from the publication of *Science and Metaphysics* (SM, 1967) onwards, could be traced back to his early writings, providing a *leitmotiv* to his entire philosophical enterprise.[9] Contrasting

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[9] This line of reading was recently advocated by Robert Brandom in *From Empiricism to Expressivism* (2015), another literary work that discusses some of the early writings I am considering. Brandom is particularly convincing in showing how it was a combination of Carnapian and Kantian elements that guided Sellars from his initial project of a pure pragmatics to the mature re-conception of categories as meta-linguistic functions. Although Brandom's essays are brilliant, his relationship to the history of philosophy is difficult to separate from his own philosophical

this view, Olen is convinced that identifying a transcendental dimension in Sellars' early works "ignores the historical context in which Sellars' early arguments developed" (*ibid.*, p. 64), and that "reading a strong Kantian meta-philosophy into Sellars' early linguistic analysis fails to cohere with the historical and textual evidence" (*ibid.*, p. 65).

Although I agree with many of the points made by Olen (e.g., I agree with him that Sellars' early and later writings contain some discordances, especially since the later and better-known phase – the one demarcating the "famous" Sellars we all know – leaves much of his technicalities behind), I do not believe that Sellars' early and later writings constitute two irreconcilable metaphilosophies. On the contrary, I am convinced that the common thread to Sellars' whole philosophical enterprise can be seen precisely in its Kantian inspiration. More precisely, my idea is that recognizing Kantian elements in Sellars' early phase not only allows one to find that conceptual link between Sellars' early and later philosophical projects, but also constitutes the proper "lens" through which only some of the aspects of his early enterprise are clarified.

By saying that Kantian elements were already present in the background of the early writings, I am not claiming that Kant was his most direct influence at the time, nor that Sellars already had in mind what would be the core of the later interpretation offered in SM. If we were to identify the most immediate source of comparison against which Sellars built his project, I think there is little doubt that it would be logical empiricism (Seibt 2000, Carus 2004, Brandom 2015).[10] However, from the point of view of someone who begins his philosophical writing activity in the wake of the empiricist tradition, it may be difficult to make sense of his equally explicit *resistance* to some of the most widespread and undisputed theses that characterized logical empiricism. In this chapter, I am going to argue that this resistance can be explained precisely through some broadly Kantian insights that were already operating during the early years (even though they were not labelled as Kantian yet). In the end, this claim simply acknowledges the fact that Sellars read the *Critique of Pure Reason* for the first time back in 1933[11] and that, as Jeffrey

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concerns – a position that, besides marking the difference with Olen's historical reconstruction, means that his essays do not quite adhere to my close-to-text reconstruction. Besides Brandom, Kantian influences in Sellars' *early* writings are detected and underlined by Sicha ([1980] 2005), DeVries (2005), Turbanti (2019), Buholzer (*forthcoming*). A large number of articles are devoted instead to Sellars' later, *explicitly* Kant-inspired essays. I mention DeVries (2010) and (2012), Haag (2012) and (2019), O'Shea (2011), (2017), (2018a), (2019) and (*forthcoming* 1).

[10] That Carnap was the main source of inspiration for Sellars' project is evident to the extent that Brandom (2015, p. 4) argued that "[t]he avatar of the new way of words for Sellars is Carnap". In addition to Brandom (2015), the relationship between the two is explored in Carus (2004), Westphal (2015) (which discusses the Carnap-Quine-Sellars triangle), Gabbani (2018), Breunig (2020), and partly in Seibt (2000), Brandhoff (2017), and Turbanti (2019).

[11] "After graduating in 1933, I went to Buffalo as a teaching assistant. From the beginning, I was at home in the classroom. I had already discovered, as a debater in high school, that I could present ideas persuasively to large audiences and, which is more important, think on my feet. I early developed the technique of combining lecturing

Sicha recalls in the Preface to *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, he "read Kant and thought about Kant's views all his life" (Sicha 2002, p. 8).

In my reading of Sellars' early writings, Kantian themes guiding my reconstruction are his attempt to make explicit the conditions for the "aboutness" of a language (1), the emphasis on the normative dimension of epistemological predicates through which, so to say, the language speaks about itself (2), and his re-conception of the notion of synthetic *a priori* knowledge through conformation rules (3). According to (1) and (2), pure pragmatics can be seen as providing an account of the conditions of possibility of empirically meaningful languages in general and, thus, of the intentionality of the subject (that is, her ability to refer to the world). As summarized by Marletti:

> An "empirically meaningful language" is not a language whose basic predicates can be justified through "experiential evidence". Rather, it is an object-language which is able to "write" world-stories […], and in whose metalanguage the usual battery of epistemological notions – verification, confirmation, etc. – play a normative role as rules which authorize moves in object-language.
> (Marletti & Turbanti 2013, p. XXVII, my transl.)

At the bottom, there lies a view of language as inherently epistemological, since it is conceived as the mean through which we make contact and gain knowledge of the world. It is, in short, a linguistically reconceived Kantian picture – one that will overtly characterize Sellars' later philosophy, but that I take to be already operating during his earliest years.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 1.1 is devoted to the presentation of pure pragmatics. I start by explaining the origins of Sellars' project of a pure pragmatics in his dissatisfaction with Carnapian accounts of syntax and (especially) semantics and, more

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with extended 'Socratic' exchanges with 'volunteers' who happened to ask the right question and could be guided (or goaded) into representing the *volonté generale* of the class. Marvin Farber led me through my first careful reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and introduced me to Husserl. His combination of utter respect for the structure of Husserl's thought with the equally firm conviction that this structure could be given a naturalistic interpretation was undoubtedly a key influence on my own subsequent philosophical strategy" (AR, p. 283). Sellars' relationship with Kant also encompasses an abandoned PhD in Oxford in 1936, where he worked under the supervision of Thomas Weldon ("I had no real sense of how to go about it but read extensively and made countless notes on filing cards. I knew the *sort* of thing I wanted to say and how it differed from received interpretations but simply could not get anything worthwhile down on paper. Actually, my views were so systematically different that it really *was* difficult to know where to begin; or, to put it bluntly, I would have to be clearer about my own ideas before I could write intelligibly, let alone convincingly, about Kant", AR, pp. 286-7). The early reading of KrV, which took place *before* many of Sellars' subsequent significant philosophical encounters (e.g., with Carnap and logical empiricism), will prove to be rather significant (at least according to my interpretation).

generally, the empiricists' modelling of languages on *calculi*. Then, I recollect pure pragmatics' main features, including its metaphilosophical scope (which includes both Sellars' willingness to secure the perimeter of philosophy's domain with respect to empirical sciences, and the overcoming of the limits of both rationalist and empiricist traditions), alongside the explanation of (1) and (2). I also lay down a first account of the meaning of the formalism of pure pragmatics, which will be evaluated again at the end of the chapter.

In section 1.2, I offer a more in-depth description of pure pragmatics by outlining the elements that constitute its backbone. I have separated them into two groups: the "co-ex predicate", the notion of a "world story", and the distinction between verified and confirmed sentences are all parts of Sellars' construal of a sort of verificationist account of meaning *sans* verification. Conformation rules, on the other side, are introduced by Sellars to satisfy a "higher" requirement of empirically meaningful languages, that is, their internal consistency. The latter aspect allows one to "construe him [Sellars, CC] as maintaining a doctrine of 'synthetic a priori' truth" (Sicha [1980] 2005, pp. 39-40), thus explaining (3).

Once having spelled out all its relevant aspects, in section 1.3 I am finally able to discuss some general issues concerning pure pragmatics. Olen's thesis of the incompatibility between Sellars' early and late metaphilosophy is tackled from two angles: first, I show how it is possible to understand the relationship between formal and factual concepts within pure pragmatics *without* crossing the boundaries of its strict anti-psychologism. Finally, I show how pure pragmatics can ultimately be seen as a transcendental enterprise, which allows us to look at it as containing all the germs of Sellars' later project of a "transcendental linguistics".

1.1 From *Calculi* to Empirically Meaningful Languages

The major project with which Sellars began his career consisted of, in general terms, an attempt to formalize that branch of linguistic studies that went by the name of pragmatics. The project is set forth in three essays collected in 1980 in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds* (PPPW) by Jeffrey Sicha: the already mentioned "Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology" (PPE), "Epistemology and the New Way of Words" (ENWW), and "Realism and the New Way of Words" (RNWW).[12] The three essays together, written between 1947 and 1948, constitute a distinguishable family

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[12] All three essays had previously been published elsewhere (see bibliography). A revised version of RNWW was also published one year later in the collection *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* edited by Sellars and Herbert Feigl (Feigl & Sellars 1949).

among Sellars' writings: indeed, their insistence on the irrevocable *formal* nature of philosophical analysis was apparently abandoned after 1949, along with much of their technicalities − a circumstance that led many scholars to speculate on Sellars' complete abandonment of the project.[13]

While accounts of syntax and semantics were commonly seen as necessary foundations for any philosophical analysis of language, the novelty of Sellars' project lied in the distinctive role he carved out for pragmatics. Whereas syntax dealt with the general "grammatical" structure of language, and semantics studied the relations between signs and their designata, pragmatics was rather considered the more empirical branch of linguistic studies, since it consisted of the study of language in relation to its use and its users.

A *locus classicus* for the "taxonomy" of the branches constituting linguistic studies was Charles Morris' *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Morris 1938), whose tripartition of semiotics into syntax, semantics, and pragmatics quickly became a model for investigations of language. His trichotomy is for instance explicitly rehearsed by Carnap, who defines it like this in his *Introduction to Semantics* (Carnap 1942):

> If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or, to put it in more general terms, to the user of a language, then we assign it to the field of **pragmatics** […]. If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of **semantics**. And if, finally, we abstract from the designata also and analyze only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) **syntax**.
> (Carnap 1942, p. 9)

Carnap's sophisticated version of logical empiricism is a good example of how semiotic ("the whole science of language, consisting of the three parts mentioned", Carnap 1942, p. 9) was generally approached by philosophers of language and logicians. Indeed, he always considered pragmatics as a domain properly belonging to empirical sciences and, as such, of no interest to philosophy of language (which, in his view, coincided with philosophy *tout-court*).

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[13] The failure of pure pragmatics is assumed implicitly or explicitly by Olen (2012) and (2016a), Westphal (2015), Neuber (2017), Turbanti (2019), Buholzer (*forthcoming*), to name a few. The failure of pure pragmatics, and Sellars' abandonment of the project, certainly reflects the most widely held view. As far as I know, in literature there is currently only one "detractor": Brandhoff (2017), which is devoted to proving that "despite initial appearances […], there is a sense in which Sellars' philosophy remains committed to the philosophical project of pure pragmatics as envisioned in his earliest essays" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 56).

Even leaving aside Carnap's stricter so-called syntactic phase, during which philosophy of language was limited to the study of syntactical relations between linguistic expressions, the so-called semantic phase's "liberalization" still did not invest pragmatics. As Olen summarizes, "[d]uring the 1930s and 1940s, pragmatics was seen as an empirical or psychological study of language that focused on the relationship between language, language user, and language as used", the consequence of which was that "[a]lthough there was conceptual space for philosophical accounts of linguistic practices, the overall focus was to fit philosophical accounts of pragmatics within a broadly empirical framework constituted by scientific studies of language" (Olen 2016b, p. 26).[14] Why, then, did Sellars choose to focus specifically on pragmatics?

1.1.1 Beyond Syntax and Semantics: The Need for a Pure Pragmatics

Sellars' project of a pure pragmatics was motivated by several interconnected reasons. The most urgent seems to be his disappointment in acknowledging that most of the analytic philosophy of his time[15] was still infected with psychologism. Precisely because of the psychologistic infection, philosophers had not been able either to adequately distinguish philosophical from empirical domain (since many epistemological predicates were still treated "factually"), nor to adequately address the problem of language itself, since the most they could account for were *calculi*, which in Sellars' view are not an adequate model for natural languages. Indeed, according to Carnap, to conceive language as calculus implies to abstract from all possible use (Breunig 2020, p. 35),[16] while to Sellars a language is not a language proper unless it is *applied* (in a sense to be defined).

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[14] In short, "[a]lthough pure pragmatics was a conceptual possibility in the 1930s, empirical, as opposed to formal, approaches to pragmatics were the dominant school of thought – to address the pragmatic dimension of language was to address an organism's system of behavior that, at heart, is a social and psychological phenomenon largely unamenable to formalization" (*ibid.*, p. 27).

[15] The first use of "analytic philosophy" in the relevant sense has its origins in the late 1930s and it is traditionally traced to Nagel 1936 (Tripodi 2015, p. 121). That Sellars felt part of the analytic community is witnessed by his role as editor, together with Herbert Feigl, of an anthology which contributed to defining and stabilizing this sense of community (Feigl & Sellars 1949). I will say more on this in 2.1.1.

[16] "There are a number of differences between languages in use and languages as calculi. A language in use only exists if it is actually used, whereas a language as calculus exists already when its syntactical rules have been formulated. Also, a language in use can contain malformed expressions, as a result of rules being applied incorrectly, whereas the expressions of a language as calculus are necessarily formed correctly" (Breunig 2020, p. 50 fn37).

As Sellars' philosophical enterprise enthusiastically adhered to the turn of the tide imprinted by the new "linguistic turn" in philosophy − which Sellars called his *New Way of Words* −, a lack of clarity in topics like the ones mentioned above did not imply a failure of a specific and more or less important "branch" of philosophy, but rather constituted a fatal flaw in philosophy itself. Indeed, philosophy is defined by Sellars as first and foremost "the *formal theory of languages*" (PPE 1) or, with an expression to be clarified, "the *pure theory of empirically meaningful languages*" (ENWW 2). In this regard, the possibility of rescuing philosophy from being subsumed by psychology (the latter defined as "[t]he empirical science that has most frequently threatened to swallow up questions of particular interest to philosophers", PPE 1) rested entirely, according to Sellars, on the success of pure pragmatics in permanently eliminating psychologism from philosophy.

In a sense, that a philosopher who conceived of philosophy as a strictly non-factual and non-psychological enterprise chose to bet on pragmatics − which mostly concerned factual accounts of linguistic practices and was, therefore, strongly intertwined with psychology, sociology, and anthropology − must have looked like conceptual confusion (Olen 2016a, pp. 6-7). The key to this apparent nonsense lies in the adjective *pure* preceding the noun "pragmatics". In defining pure syntax and pure semantics, Sellars writes that:

> Pure syntax is concerned with rules defining the formal structure of a *calculi* rather than *languages*, for syntax, as the term as come to be used, makes no use of the concepts of designation and truth, not to say verifiability and meaningfulness. There has, however, arisen the notion of a structure of rules which define the formal features not of calculi in general, but of a special set of calculi in connection with which the term 'language' is more appropriately used. Such systems of rules are studied in pure semantics. They are richer than those formulated in pure syntax, for beside in a sense covering the same ground, they add a new dimension to the manipulations of the systems they define.
> (PPE 3)

According to these definitions, pure syntax and pure semantics are crucially involved with rules − an aspect that, therefore, likely characterizes pure pragmatics as well. The adjective "pure" in pure pragmatics is indeed used by Sellars to mimic the role it plays in the definitions of pure syntax and pure semantics. Pure pragmatics, then, is included among the fields of inquiry into languages' structural features: pure syntax, pure semantics, and pure pragmatics share, in this sense, similar *statuses*. As with pure syntax and pure semantics, the purity accorded to pure pragmatics indicates its belonging to the "study of meta-linguistic rule systems" (Neuber 2017,

p. 128) – the only possible angle if one is to avoid "factualistic treatments", such as those to which analytic philosophers themselves were committed.

One thing that cannot go unnoticed is that Carnap himself explained the difference between pure and descriptive investigations of language a few years before in a similar way to Sellars, namely, by attributing the former to philosophical analysis proper and the latter to the subject-matter of empirical sciences:

> Semantical investigations are of two different kinds; we shall distinguish them as descriptive and pure semantics. By **descriptive semantics** we mean the description and analysis of the semantical features either of some particular historically given language, e.g. French, or of all historically given languages in general […]. Thus, descriptive semantics describes facts; it is an empirical science. On the other hand, we may set up a system of semantical rules, whether in close connection with a historically given language or freely invented; we call this a semantical system. The construction and analysis of semantical systems is called **pure semantics**. The rules of a semantical system S constitute, as we shall see, nothing else than a definition of certain semantical concepts with respect to S, e.g. 'designation in S' or 'true in S' […].
> (Carnap 1942, pp. 11-2)

As the quote shows, Carnap places the difference between descriptive and pure linguistic investigations precisely in their dealing, respectively, with "empirically given languages" *or* "systems of semantical rules" (the latter either reconstructed out of specific historically given languages, or freely invented). Similarly, he says that in the study of pure syntax "not empirically given languages but systems of rules will be studied" (*ibid.*, p. 155).

Given Sellars' agreement with Carnap's sharp distinction of semiotics' branches into empirical and pure investigations according to their subject-matter, he must have been dissatisfied with the way in which Carnap applied this distinction. Indeed, Sellars' opinion on the father of logical empiricism is characterized by great enthusiasm towards the foundational work of the *Logical Syntax of Language* (Carnap 1937) and, in equal measure, great disappointment with the later, so-called semantical phase.

While pure syntax never aspired to describe formal structure of natural languages, Carnap's opening to semantics raised Sellars' hopes in this sense. Under the influence of Tarski, Carnap came to see that the investigation of meaning could be specified by adding rules of truth and rules of designation, just as, in a parallel fashion, syntax's rules of formation and transformation

specified the grammatical structure of a calculus. In this sense, the "structure of rules" defined by pure semantics provided the calculus with a "dimension" (the interpretation) that made it closer to languages proper.

However, according to Sellars, pure semantics soon reveals itself to be a failure. At the beginning of ENWW, he writes:

> Today it is generally recognized that the tools of the syntactical phase of logical empiricism were not up to the task of dealing with all genuinely philosophical issues. That the situation has been improved by the addition of the semantic dimension to the pure theory of languages, is clear. Yet to the question, "Are we yet in possession of the tools necessary for a systematic clarification of philosophical issues?" the answer […] must be negative. I shall argue that philosophy is properly conceived as the *pure theory of empirically meaningful languages*, and that pure semantics, as it now exists, is but a fragment of such theory.
> (ENWW 2)

In this passage, references to "syntactic" and "semantical" phases of Carnap's thought are explicit enough. However, it is not easy to make sense of Sellars' disappointment with the semantical phase, which, instead of welcoming it as an enrichment in the direction of a more adequate conception of language – something to which he was striving as well –, he seems to perceive as a step backward:

> In the syntactical stage of analysis, logical syntax was used as a Procrustean bed, and if the concepts admitted to philosophy were often sorely maimed, factualism, at least, was kept at bay. Semantics, to continue with metaphor, instead of providing a gentler bed, has been functioning as a Trojan horse. As a result, factualism and psychologism are flourishing in analytic philosophy, and by no means on the fringes only.
> (PPE 3)[17]

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[17] In the same vein, ENWW 3 declares: "[u]nfortunately, since these issues [the genuinely epistemological ones, CC] are adumbrated in a socio-psychological context, they are inevitably falsified and confused with empirical problems. Even more unfortunate is the fact that because the felt need for a *philosophical* supplementation of semantic categories is thus finding expression along empirical-psychological lines, there is occurring a psychologistic infection of these semantic categories themselves. The result is a blurring of the sharp distinction between philosophical and factual propositions which was a primary value of the syntactical phase of logical empiricism, whatever its shortcomings in other directions" (ENWW 3, cf. RNWW 3).

As can be appreciated from this quotation, according to Sellars, semantics, while born out of good intentions (that is, providing real enrichment of his calculus' structure, which ideally should have made it closer to natural languages' structure), actually resulted in psychologism flourishing. That being said, a question arises: was Carnap's account of meaning and designation really infected with psychologism? Is Sellars' disappointment justified?

Peter Olen has made possible a significant step in answering these questions by delving into the context in which these writings were produced. Against the backdrop of Sellars' disappointment with pure semantics, some scholars have called out a conspicuous *misunderstanding* of Carnap's views: in this regard, it has even been said that "[h]owever close his goals were to Carnap's, […] what he did attribute to Carnap was worse than a caricature" (Carus 2004, p. 319). Other scholars have been more charitable, acknowledging some ambiguities in Carnap's texts that could justify at least some of Sellars' concerns (Westphal 2015, Breunig 2020).

Olen, who joins those who favor the misunderstanding explanation, locates the origin of Sellars' misconception of Carnap's views back to his years spent at the University of Iowa, where a peculiar misreading of Carnap's "semantic turn" became widespread among his colleagues (Gustav Bergmann and Everett Hall *in primis*). The Iowa School, Olen explains, seems to have "misread Carnap's project in a distinct way", specifically failing to understand the transition from a purely syntactic view of language to the later semantical turn.

As anticipated, Carnap's philosophical reflection is usually partitioned into two main phases: the first characterized by a purely formal-syntactic treatment of languages and exemplified by his best-known book, the *Logical Syntax of Language* (Carnap 1937), in which meaning and designation play almost no role; and the second phase, beginning with his 1942 *Introduction to Semantics* (Carnap 1942)[18] characterized precisely by an opening to semantics.[19]

The first phase of Carnap's thinking is inaugurated by his conception of languages as quasi-mathematical *calculi*.[20] In the *Logical Syntax*, calculi are presented syntactically through rules of formation and transformation: the former determine "the conditions under which an expression

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[18] Most of Sellars' references to Carnap's "semantic phase" texts, however, are not as much to *Introduction to Semantics* (Carnap 1942) than to the then-new *Meaning and Necessity* (Carnap 1947).

[19] There is wide disagreement among scholars about the extent to which Carnap's shift to semantics is, or is not, a major turning point in his work. I am not going to argue on this point, which belongs to Carnapian studies. I mention only that recent literature has significantly downplayed this distinction. This is of no concern to Sellars' own interpretation of Carnapian texts, which clearly assumes it to be a major turn.

[20] "All the sentences of pure syntax follow from these arithmetical definitions and are thus analytics sentences of elementary arithmetic. The definitions and sentences of syntax arithmetized in this way do not differ fundamentally from the other definitions and sentences of arithmetic, but only in so far as we give them a particular interpretation (namely the syntactical interpretation) within a particular system" (Carnap 1937, p. 57).

can be said to belong to a certain category of expressions" (Carnap 1937, p. 4), and are thus syntactical rules in a narrow sense; the latter are identified with "so-called logical laws of deduction", in that they determine the conditions under which a sentence can be said to be a *consequence* of another sentence (indeed, they are also called "rules of inference" or "rules of derivation").

Pivotal to the functioning of the calculus is the lack of reference "either to the nature of the things which constitute the various elements, or to the question as to which of the possible arrangements of these elements are anywhere actually realized" (Carnap 1937, p. 7). That is to say:

> In pure syntax only definitions are formulated and the consequences of such definitions developed. Pure syntax is thus wholly analytic, and is nothing more than *combinatorial analysis*, or, in other words, the *geometry* of finite, discrete, serial structures of a particular kind. […]
>
> When we say that pure syntax is *concerned with* the forms of sentences, this 'concerned with' is intended in the figurative sense. An analytic sentence is not actually 'concerned with' anything, in the way that an empirical sentence is; for the analytic sentence is without content. The figurative 'concerned with' is intended here in the same sense in which arithmetic is said to be concerned with numbers, or pure geometry to be concerned with geometrical constructions. (Carnap 1937, p. 7)

Among the features most appreciated by Sellars is *Logical Syntax*'s characteristic meta-linguistic stance. Drawing from Hilbert's metamathematical intuitions, Carnap neatly distinguishes object-languages from meta-languages,[21] providing Sellars with a key tool that he appropriates and exploits in carrying out all his subsequent analyses. As Brandom remarks, "[t]he feature of Carnap's views that made the scales fall from Sellars's eyes is his specification of a particular kind of vocabulary that is neither ground-level empirical descriptive vocabulary nor to be relegated to a sort of second-class status: *metalinguistic* vocabulary" (Brandom 2015, p. 4).

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[21] In the incipit to the *Logical Syntax*, Carnap states that he is working "with two languages. In the first place with the language which is the object of our investigation – we shall call this the **object-language** – and, secondly, with the language in which we speak *about* the syntactical forms of the object-language – we shall call this the **syntax-language**" (Carnap 1937, p. 4 – italics and bold in original). This meta-linguistic stance is of course not limited to *Logical Syntax*, but it extends over Carnap's philosophical approach to language *tout-court* (cf. the beginning of *Introduction to Semantics*: "The language spoken about in some context is called the *object-language*; the language in which we speak about the first is called the *metalanguage*", Carnap 1942, p. 3).

The shift to the second phase of Carnap's reflections on language is marked by the addition of a semantical dimension of analysis, which was previously thought to be possible only in a descriptive (hence, empirical) sense. The *Logical Syntax*'s apparatus remains, but the addition of rules of designation and rules of truth constitutes a major change. During the syntactical phase, the avoidance of any reference to extralinguistic discourse marked the difference between genuinely *logical* and empirical or psychological analyses. Now, on the contrary, designation rules are added precisely with the aim of allowing extralinguistic reference: they fulfill the task of relating linguistic expressions to objects in the world such as things or properties. To sum it up, while descriptive semantics inquired about factual relations between expressions and objects, pure semantics offered "a logical characterization of meaning or designation that makes reference to explicitly stipulated designata of expressions, but does not import historical or factual connections between meaning and language use" (Olen 2017, p. 127).

According to Olen, it is precisely the inability to appreciate the transition from *Logical Syntax* to *Introduction to Semantics* that explains Sellars' preference for the syntactical phase.[22] Indeed, instead of recognizing the enrichment brought in by the latter, the Iowa School's reception pictured Carnap's semantics as stuck in a "language-centric predicament", according to which rules of designation did not refer to extralinguistic items. In fact, they believed that "[*p*]*recisely because of their meta-linguistic and formal nature*, pure semantics and rules of designation only concern the relationship between names of expressions in the meta-language and expressions themselves in the object language" (Olen 2016a, pp. 24-5).[23] In other words, the Iowa School – and Sellars to follow – interpreted Carnap's rules of designation as stipulating a relationship between two different language levels (the metalinguistic level and the object-language level), leaving the question of the relationship between language and world unsolved, and failing to adequately account for meaning or designation. As Olen makes clear in an essay devoted entirely to the

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[22] Besides references in published papers, proofs of this preference can be found both in personal correspondence with Carnap himself, and in his "Autobiographical Reflections" (AR). Olen recalls that, when sending the first draft of EAE to Carnap in 1954, Sellars wrote: "most of what I have done (I won't say accomplish) in philosophy, has been built on the foundations you laid in what, to my way of thinking, remains your most exciting book, *Logical Syntax of Language*" (quoted in Olen 2016a p. 129). In AR, Sellars recalls having read the *Logical Syntax* for the first time in Harvard in none other than Quine's classes. He recalls it as follows: "As for the *Logical Syntax of Language*, I reacted, as did many of my contemporaries, with the idea that while a rigorous account of syntax was clearly a *desideratum*, as far as its *philosophical* content was concerned, Carnap was putting the cart before the horse. Surely (or so it seemed to me) the syntax of language reflects the structure of the world. And since thought deals directly with the world, *that* is where the action is. Yet a seed was planted. It might have sprouted earlier if the impact of *Syntax* had not been blunted by Carnap's own move into his semantic phase, which seemed to support the above reaction" (AR, pp. 287-8).

[23] For more on the "Iowa reading" of Carnap's philosophy, see Olen (2016a, especially pp. 18-35) and Olen (2017). Westphal (2015) also mentions Sellars' relationship to Bergmann and Hall.

history of pure semantics' reception in Iowa, however, to interpret pure semantics as a formal investigation of language "overlooks the fact that Carnap does not describe pure semantics as a formal investigation" (Olen 2017, p. 127): on the contrary, pure semantics was often explicitly contrasted by Carnap with the formalistic nature of pure syntax (*ibid.*, p. 128). The adjective "formal" was indeed mostly used to indicate "in abstraction from meaning or designata", and was therefore tied specifically to syntactical analyses.

From Olen's reconstruction, it seems that Sellars' pure pragmatics was designed precisely to overcome pure semantics' "lingua-centric predicament" by making extralinguistic reference possible (as Carnap was considered incapable of doing), thus "bridging the gap between formal treatments of language and the factual referents of expressions" (Olen 2016a, p. 42) in a way that avoided any dreaded psychologism. According to Olen's reading, Sellars' efforts had the aim of re-establishing that "contact" between language and world that, in Sellars' Iowa-influenced reading, Carnap's pure semantics had left out. In what follows, I am going to approach the topic more closely by outlining pure pragmatics' main features, so that Olen's view outlined above can be evaluated.

1.1.2 Main Features of Pure Pragmatics

Pure pragmatics is the major project with which Sellars begins his philosophical career. It shows how deep the influence played by logical empiricism was in the development of his views: as a matter of fact, pure pragmatics originates as a kind of "third phase" that should have followed on from Carnapian syntactic and semantical phases. Dissatisfied with the latter and guilty of having introduced psychologism into philosophical analysis, Sellars argues that only a pragmatic treatment of some special predicates (which at the time were still treated factually) could rescue philosophy from the quagmire.

I am now going to summarize the main features of pure pragmatics, through which the claim above will be clarified. I have recollected them into two different groups: two concerning pure pragmatics' metaphilosophical purview (a), and two tied to some characteristics of its proper subject-matter (b).

  a. The Metaphilosophical Scope of Pure Pragmatics

I have explained above that pure pragmatics stems from Sellars' conviction that an adequate semantics was not yet in sight. *If* something like that had been available – in other words, if things had gone the right way,

> [w]e should expect a clear-cut distinction between 'meaning' as a term in empirical psychology definable in terms of goal behavior, and the semantical concept of designation; and similarly, between constructed empirical relationships, however subtle, and the semantical concepts of truth and falsity. Unfortunately, not only have analytic philosophers not made proper use of the new tools made available to them [by syntax and semantics, CC], not only have they not pressed on to new victories in the battle against psychologism and factualism; ground has actually been lost!
> (PPE 3)

This quote condenses the sense in which pure pragmatics can be seen as entailing a specific metaphilosophical commitment: it is indeed supposed to secure the perimeter separating philosophy from the domain of empirical sciences – a perimeter that philosophers have previously failed to fix. As Boris Brandhoff remarks, "Sellars' earliest three essays pursue an ambitious metaphilosophical project. They constitute the attempt to arrive at an adequate account of what philosophical questions are and how they are properly addressed. In doing so, Sellars aspires to draw a clear-cut line of demarcation between philosophy and empirical science" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 56).[24] Sellars was indeed persuaded that it was precisely because of the lack of a clear distinction between philosophy and psychology that the former had to take a step backward – an unfortunate circumstance that developments in philosophy of language (particularly semantics) should have enabled philosophers to avoid, but ultimately did not. To regain lost terrain, he was convinced that, alongside pure syntax and pure semantics, a third branch needed to be developed: pure pragmatics. The pragmatics he had in mind, however, had nothing to do with that empirical branch of linguistic studies mentioned by Carnap or Morris: rather, it was meant to be a formal science (in a sense still to be defined) dealing with predicates that, at the time he was writing, had been – at least in his view – mistakenly absorbed by psychology.

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[24] The gist of Brandhoff's argument about Sellars' *metaphilosophical non-factualism* can be found also at the end of Brandhoff (2020).

Which kind of predicates did Sellars have on his mind? PPE gives us a tentative list. The list includes "*true, false, designates* (or *means*), *verifiable, confirmable, verified, confirmed*, and *meaningful*" (PPE 4). Sellars argues that psychologism lingers in the first three "because analytic philosophy has not yet achieved a formal treatment of the latter five" (*ibid.*). Part of the task of pure pragmatics, in this sense, is to show that these predicates "have a status akin to that of currently recognized syntactical and semantic concepts", and "they belong in rules definitive of a type of object calculus" (PPE 6). The equivalence traced by Sellars between pragmatic predicates and syntactical and semantical predicates allows one to appreciate pure pragmatics' belonging to metalanguage: more specifically, the analysis envisioned by Sellars brings to light "a class of meta-linguistic rules", belonging neither to syntax, nor to semantics *as they were then conceived*, which define "a new dimension of calculus structure, a dimension which alone entitles them to be called *languages* in a genuinely epistemological sense of the term" (*ibid.*).

Pure pragmatics' metaphilosophical scope extends over a further aspect. Sellars' dissatisfaction with treatments traditionally accorded to the list of epistemological predicates mentioned above includes both "rationalist" and "empiricist" approaches. In his words:

> Classical rationalism, in so far as it was concerned with genuinely philosophical issues, made explicit the grammar of epistemological and metaphysical predicates, but – owing to certain confusions, particularly with respect to *meaning* and *existence* – came to the mistaken conclusion that philosophical statements were factual statements, albeit of a peculiar kind. Classical empiricism, on the other hand, argued that these statements were common or garden variety factual statements, and usually put them in the psychological species. Rationalism gave the grammar, but contaminated it with platonizing factualism. Classical empiricism threw out the platonizing, but continued to factualize, and confused the grammar of philosophical predicates by attempting to identify them with psychological predicates.
> (ENWW 4)

According to Sellars, both rationalism and empiricism have in common psychologistic or factualist rendering of epistemological predicates: the former because of its "platonism" about abstract entities – that is, in general terms that will be specified further on, the idea that there is any kind of psychological relation (of acquaintance, *Wesensschau*, and so on) between minds and universals; the latter because it accounts for designation in terms of psychological associations between words and responses elicited by speakers to certain *stimuli*.

The passage just quoted is important because it enlightens pure pragmatics' place in the broader picture of Sellarsian philosophy. Far from being a rhetorical embellishment, the attempt to overcome the limits of rationalist and empiricist traditions is part and parcel of Sellars' enterprise and, in a sense, its true origin (think about the importance of gaining a "synoptic view" between manifest and scientific images in his later philosophy). This characteristic metaphilosophical stance will mark every step of Sellars' analysis from now on, and one could easily argue that it would become a hallmark of his philosophical enterprise *tout-court*. Indeed, if on the one hand the cultural and philosophical context that surrounded him took logical empiricism as a sort of default position,[25] and Sellars himself developed his pure pragmatics "*within* the framework and vocabulary of logical empiricism, specifically of Carnap" (Carus 2004, p. 319), on the other hand he has always been a *sui generis* estimator of logical empiricism. This can be clearly appreciated from the very beginning of ENWW, where he writes:

> The general perspective of the present work can best be indicated by saying that the author is a rationalist realist who has deserted the field of logical empiricism; but that he believes he has rejected not so much one set of philosophical propositions in favor of another, but that he has come to a clearer understanding of what philosophical propositions *are*.
> (ENWW 1)[26]

How could an admirer of logical empiricism seriously describe himself as a "rationalistic realist"? The tension already simmering in Sellars' thought strikes us even more forcefully in his "Autobiographical Reflections" (AR), particularly when he recalls his relationship with logical empiricist Herbert Feigl:[27]

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[25] For a reconstruction of the "pre-analytic era" that was the fertile soil from which Sellars' philosophy sprung, see Nunziante (2012). An idea of how pervasively the new "analytic philosophy" arrived from Europe set roots in U.S.A. can be extrapolated by Roy Wood Sellars' bitter remarks on "so-called analytic philosophy", which "did not seem to me very creative in either epistemology or ontology. American addiction to it and disregard of its own momentum struck me as a form of neo-colonialism" (Sellars 1969, p. 5, emphasis omitted).

[26] The quote goes on with yet another confirmation of Sellars' disappointment with semantics: "This change of allegiance has been made possible by the development of the semantic phase of the pure theory of languages; for only with the achievements of pure semantics did the formal-linguistic approach to epistemological and metaphysical issues begin to appear relevant, let alone adequate" (*ibid.*). However – that is how the quote continues – as for then, semantics is nothing but a "fragment" of a pure theory of empirically meaningful language.

[27] For an interesting study of the relationship between Sellars and Feigl, see Neuber (2017). In the same article, the reactions of two very different logical empiricists to Sellars' pure pragmatics are discussed: while Feigl was an enthusiast who took the whole pursuit extremely seriously (even incorporating some elements into his semantic realism), Ernest Nagel was convinced that the whole project was doomed to failure (Neuber 2017, p. 132).

The relevant fact is that Feigl and I shared a common purpose: to formulate a scientifically oriented, naturalistic realism which would 'save the Appearances'. He was familiar with the general outline of my father's Critical Realism and Evolutionary Naturalism, and when an opening occurred in the University of Iowa Department where he had been teaching since 1931, he suggested that I be invited for an interview. We hit it off immediately, although the seriousness with which I took such ideas as causal necessity, synthetic a priori knowledge, intentionality, ethical intuitionism, the problem of universals, etc., etc., must have jarred his empiricist sensibilities. Even when I made it clear that my aim was to map these structures into a naturalistic, even a materialistic, metaphysics, he felt, as many have, that I was going around Robin Hood's barn.

(AR, p. 282)

As the quote attests, Sellars was always fascinated by certain special philosophical issues that, at the time, had been mostly purged from the agenda of logical empiricists.[28] As he says in the quote from ENWW, he was convinced of the importance of those "genuinely philosophical issues" belonging to "classical rationalism" (ENWW 5) (such as "causal necessity, synthetic a priori knowledge, intentionality," etc.) although he knew they clashed with the sensitivity of logical empiricists. But he maintained this clash to be nothing more than a "conflict of illusions", since

[i]t is now time to realize that classical rationalism was essentially sound as a naïve syntax of philosophical predicates, and not only can but must be absorbed into the empiricist camp if the latter is to be a philosophy […]. The essential task is to rob rationalism of the illusion that it is making factual statements. But in order to do this, empiricism must first recognize that a certain group of concepts which, when they are recognized at all to fall within the province of the philosopher, are hurled into the psychologistic dump known as pragmatics, are as genuinely philosophical and non-factual as those of pure syntax.

(ENWW 5)

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[28] Gironi (2017) points out that Sellars' interest in issues characterizing what he calls *perennial philosophy*, along with his search for a systematic and comprehensive picture of what philosophy should do, are likely part of Roy Wood Sellars' legacy concerning his son's intellectual development.

It is with this goal in view – that of saving "a certain group of concepts" by showing their authentically philosophical (and epistemological) dimension – that Sellars conceives his project of pure pragmatics.

b. About Pure Pragmatics' Subject-Matter

Now that pure pragmatics' metaphilosophical claims have been spelled out (one concerning a line of demarcation between philosophy and empirical sciences, and the other concerning the "stereoscopic aim" of overcoming the limits of both rationalism and empiricism), I now turn to two aspects tied to the subject matter of pure pragmatics. Contrary to the two above mentioned metaphilosophical claims, the ones that I am going to introduce now are found quite far ahead in texts and risks, in this sense, to be overlooked.

In the midst of a complicated piece of reasoning in RNWW, Sellars writes:

> Pure pragmatics *or, which is the same thing, epistemology*, is a formal rather than factual area. In addition to the concepts of pure syntactics and pure semantics, pure pragmatics is concerned with other concepts that are *normative* as opposed the factual concepts of psychology, as 'true' is normative as opposed to 'believed', or 'valid' is normative as opposed to 'inferred'.
> (RNWW 34)

Up to now it was not yet clear *why* Sellars believed that epistemological predicates could not be adequately analyzed in terms of the pre-existing semantical vocabulary. The answer, in short, is that concepts belonging to pure pragmatics all share a *normative* dimension that the factual analysis of semantics cannot entirely account for. That is, concepts such as justification, confirmation, meaning, and truth have an irreducible normative (or "prescriptive") component which makes them irreducible to descriptive analysis. André Carus is right in pointing out that there is a sense in which "[t]he recurring argument of these early papers is, roughly, that 'psychologism' […] commits something akin to what has been called, since G.E. Moore, the 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics […]". The mistake consists precisely in overlooking the fact that "the 'formal' (metalinguistic) predicates of 'pure pragmatics' (such as 'meaningful') have an

irreducibly normative [...] component, and thus cannot be either logical or empirical" (Carus 2004, p. 322).[29]

I now conclude by pointing out a further key feature concerning the subject matter of pure pragmatics. I have already indicated that Sellars repeatedly defines philosophy as "the *formal theory of languages*" (PPE 1) or "the *pure theory of empirically meaningful languages*" (ENWW 2). What, precisely, is meant by "empirically meaningful language"? According to Sellars, an empirically meaningful language is one that is capable of being "about" the world in which it is used (PPE 18, RNWW 53). In a significant passage, he states that:

> *the minimum formal requirement which a formal system must fill in order to be a candidate for the position of empirically meaningful language is that it be capable of being 'about' a world in which it is used.* This statement should be kept in mind as the key to the argument which follows, for its aim can be summarized *as the attempt to give a formal reconstruction of the common-sense notion that an empirically meaningful language is one that is about the world in which it is used.*
> (PPE 18)

The dimension of "aboutness" on which Sellars insists is really what marks the distance from accounts of language made available by syntax and semantics in form of calculi. In this regard, Sellars' frequent references to the subject matter of pure pragmatics– i.e., empirically meaningful languages – should be interpreted as a sign that he is trying to explain "what it means to say that a language represents the world to which it belongs – as opposed to just any possible world" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 57).

In short, the idea is that "philosophy faces the task of clarifying what structure an ideally coherent system of norms must have in order to constitute a language that represents the world in which it is used" (*ibid.*, p. 58), and it accomplishes the task in such a way to make this analysis radically different from simple descriptive and factual accounts made available by empirical sciences. Pure pragmatics, in this sense, is an inquiry into language that is both *pure* (sometimes Sellars even says *a priori*, cf. RNWW 17) insofar as it applies to any language, and *pragmatic*

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[29] Later, near the beginning of EPM, Sellars speaks of the relationship between the normative and the natural precisely in this way: "the idea that epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder – even 'in principle' – into non-epistemic facts, whether phenomenal or behavioral, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives and hypotheticals is, I believe, a radical mistake – a mistake of a piece with the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics" (EPM, p. 131).

insofar it deals with applied languages that contain descriptive vocabulary – that is, *applied* languages.

As Brandom puts it, Sellars' initial project could be summarized into the attempt of "developing a *general* pragmatic metavocabulary for specifying the use of any language in which empirical description is possible" (Brandom 2015, p. 8). This task amounts, therefore, to highlight the normative structures that make it possible for language users to apply descriptive concepts (and, as I will show in section 1.3.3, it also corresponds to the sense in which I take pure pragmatics to be a transcendental enterprise).

1.1.3 Pure Pragmatics' Formalism: Proposal 1

Until now, I have provided some context to understand where the pure pragmatics project comes from. In section 1.1.1, I have shown that pure pragmatics is conceived by Sellars alongside Carnapian pure syntax and pure semantics: dissatisfied especially with flattering promises of the latter, Sellars' pure pragmatics aims to enrich Carnap's analyses of language by adding a new "dimension" that would provide an account of language proper (instead of calculus alone).

In section 1.1.2, I have summarized the main features of pure pragmatics. First, I have highlighted a metaphilosophical dimension which places pure pragmatics in the bigger picture of Sellars' attempt to accommodate the substantive claims of rationalists with the methodology of empiricists. In particular, the ambitious goal he pursues with pure pragmatics is to "correct" rationalistic ideas using the tools made available by his *New Way of Words*, so that important "classical philosophical" questions – those that empiricism has mistakenly set aside – could eventually fit into a naturalistic framework.

Secondly, I have highlighted two distinctive features that characterize the subject matter of pure pragmatics: the aboutness that is a pre-condition for any language to be "empirically meaningful", and epistemological predicates' intrinsic normative dimension. Taken together, these two aspects reflect Sellars' attempt to reconstruct the very conditions for a subject to be able to refer to the world around her. The gist is that there is indeed a whole "stratum" of special concepts that pure pragmatics is able to detect, and this stratum stands for the structural conditions of the framework within which description is possible.

The predicates included in this stratum, Sellars says, are those associated with semantical investigations ("true", "means", "designates", etc.), which he sees as easily prone to slip under the umbrella of psychologistic treatments. That semantic predicates *cannot* be explained in factual, psychologistic terms is forbidden by their normative nature, which calls instead for a formal treatment. The time has come to finally ask the question: what, precisely, is a "formal" treatment? Before introducing the apparatus of pure pragmatics, I am going to sketch an initial answer to this central issue.

It should be clear that much depends on clarifying Sellars' use of the adjective "formal" in describing pure pragmatics. The question is particularly urgent because this concept "does the lion's share of the demarcation between philosophical and broadly empirical treatments of concepts" (Olen 2016a, p. 12), thus contributing to the very definition of philosophy itself. Indeed, through pure pragmatics, Sellars aims to formulate "the conceptual and methodological foundations for a genuinely non-factualistic approach to philosophical questions – an approach that avoids the pitfall of psychologism much more carefully than does, according to Sellars, the mainstream of Analytic Philosophy in the wake of Frege, Wittgenstein, and Carnap" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 55).

In defining what a formal treatment consists of, however, we immediately face a serious obstacle: Sellars is neither clear, nor consistent in using the adjective.[30] All that follows in this subsection, in this sense, is an attempt to do my best with the meager and partially inconsistent materials at hand. This means that the definition I am going to propose is unlikely to fit *all* the adjective's textual recurrences. All its limits considered, I am still convinced that this definition is nonetheless the one that better captures the "spirit" of what Sellars meant by the formal nature of pure pragmatics. Besides, this definition will be proved to be largely compatible with some later Sellarsian insights elaborated after 1949 – something that will be justified later on.

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[30] This difficulty has been pointed out by Carus (2004, pp. 320ff), Olen (2016a, pp. 62ff), Brandhoff (2017, p. 63) and Westphal (2015, pp. 9-10). In general, pure pragmatics essays contain numerous repetitions, discrepancies, and even inconsistencies, of which the one concerning the meaning of "formal" is the most problematic. This unpleasant feature stems from both the fact that they represent Sellars' first attempts at writing, whose anxiety was growing exponentially as he was in desperate need of publications (AR, pp. 261ff), and the inherent difficulty of the project itself. Bearing witness to Sellars' fears of the inadequacy of his "pragmatic toolkit" are several letters collected in the appendix of Olen 2016a. For instance, writing to Bergmann about freshly published PPE, Sellars declares having "a tremendous urge to trace every reader of *Philosophy of Science* and assure them that I am aware as they are of its vagueness, involvedness, confusions, and general shortcomings; indeed, far more *aware* than they can ever be. The paper was written last October and November, and is literally a record of my attempts to sweat out the implications of the non-factual character of philosophical assertions, while avoiding the Wittgensteinian notion that there are no philosophical propositions" (Olen 2016a, p. 178).

It has not gone unnoticed (Brandhoff 2017, Carus 2004) that, despite frequent references to his texts, Sellars' notion of "formal" does not coincide at all with Carnap's. To have a glimpse on Carnap's notion of formalism, let me quote a passage from *Introduction to Semantics* (Carnap 1942). Carnap writes:

> We may distinguish between those problems which deal with the activities of gaining and communicating knowledge and the problems of logical analysis. Those of the first kind belong to pragmatics, those of the second kind to semantic or syntax – to semantics if designata ('meaning') are taken into consideration; to syntax, if the analysis is purely formal.
> (Carnap 1942, p. 250)

This quotation is particularly significant. First, it contains Carnap's opinion on pragmatics, relegated to the empirical domain and falling outside the horizon of logical analysis. Second, semantics is explicitly said to be dealing with designata – something which flies in the face of the Iowa reading, according to which Carnap's semantics lacks the link between expressions and their extra-linguistic referents.[31] Finally, and most relevant for this subsection's scope, the term "formal" is used by Carnap to characterize syntactic as *opposed* to semantical analysis. According to Carnap, a formal inquiry is *independent of any reference to the world.* A formal analysis, in other words, abstracts from meaning and semantic relations of any kind. Rules of formation and transformation are "formal" precisely in the sense that they concern non-interpreted linguistic symbols (or, amounting to the same thing, they do not consider their properties or contents). The distinction repeatedly drawn by Carnap is between formal, *syntactic* levels of analysis on the one hand, and *semantic* treatments on the other – a distinction that reinforces the impression that the Iowa interpretation, with its insistence on Carnap's inability to provide an

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[31] The question as to whether Carnap's rules of designation – the ones that were later included in Carnap 1942 – do refer to extra-linguistic objects is not straightforward, but it is also far outside the scopes of my work. On Olen's account, "[w]hile pure semantics does contain references to extra-linguistic objects or properties in the object language (e.g. 'Chicago' stands for the city Chicago in the meta-linguistic statement 'c' designates Chicago), it does not contain statements of fact. Rules of designation explicitly state – as a convention – the designation or meaning of a given expression in a language. The factual relationship between expressions and objects falls within empirical and historical studies of language use (i.e. either within descriptive semantics or pragmatics). Pure semantics offers a logical characterization of meaning or designation that makes reference to explicitly stipulated designata of expressions, but does not import historical or factual connections between meaning and language use (accounting for the 'pure' character of semantics)" (Olen 2017, p. 127).

appropriate link to extralinguistic elements, is basically trying "to right a ship that is not adrift" (Olen 2017, p. 122).[32]

Now, that Sellars' conception of formal does not coincide with Carnap's is quickly realized by simply acknowledging that, according to the former, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics must *all* be formal if they are to be relevant to philosophical analysis. Moreover, while we saw that Carnap *eliminates* any "relevance to the world" or "aboutness" from formal (syntactic) analysis presented in his *Logical Syntax*, Sellars firmly believes that aboutness is a central feature of pure pragmatics.

Although Sellars never sets out an explicit definition for it, the contrast of "formal" with "factual" or "psychologistic" treatments allows us to approach a provisional definition *via negationis*: we know at least what a formal treatment *is not*. "But if neither Carnap's nor the standard sense of 'formal' is intended, what is?". Sellars' usage of the term, Carus suggests, "does not mean 'purely linguistic', or 'syntactic', or even 'logical', in Carnap or the modern sense, but something much less definite, perhaps 'metalinguistic'" (Carus 2004, p. 321). Is Carus' association of pure pragmatics with metalinguistic analysis on the right path?

The inextricable connection between "formal" and "metalinguistic" is alluded to in a significant passage at the beginning of PPE, where the aims and scopes of pure pragmatics are laid down for the first time:

> …*which of the concepts traditionally classified as epistemological can be interpreted as concepts of which the function and essence is to serve in rules definitive of a type of object calculus?* I shall argue that of the traditional concepts which can be so interpreted, the fundamental ones are *true, false, designates* (or *means*), *verifiable, confirmable, verified, confirmed,* and *meaningful.* I shall argue that psychologico-factualism lingers on with respect to the first three, because analytic philosophy has not yet achieved a formal treatment of the latter five. I shall argue that 'true', 'false', and 'designates'

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[32] Here a note of caution is due. Not even Carnap himself had always been crystal clear in his definition of what it means for an analysis to be formal. Westphal points out correctly that the ambiguity arises almost from the beginning: in the passage from Carnap (1942), here quoted on page 26, Carnap stated explicitly that "[i]f we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics" (Carnap 1942, p. 9). However, the explanatory note to the same paragraph states that "[t]he representation of certain concepts or procedures in a formal way and hence within syntax is sometimes called *formalization*. The formalization of semantical systems, i.e. the construction of corresponding syntactical systems, will be explained in ¶36" (*ibid.*, p. 11). What is a "formalization" of semantical systems supposed to mean, given that Sellars has just said that formal analyses *abstract* from designata? Westphal concludes that "Carnap's claims and terminology caused confusion. Bergmann (1944) and Hall (1944) both thought that the purity or formalism of Carnap's semantics could not and did not refer to spatio-temporal particulars, such as the actual city of Chicago (where Carnap then lived). This follows from Carnap's (1942, ¶4) specification that formal studies refer only to sign-designs and not to the designata of signs […]" (Westphal 2015, p. 10).

still receive factualistic treatment at the hands of analytic philosophers, in spite of a metalinguistic treatment of these terms obviously incompatible with a factualistic *analysis, because these terms gear in with 'verifiable', 'confirmable', 'verified', 'confirmed', and 'meaningful', and a formal, or metalinguistic, analysis of these latter terms does not yet exist.*

(PPE 4)

The first part of the quote restates something already anticipated, *viz.*, that much analytic philosophy commits the psychologistic mistake of interpreting certain predicates as factual concepts, when they should instead be treated formally. In the second part, this formal treatment is explicitly associated with *metalinguistic* treatment: "I shall argue that 'true', 'false', and 'designates' *still receive factualistic treatment* at the hands of analytic philosophers, *in spite of a metalinguistic treatment of these terms obviously incompatible with a factualistic analysis*" (*ibid.*, italics mine). The quotation then ends with an explicit equating of "*a formal, or metalinguistic analysis*" (*ibid.*): it is only by according formal and, therefore, metalinguistic treatment to above predicates that the analytic philosopher can hope to give an adequate account of epistemology's key concepts, and "Kant's Copernican revolution receives its nonpsychological fruition" (PPE 10).[33] I then propose the following provisional definition for pure pragmatics' formalism:

> **PPF1** = The formalism attributed to pure pragmatics is to be interpreted as a metalinguistic kind of analysis.

Given the inevitable acknowledgment of Sellars' confounded use of the adjective, I think that I have shown that there are at least some textual bases for supporting an interpretation of the formalism of pure pragmatics in terms of its metalinguistic dimension. In this sense pure syntax, pure semantics, and pure pragmatics would all pertain to the stipulation of meta-linguistic rule systems. In what follows, I will retain the provisional definition of formal as "metalinguistic" (PPF1), the adequacy of which will be evaluated again after I will have spelled out the toolkit of pure pragmatics, to which I now turn.

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[33] "The mention of Kant is intended to suggest that the linguistic tools shaped in pure pragmatics will make possible, indeed necessitate, a return to the *Aufbau* stage of Logical Empiricism, but with a conception of *Aufbau* which is as much richer than that of the early thirties, as the psychologism of Kant is richer than that of Hume" (*ibid.*). Even though only rarely stated out loud, the connection to both Kant and Carnap's projects is recognized by Sellars himself, corroborating Brandom's claim about the Carnapian and Kantian roots of pure pragmatics (Brandom 2015).

1.2 Pragmatic Toolkit

Given his disappointment towards Carnap's pure semantics on the one hand, and his admiration for the *Logical Syntax* on the other, Sellars' starting point will consist precisely in regimenting the structure of Carnap's *Logical Syntax* with an adequate (non-psychologistic) account of designation.

The route to the first element is indicated by the definition of "formal" given in PPF1: indeed, any proper metalinguistic analysis requires a distinction between linguistic *tokens* and linguistic *types*.[34] Actually, this distinction is not prerogative to pure pragmatics, since it is shared by syntactic and semantical analyses. In any case, it is fundamental to Sellars' machinery, since "it is involved in the definition of all pragmatic predicates" (PPE 13). To see how it works, consider the predicate "designate" in a standard semantic designation sentence, like:

$$\text{'}p\text{' designates } p^{35}$$

In general, tokens are individual pieces of language behavior. A token-word is described by Sellars as a meta-linguistic expression "used properly when it is said that the *designatum* of one expression in a language is a token of another (perhaps the same) expression in the language" (PPE 12, cf. RNWW 15, 35) so that, in the example above, "[i]*f 'p' designates p, and p is a token of 'q', then all the metalinguistic predicates that apply to 'q' apply also to p*" (*ibid.*). In simpler terms, the distinction between type and token is nothing but a way of distinguishing linguistic "universals" (types) from the special occurrences in which these universals are embodied from time to time (tokens), so that token-words cover *any* instance of a certain type-word.

Even though in pure pragmatics essays it is only sketched, the token-type distinction is exploited by Sellars throughout the rest of his career, and it plays a key role in establishing his functional role semantics. However, among the many elements that make up pure pragmatics' complex machinery, it is also one of the few to remains intact. Indeed, most of the devices I am about to present will undergo minor or major modifications: some of them will disappear completely after 1948 (the *co-ex* predicate), others will be partially modified (*conformation rules* will be

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[34] The terminology is drawn by Sellars from C.S. Peirce, as he will recall a couple of years later in ILE, p. 31 fn2.
[35] Recall that we are in the context of a metalinguistic analysis, so the proposition "'*p*' designates *p*" is itself given in semantic metalanguage.

reformulated as *material rules of inference*), while others will be preserved (the idea of a *world-story* will be transformed into the idea of a *conceptual framework*).

1.2.1 A Pure Pragmatic Account of Verification

The first concept described as belonging exclusively to pure pragmatics (so, the first that is *not* shared with syntactic or semantical analyses) is the so-called co-ex predicate. The co-ex predicate is defined by Sellars as an "irreflexive, symmetrical, and transitive two-place predicate" (PPE 17, cf. ENWW 16) modeled on the expression "is-present-to-consciousness-with" (or, more simply, "co-experienced-with"). The co-ex predicate plays a pivotal role in Sellars' meta-linguistic account of "verification" in providing the link to connect the subject's private, immediate experience with her external, observable linguistic behavior. To give an example, the co-ex predicate works in such a way that "c co-ex c_1" would have "c" standing for an instance (a token) of the word "Chicago", and "c_1" standing for the experience of what that expression is about (the city of Chicago).[36]

A further, important element of pure pragmatics is the notion of *world-story*. In a nutshell, a world story consists of a set of maximally consistent sentences through which the subject depicts her world.[37] Each set (each world-story) is relative to a given language, so that many world-stories (each of which designates a different world) are possible. Pure pragmatics, as such, characterizes the relationship between linguistic expressions and their referents always in relation to a world story presupposed by an empirically meaningful language.[38] The world-story device is, as it will soon be clear, a symbol of the semantical holism that Sellars opposes to logical empiricism's classic semantical atomism. I am now going to explain in which sense.

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[36] This example is taken from Olen (2016a, pp. 40-1). I used to believe that the co-ex predicate belonged to metalanguage, and I am indebted to Giacomo Turbanti for having pointed out to me that it belongs instead to object-language. If the co-ex predicate belonged to metalanguage, it would be hard to avoid the impression that Sellars is surreptitiously introducing psychologism into his account. To correctly collocate the co-ex predicate in object-language allows one to ease this kind of preoccupation, even though it does not dissolve it: as Olen correctly points out, "it is difficult to see how such a notion can be understood without referencing some aspect of psychology (i.e., the very notion of a language user's *experience* invokes the psychological or common sense concept of 'experience', despite Sellars' claims to the contrary)" (*ibid.*). More on the relation between pure pragmatics and psychologism will be said in what follows.

[37] Olen (2020) shows how Sellars' *world-story* is likely drawn from Polish logician Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's notion of *world-perspective*.

[38] The apparently realistic reference to the "world", though, should not mislead: "Instead of referencing the actual world, the linguistic structures constructed in pure pragmatics represent the fact *that* expressions must designate a set of entities that constitute the 'world' of any language user who uses the language in question. Thus, what is being represented in pure pragmatics is only the structural depiction of what is required for a language to count as empirically meaningful" (Olen 2016a, pp. 46-7).

The starting point is the recognition of a certain "claim" of language (RNWW 6, cf. ENWW 7) that is as trivial as it is bold: our language allows us to formulate sentences with universal quantifiers ("All swans are white") even though it clearly does not contain "a designation for every element in every state-of-affairs, past, present and future" (*ibid.*). Our language, Sellars says, "claims to mirror the world by a complete and systematic one-to-one correspondence of designations with individuals" and, even though "it is obvious that our language does not *explicitly* contain such designations […], it is equally clear that our language behaves as though it contained them" (*ibid.*). In other words, Sellars is pointing out a problem concerning indeterminate reference in universally quantified sentences. The resources of natural languages are limited, and it is simply impossible to name *everything*.[39]

Thus, the problem is explaining universally quantified sentences in such a way to make them acceptable within a naturalistic framework. To explain this, in both ENWW and RNWW, Sellars rehearses to an omniscient imaginary being called Jones,[40] whose language "permits him to formulate a body of completely unpacked or logically simple sentences which together constitute the story of the universe in which he lives" (RNWW 8, cf. ENWW 8). This language also constitutes knowledge of his world ("the language of our omniscient being permits the formulation of a world story which, in a sense to be clarified, constitutes knowledge of the world in which he lives", RNWW 18; "Jones knows his world through the application of a world-story", *ibid.* 22).

Since Jones is an omniscient being, he can clearly formulate many world-stories. His linguistic resources are indeed so vast as to permit him both the formulation of the world-story related to the world in which he lives, as well as sentences incompatible with the ones contained in the "true" world-story, and perhaps even fully invented alternative world-stories. The question Sellars proceeds to ask is thus: "what makes the Jonesian language with its battery [of individual constants, i.e., a set $a_1 \ldots a_n$ where each constant is tailored to one specific swan living out in the

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[39] The problem of reference in a similar context will come up much later in, for instance, "Naturalism and Ontology" (NAO): "[A] language not only consists of more than the grammatical strings which are actually deployed at any one time (which is obvious), but also of more than the grammatical strings which are available for deployment" (NAO 1, 15).

[40] Jones will come back in further *topoi* of Sellars' philosophical production, including the famous Myth of Jones contained in EPM. Mythical or god-like traits are usually accorded to Jones. In RNWW and ENWW, Sellars leans on the peculiar device of Jonesian "perfect language" as he assumes that this ideal language is nothing but "our language writ large, and that an investigation of the way in which epistemological predicates geared in with it would throw light on the significance of normative statements relating to cognition" (RNWW 21). That being said, Jones' perfect language plays a role only as a contrast to the natural language user that alone is the proper subject of pragmatics.

world, CC] *adequate to Jones' world so that as an omniscient being he uses it?*" (*ibid.*, 9). If we are to say that one among the many possible set of sentences constituting Jones' world-story must be called knowledge, we have to find a way for this set's selection to be *justified* (*ibid.*, 18). As I am going to show, the search for an answer to this question allows Sellars to lay down much of what, in his view, a philosophical analysis of language needs in order to account for a language proper. The pseudo-solution that anyone would rule out from the outset is that of a direct confrontation of language with the world. It goes without saying that this kind of naive realism has simply no place in Sellars' account (RNWW, *passim*). How, then, is it possible for Jones to state sentences about items he has never directly experienced? It is at this point that it is useful to introduce another distinction that characterizes pure pragmatics: the one between *verified* and *confirmed* sentences.

Jones' world-story, being a complete story about *everything*, must include sentences concerning *him* as well. Sellars focuses on those sentences that constitute Jones' so-called "sense-biography", that is, sentences about Jones' immediate experience. Sellars refers to these "sense-biographical sentences" as sentences *verified* (by Jones), and he describes them as sentences whose token is co-experienced with their designatum (RNWW 24, cf. ENWW 11). All other sentences that constitute Jones' world-story are, in contrast, simply *confirmed* sentences which do not directly confront experience. In PPE, in order to explain the difference between the two, Sellars introduces the notion of *experiential tie*: only *verified* sentences have "experiential ties" with extra-linguistic referents (as they are co-experienced with a certain language user's experience), whereas confirmed sentences do not confront their meaning with the world. In this sense, verified sentences are meant to account for the "agential aspect of language use, one ignored in pure syntax and pure semantics" (Olen 2017, p. 40).[41]

In drawing the distinction between verified and confirmed sentences, Sellars seems to be thinking of quite a precise target: the logical empiricist account of verification. One example of the latter is precisely Carnap's treatment of the topic, of which he offers an example in the article "Truth and Confirmation" (Carnap 1949) that would appear right in the collection *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* edited by Sellars and Feigl (Sellars & Feigl 1949). The weak point

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[41] Olen shows that the notion of *experiential tie* is partially constructed out of Everett Hall's notion of "empirical tie", which was meant to prove the link between linguistic and extra-linguistic entities. In contrast with Hall's empirical account, Sellars' experiential ties are – as are all the elements constituting the backbone of pure pragmatics – "purely formal" (PPE 19): in this sense, "[t]he significant difference between Hall and Sellars is that Hall locates empirical ties in the object-language […], while Sellars places experiential ties in the meta-language" (Olen 2017, p. 137). In RNWW, experiential ties are replaced by "experiential *confrontations*" (RNWW 22ff).

of the matter lies, according to Sellars, in the impossible claim of accounting for confirmation in terms of a direct comparison between a "statement" and an "observation". In Carnap' words,

> Observations are performed and a statement is formulated such that it may be recognized as confirmed on the basis of these observations. If, *e.g.*, I see a key om my desk and I make the statement: "There is a key on my desk", I accept this statement because I acknowledge it as highly confirmed on the basis of my visual and, possibly, tactual observations.
> (Carnap 1949, p. 124)

The point is, as remarked by Westphal, that not only confirmation so conceived requires mutually independent observational predicates – a claim that, according to Sellars, amounts to a contradiction in terms – but also that such a view of confirmation assumes correspondence as the criterion for truth (Westphal 2015, pp. 6ff).[42] Sellars' *intralinguistic* account of confirmation is, in this sense, an alternative to the Carnapian model, which avoids the myth of direct confrontation (and of one-to-one correspondence). Indeed, the relation of confirmation holding between the token of a sentence and the "immediate experience" is, according to Sellars, "a question that can be unequivocally decided on the basis of the world-story of the language to which that sentence belongs" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 61).[43]

Once we have gathered almost all the elements that constitute the backbone of pure pragmatics, however, the plot thickens.

Let us assume at this point that Jones has found a justification for some of the sentences constituting his world-story (verified sentences – at this point, Sellars is still calling them "confronting sentences") in these sentences tokening sense-biographical sentences that are co-experienced with the sense-data which these sentences designate. Thus, "while all the sentences are *ex hypothesi* tokened in the immediate experience of Jones, only sense-biographical sentences

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[42] Westphal's article is especially interesting insofar it points at a "tension" in Carnap's semantics: "Briefly, the problem with the minimal semantical atomism required by Carnap's empiricist account of the meaning of observation predicates is that it is inconsistent with the structure of his semantic theory, according to which the syntactic forms of observation sentences are set by the formation rules […] of any linguistic framework. These syntactic forms partially determine which inferences can, and which cannot, be drawn using any particular observation sentence" (Westphal 2015, p. 26).

[43] Another formulation of logical empiricism' verificationism towards which Sellars' model can be considered an alternative is Schlick' notion of a *Konstatierung*, which Sellars mention here and there in his writings. The confrontation between the two is very briefly touched on in Brandhoff (2017). The relationship between Sellars and Schlick, on which I will say something in chapter 2, has unfortunately never been explored in literature yet.

have tokens which *confront* their *designata*" (RNWW 22).[44] The question that has to be answered at this point is: "What is the connection between the confronting sentences and the non-confronting sentences belonging to the world-story which enables it to be said that they belong together to *one* sentence *system*?" (*ibid.*). In simpler terms: how can Jones justify the connection between verified and merely confirmed sentences in the context of a consistent world-story?

The strive towards the special kind of unity that a system must exhibit to be worthy of being called a "language" proper is what guides Sellars to the last element of his pure pragmatics. Since it is both complicated and particularly important for my purposes, I am going to focus on it in the next section.

1.2.2 *Conformation Rules* and the Meaning of "Meaning"

In the subsection immediately above, I have introduced most of the backbone of pure pragmatics: the type-token distinction, the co-ex predicate, the distinction between verified and confirmed sentences (and the related notion of experiential tie), and the notion of world-story. All these devices are requirements for empirically meaningful languages. Combining the focus on the normative dimension (1) with the "aboutness" of language (2), pure pragmatics was characterized as an "*attempt to give a formal reconstruction of the common sense notion that an empirically meaningful language is a language that is about the world in which it is used*" (PPE 18).

After evaluating the difference between confirmed and verified sentences, I paused the analysis. The point at which I stopped is where Sellars wonders about the connection between sentences that do and sentences that do not have direct comparison with experience. Indeed, we show great confidence in drawing these connections, even though most of what constitutes our knowledge of the world is *not* based on "sense-biographical sentences". How is this possible? How is it possible to explain the unity and consistency of such a system of knowledge?

The element about to be introduced has a larger scope than the ones introduced in the preceding section. In my reading, conformation rules are in effect crucial both to Sellars' overcoming of an empiricist conception of meaning – an overcoming which occurred long before the publication of the famous EPM – and to the explanation of Sellars' complex and

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[44] "While verifiable sentences are 'basic' in the sense of being co-experienced with their *designata* (sensory events), confirmable sentences are merely indirectly tied to the coex-basis, *but nevertheless are meaningful*. That is, according to Sellars the coex-relation should be interpreted as liberally as possible. Or, in his own words: 'The concept of an empirically meaningful language rests on that of a verification base, but by no means presupposes that every sentence in the story which is its meaning base is to be found in that verification base'" (Neuber 2017, p. 131).

revised theory of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. In what follows, I am going to try to highlight both aspects, and to show how they are intertwined.

In RNWW, Sellars writes:

> Let us be quite clear that the mere fact that a group of sentences illustrates a common set of *formation* rules does not suffice to make them one system in the sense that is relevant when speaking of a group of sentences as *applied* [my emphasis]. Unless they have some further relation to one another, the sentences are like the windowless monads of Leibniz.
> (RNWW 23)

According to Sellars, only (legitimately) applied languages are *meaningful*.[45] Since we are looking for "a pure theory of the application of a language", i.e., "of the relation of a meaningful language to experience" (RNWW 23), Sellars cannot be satisfied by a simple pile of well-formed formulas.[46] What is required is another kind of unity, one that goes beyond mere conformity to a shared set of formation (and transformation) rules. This different kind of unity, we will see, is the one granted by conformation rules only.

In the standard way in which they are presented by Sellars, conformation rules are the genuinely pragmatic addition to rules of syntax (formation rules) and rules of inference (transformation rules):

> Not merely is a language characterized by a set of formation rules; we must also add that the primitive predicates of a language are distinguished from one another by *conformation* rules, rules which restrict the formation of compound sentences out of atomic sentences which involve these predicates.
> (ENWW 14)

While formation rules determine the ways in which the symbols of languages can be joined into new expressions or sentences, and transformation rules govern the laws of inference from one

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[45] "It is obvious that a language that is not applied is, in a sense to be clarified, *empty*. At the present stage in our argument we are considering the possibility that the opposite of empty is *meaningful*, and that a language is meaningful […] by virtue of being *applied*" (RNWW 21).

[46] "For if the world-story we are considering were such a heap, the fact that the *Jones-biographical* sentences were *confronting* sentences would be of exactly no significance for the *remaining* sentences of the 'system', and we should be forced to admit that even though 'meaning' does not mean confrontation with a datum, the only expressions that are *meaningful* are in point of fact those which have tokens which do confront data, because these are the only sentences which are *applied* as opposed to merely tokened" (RNWW 23).

expression to another, conformation rules are described as restrictions placed on the union of atomic sentences into larger strings. At first glance, this definition may make conformation rules look similar to transformation rules: indeed, the latter determine "under what conditions the transformation of one or more expressions into another or others may be permitted" (Carnap 1937, p. 4), and are responsible for admissible and non-admissible transitions from one sentence to another. Similarly, conformation rules are also responsible for inferential transitions from one sentence to another, but there is a crucial *distinguo* between the two: while both formation and transformation rules consider symbols only regarding their syntactical properties − that is, without any reference to their meaning or interpretation (Carnap 1937, p. 5) −, conformation rules are instead concerned precisely with predicates' *meaning*.

The problem of meaning has clearly been behind our argument all along. Among the predicates mentioned in the list ("verified", "confirmed", "meaningful", etc.), "meaning" is the one that occupies Sellars for longer. It is also the one to which most effort is dedicated as, in a sense, provides the key for the adequate treatment of all the others. Let me now follow Sellars' text to see the relation of conformation rules to meaning.

In virtue of what, Sellars asks, can two predicates be said to differ? The most spontaneous answer is that they differ in virtue of their meaning. However, now that we have moved beyond naive realism, we know that there is all the difference in the world between "meaning" as an empirical concept and "meaning" as part of the pragmatic epistemology that Sellars is grounding. In the context of a (purely) pragmatic analysis, the only possible answer to this question, then, must be given only from the latter perspective − namely, that of an entirely *formal* notion of "meaning". Sellars asks again: "In virtue of what are two different predicates 'ϕ' and 'θ' different?". Since his answer is quite complex, I quote the passage in its entirety:

> The conclusion at which we are arriving is that from the standpoint of epistemological analysis, the predicates of a language are differentiated from one another in terms of the formal roles they play in language. […] We shall prefer to say that predicates are differentiated only by the conformation rules which specify their combining properties. The concept of the combining properties of predicates (and it must be remembered that in this paper we are concerned only with primitive predicates) concerns the relation of predicates to individual constants in the following way. It involves: (1) *the concept of a "skeletal" relational predicate* (there may be more than one, provided they are syntactically related) *which signifies the fundamental type of order in which the individuals to which the language can refer must stand*; and (2) the concepts of restrictions on the non-

relational predicates which can be associated with given individual constants where the restrictions are a function of (a) the predicates, (b) the (skeletal) relational sentences in which these individual constants are making an appearance. These restrictions constitute the conformation rules for the predicates of the language. […] *It is in terms of such conformation rules that predicate families are formally specified ("determinates under common determinables") and different predicate families are distinguished and related.*

(RNWW 33)

In this quote, Sellars explains how it is possible to differentiate two predicates on purely formal grounds. The only possible answer that pure pragmatics can give is their being differentiated "in terms of the formal roles they play in language". In other words, the pragmatic analysis of epistemological predicates, if conducted strictly on formal (in the sense defined) grounds, leads precisely to the first sketch of that non-relational, functional role semantics that will characterize Sellars' theory of meaning from now on. Interpreting "meaning", as it should be, as a purely formal term implies interpreting it as "one of the bones of the skeleton of language, enabling it to contain a logic of meaning and truth, just as logical words enable any language to contain a logic of implication. *Meaning* in this sense is no more to be found in the world than is a referent for 'or'" (RNWW 21). This is, indeed, the main insight of Sellars' "New Nominalism":

> The New Nominalism takes 'means' or 'designates' to be a purely formal term, that is to say, a term which as little stands for a feature of the world as 'implies' or 'and'. It has nothing to do with psychological acts, intuitions, or, indeed, with experience of any kind. It refers to no psychological act, intuition, or transaction of any sort.
>
> (RNWW 16)[47]

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[47] One of the targets of Sellars' "New Nominalism" is the classic relational view of "meaning" endorsed in Bertrand Russell (1912), quoted two pages above. There, Sellars claimed that "[i]t has until recently been a characteristic assumption of philosophers of both nominalistic and, in the medieval sense, realistic persuasions, that *meaning* in epistemological contexts is a psychological fact involving self, sign and *designatum*. Perhaps the most explicit expression of this notion is to be found in Russell's *Problems of Philosophy*. He writes, 'We must attach some meaning to the words we use, if we are to speak significantly and not utter with mere noise; and the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted' (*ibid.*, p. 91). It needs but a moment's reflection to realize that this conception of the meaning of symbols leads directly to Platonism. […] For if the meaning of a symbol must always be something with wich someone is acquainted on the occasion of a significant employment of that symbol, then either there are subsistent essences and propositions with which we can be acquainted, or else the meaning of symbols are restricted to *sensa* and *introspecta*, so that indeed symbols must be radically ambiguous, meaning different data on each occasion of their use" (RNWW 14).

To say that "meaning" must be understood in terms of the formal roles that expressions play in language could also be translated into the claim, Sellars continues, that predicates "are differentiated only by the conformation rules which specify their combining properties". To show how this works, I am going to try to break down this special function, which appears in the second part of the quote.

The language (L) with which Sellars is working seems to be rather simple. It is constituted by:

- L alphabet. L alphabet comprises both non-logical (Sellars mentions listed sets of relational and non-relational primitive predicates, and listed sets of individual constants) and logical repertoire (logical connectors).
- L syntax. L syntax defines conditions for well-formed formulas. Its formation rules dictate how symbols can be assembled into sentences. Its transformation rules dictate permissible and non-permissible transitions between sentences.
- L semantics. L semantics defines an interpretation for the truth-conditions of formulas.

Now, L alphabet contains predicates of k-arity: that is, it contains both relational (two-, three-, four-places predicates, and so on) and non-relational (one place) predicates. Arity, however, is a syntactical (formal, in Carnapian sense) property, which say nothing about those predicates' "combining properties", which concerns the application of predicates to individual constants. To specify this more sophisticated level we need, according to Sellars, conformation rules.

There are two senses in which conformation rules are said to specify predicates' combining properties:

- On the one hand, they specify "*the concept of a 'skeletal' relational predicate* […] *which signifies the fundamental type of order in which the individuals to which the language can refer must stand*". As I understand it, this is linked to Sellars' assumption that the unity of the system we were considering (Jones' world-story) lies in that story being about a consistent spatio-temporal structure.[48] In a spatio-temporally consistent world-story there must be admissible and non-admissible orders of individual constants: the example provided by Sellars is with the relational predicate "before" (RNWW 28), which "coordinate" the temporal dimension on the background of which a coherent world story can be

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[48] With a term that will be introduced soon, Jones' world story is *P-lawful* (PPE 21).

developed. Other skeletal relational predicates can be given (e.g., I presume, regarding spatial relations).[49] Here, it seems to me, Sellars has his finger on quite an important point. Compare two arguments:

(A) All dogs are mammals.
   Fido is a dog.
   Fido is a mammal.

(B) Alice left after Bob arrived.
   So, Bob arrived before Alice left.

Validity of argument A can be easily traced back to the validity of its underlying schema, that is:

a) Every P is Q
   n is P
   n is Q

Argument B, on the other side, cannot undergo the same treatment. If we try to break the inferential steps down to their schema, the best we obtain is:

b) m F-ed after o G-ed
   so, o G-ed before m F-ed

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[49] Further on in the text, after having discussed the so-called "principle of ontological indifference" that I am going to mention below, the argument is summed up through an historical parallel: "Kant argued that conformity to the causal principle (the temporal *schema* of the principle of sufficient reason) is a necessary condition of the possibility of temporal experience. We argue that conformity of its expressions to conformation rules built upon the skeletal predicate 'before' (the temporal form of the coherence necessary to meaning in the epistemological sense) is a necessary condition on the possibility of a meaningful temporal language […]. We note only that the truth of Kant's conception of Space and Time as *pure* manifolds is contained in the conception of skeletal relations in terms of which the primitive one-place predicates of a language are distinguished, and hence, in a sense, defined" (RNWW 54). To claim, as Olen does, that this is *not* pointing towards a transcendental reading of pure pragmatics – also given that, two pages after, Sellars remarks that he would not object to using the term "transcendental logic" instead of pure pragmatics (RNWW 58 fn17) – seems to me like a stretch. This will be discussed in section 1.3.3, where I contrast Olen's reading on this point.

In other words, to make B a valid inference is not a logical schema, but the "grammar" of temporal relation expressed by the meaning of predicates "before" and "after". The meaning of those predicates seems to outweigh strictly logical relations like those determined by transformation rules. In this sense, conformation rules are responsible for the meaning of these kind of macro-relations (temporal, spatial, geographical…) that, in a sense, provide the "coordinates" of a *P-lawful* (that is, "materially" adequate) world story.

- If the first side concerned relational predicates, on the other side, conformation rules specify predicates' combining properties by also placing restrictions on the non-relational predicates to be associated with individual constants. These restrictions, Sellars says, "are a function of (a) the predicates, (b) the (skeletal) relational sentences in which these individual constants are making an appearance" (RNWW 33). Sellars also says, at the end, that "[*i*]*t is in terms of such conformation rules that predicate families are formally specified ("determinates under common determinables") and different predicate families are distinguished and related*" (ibid.). Let me then take the family of color predicates to produce an example. Consider the sentence "*a* is red". The meaning of predicate "red", according to what Sellars has said above, cannot be applied to individual constant *a* without considering holistically the sentences is which *a* appears. That is, as I interpret it, that if in our world story there is a sentence which states that "*a* is green", the predicate "red" cannot be applied.

In summary, conformation rules specify then "how expressions are to be combined to form larger units by setting down restrictions on which (relational and non-relational) predicates can combine with the same individual constants to participate in sentences" (Neuber 2017, p. 129). The italicized sentence on "skeletal relational predicates" has a particular footnote that gives me a chance to introduce the most interesting aspect of conformation rules. The footnote reads:

> These skeletal relations are, to use Hume's phrase, "relations of matter of fact" in the world to which the language applies. Putting the matter crudely, and with the aid of Hume's terminology, we can say that "relations of ideas" can only be 'defined' by reference to "relations of matter of fact".
> (RNWW 33 fn9)

This footnote is as valuable as it is potentially misleading. After Sellars' great care in preserving the formal nature of pure pragmatics, the appeal to "matter of facts" is risky. However, it is through this footnote only that the reader begins to see what conformation rules really are. This footnote indicates that, when Sellars talks about conformation rules, he is thinking of *material constraints* (even though – and this is vitally important – we are still describing these constraints from a purely formal point of view, that is, that of a meta-linguistic analysis which, as has now been specified, deals only with their formal roles). In this sense, conformation rules provide something *beyond* the simple logical consistency granted by sharing the same syntactic requirements. Pure pragmatics, in this sense, accounts for the fact that empirically meaningful languages are immersed in a world characterized by *constraints*. These constraints, termed "material", cannot be further specified in the context of a formal analysis. Indeed, the analysis stops precisely at the recognition that for a language to be "empirically meaningful", any attempt to account for it cannot ignore the existing constraints with which every language is entangled. In this sense, since conformation rules are restrictions on the possible combinations of expressions with other expressions, they in a sense "mimic", in a *formal* guise, the real, *material* restrictions that characterize natural languages.[50]

Before showing how far the consequences of the latter considerations go, a few remarks are necessary to clear the ground of possible misunderstandings. The line Sellars is trying to walk is very thin: both co-ex predicate and conformation rules seem to threaten Sellars' claim about pure pragmatics' formalism by introducing, respectively, psychological elements and material constraints about the world. Although scholars have indeed shown some misgivings about this (Olen 2016a, Carus 2004),[51] this threat does not worry Sellars in the slightest. Indeed, his

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[50] To say it with Olen's words, "[w]hile Sellars claims that conformation rules are essentially the syntactical characterization of a coherence theory of meaning, it is the compatibilities and incompatibilities ultimately based on matters of fact that function as the constraints in question" (Olen 2016a, p. 50). Olen goes on to give an instructive example: "While traditional formation rules restrict the formation of expressions on formal grounds (e.g., the expression 'A¬B' is a meaningless expression in some language L, because negation is explicitly defined as a unary connective), conformation rules restrict the combination of individual constants with non-relational predicates (e.g., the individual constant 'apple' cannot be simultaneously combined with both non-relational predicates 'colored' and 'clear') and relational predicates (e.g., 'a' cannot be combined with both 'before' and 'after' relational predicates and another individual constant 'b') with individual constants" (*ibid.*). In this sense, conformation rules are thus constitutive of *meaning* for ordinary descriptive terms.

[51] Much of this has to do with Sellars' conception of what precisely "psychologism" stands for. Carus remarks that "[a] notion of 'psychologism' defined negatively by reference to 'formal' in *this* sense (of 'metalinguistic') will therefore *include* much that Frege and Husserl (and Carnap) regarded as 'psychological'. It will include, for instance, Sellars's proposed connective 'co-ex' that is identified only by reference to an intended psychological interpretation ('co-experienced-with') and used to ground a concept of 'experiential tie'" (Carus 2004, p. 322). More on this will be said in what follows.

analyses presuppose what has been called the "principle of ontological indifference" (Neuber 2017, p. 130), according to which:

> *The pure theory of empirical languages as formally defined systems which are about worlds in which they are used, has no place for THE world; but only for the world designated by the story which is the meaning base of a language.* A given set of conformation rules defines a family of empirical languages, *or, which is the same thing, a family of possible worlds which have the same laws.* An understanding of the completely non-factual character of epistemological statements rests on the insight that not even the predicates 'verified' and 'confirmed' have an intrinsic tie with any single world, with "the REAL world". They are purely formal predicates and no properly constructed world-story stands in a privileged position with respect to them. This principle of indifference could be discarded only if something akin to an ontological argument could be formulated in the pure theory of empirical languages; if it could be shown, for example, that only one set of conformation rules is possible which enables a story to be constructed in the language form of which they are the rules; and if only one story could be constructed in that language form.
> (RNWW 47)

Sellars points out that all the predicates he is dealing with have already been freed of any psychological connotation, so that they present no connection ("tie") to *the* world we inhabit. Pragmatic reconstruction of empirically meaningful languages does not relate language to *the* world (since this would amount precisely to confusion with factualistic fields such as psychology or anthropology). Rather, pure pragmatics merely states "that formal languages must contain references to the designata of expressions, but this does not require formal languages exhibit the factual relation between expressions and their extra-linguistic referents". In short, "pure pragmatics exhibits *that* such relationships must exist within any formal reconstruction of an empirically meaningful language, but not the actual relationships themselves" (Olen 2016a, pp. 44-5). This is the only legitimate sense in which empirically meaningful languages are "about a world". Since pure pragmatics must formally account for that aspect of languages *as used* – which differentiates it from syntax and semantics – the notion of experience here at stake is completely devoid of any empirical connotation.

Let me now return to where I left Jones. Since Jones' story is described in both RNWW and ENWW, and since I have already provided an analysis of the former, I will now use the latter essay as the main textual basis. Indeed, although the point they make is virtually the same,

ENWW takes a slightly different route that allows me to better explain how conformation rules can provide the "unity" that Sellars is looking for.

At the end of the previous section, the analysis reached the point of the search for a connection between verified and merely confirmed sentences to account for the unity and consistency of Jones' world-story (defined as "the body of logically simple (atomic) sentences which constitute the story of the universe in which he lives", ENWW 8). The distinction between verified and merely confirmed sentences was drawn from the acknowledgment of the existence of a special set of propositions in Jones' world-story making up what Sellars called the "Jonesean datum biography", consisting of "*sentences the meaning of which are exemplified in his immediate experience*" (*ibid*.). Once he discarded the platonist way of accounting for the meaning of these sentences (i.e., explaining it through a direct comparison between "meanings" and "sense data" – a path which is clearly not feasible for the empiricist, for whom "meanings are never data," *ibid*. 9), Sellars realized that "if meanings are never data, this is not true of *linguistic expressions*" (*ibid*. 10). In this sense, Jones' world-story contains tokens of the expressions that constitute Jones' sensory biography, and if we cannot directly compare meanings with states of affairs, we can at least compare certain tokens with the states of affairs to which they refer by exploiting the virtues of the co-ex predicate: a verified sentence is, therefore, "*a sentence a token of which is co-experienced with its designatum*" (*ibid*. 11, cf. RNWW 24), while merely confirmed sentences are sentences that lack this element. The question was: how can we account for the connection "*between the verified sentences and the other true sentences making up the Jonesean world-story such that the verified character of the former entails the truth of the latter*"? (ENWW 11).

It is at this point that ENWW deviates slightly. Sellars notices that rationalists are less concerned because they are comfortable justifying the connection between verified and confirmed sentences by postulating "rational connections" between the two. Of course, empiricists would not be as comfortable. Is there a strategy to exploit the concept of rational connection in such a way as to make it palatable to even the most demanding empiricist? Sellars had already predicted that "classical rationalism may yet have a contribution to make to an empiricist epistemology, provided that factualistic illusions are set aside" (ENWW 12), so we can imagine the answer to be affirmative.

In PPE, after introducing the type/token distinction and the co-ex predicate, Sellars introduces a concept towards which he says pure semantics is "indifferent" but which, on the contrary, is fundamental to pure pragmatics: it is called "*P-lawfulness*". A P-lawful system is said to have a

negative and a positive phase: in Leibnitian terms, the former can be thought of as a kind of principle of compossibility; the latter as a principle of plenitude. The negative moment, the one in which *restrictions* on the predicates of the system are formulated, is the one specified by conformation rules, which in this context are explicitly associated with "what may be called the 'P-restrictions' of the calculus" (PPE 22).[52] Although in both ENWW and RNWW the term "P-lawfulness" disappears, I find it useful to include it in the analysis as it anticipates the "dimension" of the discourse Sellars is entering (and which is made explicit in ENWW and RNWW). Indeed, the same problem could be re-stated by saying that "rational connections" between verified and confirmed sentences postulated by rationalists in ENWW are a kind of pre-conditions for a system that can properly said to be P-lawful. But a doubt remains: "Can we make sense of the concept of rational connection in this context?", Sellars asks (ENWW 11). Let us look at how the rationalist would verbalize this point:

> He appeals to an a priori principle of supplementation, the principle of sufficient reason, which is bound up with the existence of a realm of universals so related to one another that they constitute a system which can be viewed in one light as a system of necessary connections, and in another as a system of compossibilities. (It is this system which underlies the concept of laws of nature).
> (ENWW 12)

With a classic move, the rationalist introduces the existence of a realm of universals (i.e., properties, qualities, and relations) that mirrors (and explains) existing connections in the world-story.[53] Now, "on the rationalistic position, universal propositions which correspond to a connection of universals are synthetic *a priori* truths about a world exemplifying those universals. Our problem, then, amounts to that of determining what concessions can be made within the framework of empiricism to the notion of synthetic *a priori* truth" (ENWW 13). Conformation rules are thus "formal vests" for laws of nature. To use Catherine Legg's nice expression, they "give 'empirical depth' to the world that the language is about, by adding further constraints to

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[52] "Conformation rules of a calculus, the expressions of which can qualify for pragmatic predicates, *specify for each non-relational predicate in the calculus, the relational predicates which can participate in sentences with one and the same individual constant which is conjoined in a sentence with the non-relational predicate in question*. A set of such rules provides what may be called the 'P-restrictions' of the calculus" (PPE 22).

[53] The introduction of a realm of universals that will be transformed to suit an empiricist philosopher will be the *leitmotiv* of an essay from the following year, "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (CIL), which I will consider in the next chapter.

the language over and above the mere avoidance of formal logical contradiction" (Legg 2019, p. 2). This allows me to make a final, important point that has come to light only through the exposition of the conformation rules.

In section 1.1.1, I recalled Olen's view about the original source that motivated pure pragmatics. In essence, Olen argues that pure pragmatics arose from a misunderstanding: the Iowa reading of Carnap saw pure semantics trapped in a "lingua-centric" predicament that fails to connect language and the world.[54] In other words, according to Olen, "Sellars is attempting to solve problems – insofar as one accepts the problematic formulations handed down by the Iowa School – that are not problems within pure studies of language: much of the demands of pure pragmatics arise only if one accepts the semantic dilemma raised by Bergmann's and Hall's reading of Carnap" (Olen 2016a) – a dilemma, it shall be remembered, that is concerned with a proper account of designation. This version, however, risks giving us an excessively narrow story of how things turned out. I will now explain why.

Of Sellars' complaints against Carnap, it seems to me that the one concerning his inability to account for what constitutes language proper instead of mere calculus (A), and the one regarding his attempt to rise to that level (i.e., of language proper) by stumbling on a *psychologistic* account of meaning (B), are both prevailing over his dissatisfaction with his theory of designation (C). It is particularly important to distinguish points (B) and (C) which, although related, are also distinct from each other. Indeed, Olen argues that Sellars' dissatisfaction with Carnap's pure semantics stems from his inability to connect language and the world (C). The arguments he provides are convincing, although, it must be said, there is literally no textual evidence for this kind of complaint in Sellars' articles on pure pragmatics. It is a "conjecture"[55] constructed out of the reconstruction of Sellars' historical and intellectual context. This conjecture works, and it is quite convincing. However, there seems to be a clash with Sellars' recurrent *textual* complaint that analytic philosophy is psychologistic (B). What I would like to posit is that *either* Sellars thought that Carnap *could not even provide* the "link" between language and the world (and, if the link is missing, how can the missing link be psychologistic?) (C), *or* he was dissatisfied with Carnap's account being actually psychologistic (B). If (B) were a stronger drive than (C), the result is a partial disagreement with Olen: Sellars would indeed have been dissatisfied with Carnap's account of designation, but not because it occurred only between different language-

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[54] See pp. 30ff.
[55] I am not using "conjecture" in a pejorative sense.

levels, leaving aside the extralinguistic reference (*à la* Bergmann and Hall), *but because this extralinguistic reference was given a descriptive account* (read: it was psychologistic, as in B). My reading – which does not rule out Olen's reconstruction, but certainly downplays it, or at least sees it as one among a whole bunch of other possible reasons – has the merit of accounting for something that otherwise would not make sense: the insistence on the formal nature of pure pragmatics' analysis does indeed seem to be a much stronger motivation than the actual ability of the analysis itself to "connect" language and the world – something that, given the above mentioned principle of ontological indifference, is completely out of the scope of pure pragmatics. Whatever interpretation of "formal" one may espouse, it is intuitively *not* an analysis that is especially concerned with extralinguistic reference.[56]

At the heart of Sellars' dissatisfaction – and, in my view, a stronger incentive to the formulation of pure pragmatics than the "Iowa reading" affaire – there seems to be the acknowledgement of pure semantics' inherent deficiency in accounting for what it takes for a language to be a language proper instead of a calculus (A). Indeed, through the exposition of the rules of conformation we have gained an insight into pure pragmatics that places it on an entirely different level than that of a search for an adequate theory of designation alone. If all that is required to account for the structure of a calculus is a syntax with a given set of rules of formation and transformation and, eventually, a semantics according to which symbols are interpreted, Sellars recognizes how natural languages – empirically meaningful languages – need something more. This extra "something" is the internal unity that makes us capable of delineating a coherent and consistent world-story about the world we inhabit, enabling us to gain knowledge of that world, and it even explains our ability to refer to that external world. This unity also includes the fact that our language must respond to "material" (formally conceived) restrictions such as those exemplified by natural laws and expressed by conformation rules.

While in the strictly formalistic essays of 1947 and 1948 the connection of conformation rules with the laws of nature is barely hinted at, in other essays this aspect becomes more explicit: this is especially true in "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (CIL, 1948), where "real connections" are investigated from a modal point of view, and later in "Inference and Meaning" (IM, 1953), where conformation rules are replaced by material rules

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[56] "Sellars is very clear that in discussions of the formal structure of language the philosopher is always working in the metalanguage, and as such is unable to address directly questions about the relations between words and things. Discussion of the real relation between language and the world must occur in the object-language, wherein language has to be considered a fact in the world, not a formal or ideal structure" (DeVries 2005, p. 27).

of inference. Their status as synthetic *a priori* principles, anticipated in the writings of pure pragmatics, will be addressed again in the essay "Is There a Synthetic a Priori?" (ITSA, 1954). Therefore, this is far from the last time that conformation rules will play an important role.

1.3 Continuity or Discontinuity? Before and After Pure Pragmatics

Based on what has been said so far, the resulting characterization of pure pragmatics is so far removed from what was known as "pragmatics", that it is not surprising that Sellars airs certain grievances in giving it this name. At the beginning of PPE, for instance, he wonders whether it would not be simpler to extend the meaning of "semantics" instead of proposing a new term (PPE 7). Since pure pragmatics is committed to showing that epistemological predicates such as "verified", "confirmed", and "meaningful" must be understood as belonging to a meta-language that accounts for the structure of any empirically meaningful language in which knowledge can be formulated, pure pragmatics ended up looking more like the adequate epistemology for any philosophy to be developed after the linguistic turn (Sellars' *New Way of Words*), rather than a special branch of linguistic studies:

> It is with some hesitation that I speak of these meta-languages as pragmatic, for they have nothing to do with language as expressive or persuasive, or with such other concepts of empirical psychology as have come to be characterized as the subject-matter of a science of pragmatics. Pure pragmatics or, *which is the same thing*, epistemology, is a formal rather than a factual area. (RNWW 34)

The official attempt to construct the project of a pure pragmatics seems to end with RNWW.[57]

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[57] Although RNWW was first published in 1948, a revised version of the article appeared in the aforementioned *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* edited by Sellars and Feigl in 1949 (see footnote 12). Granted that I do not want to justify my reading on mere historical circumstances, and I prefer to provide "conceptual" arguments in favor of it, one cannot avoid noticing that in 1949 – the year of the alleged "disruption" caused by the publication of LRB – *both RNWW and LRB are published within months* of each other. If one were to follow Olen's reading, in the least it is difficult to explain why Sellars would revise and reissue an article that was supposed to present, in its longest and deepest version ever produced, a failed project. Among these kinds of historical discrepancies, there are others: "Outlines of a Philosophy of Language" (OPL) is another document that attests Sellars' reworking of pure pragmatics (within a new vocabulary) in 1950, *after* the publication of LRB. Olen interprets the fact that OPL was not published by Sellars in his lifetime as evidence of his lack of confidence in the project, but this fact may have other reasons behind it. The cross-references between RNWW, CIL, and LRB, along with the references to RNWW contained in much later writings (for instance, SRLG 40 fn1, KTE 41 fn11) are another such case.

After 1949, the term "pure pragmatics" is indeed replaced by "Pure Semiotic" (OPL 2.513), "phenomenology of language functions" (QMSP 9 fn3, OPL *passim*) and, later, it is simply incorporated into "semantics" (EAE, p. 453 fn29). Besides, much of the technicalities composing pure pragmatics' toolkit are left behind. How shall this be interpreted? Has pure pragmatics failed, after all?

The most widespread line of interpretation agrees with Olen in considering pure pragmatics as a failed program, abandoned by Sellars after realizing the impossibility of formalizing pragmatics. This opinion is endorsed, for instance, by Westphal (2015), Neuber (2017), and Turbanti (2019).

Although the term is dropped, Sellars retains few (admittedly scattered) references to pure pragmatics essays even in much later works (TTC 51, KTE 41). This superficial remark allows one at least to question the reading according to which Sellars would have abandoned the project entirely. While my explanation of the abandonment of pure pragmatics, so to speak, in terms of its form but not its substance requires the full exposition of all that is yet to come, it is nevertheless already possible to establish some points based on what has been said so far. In particular, in this final section I would like to present reasons in support of: 1) the possibility of understanding the formal nature of pure pragmatics in such a way as to make it compatible with the more "liberalized" meta-philosophy like the one developed by Sellars after 1949, starting with "Language, Rules, and Behavior" (LRB), and 2) the possibility of interpreting pure pragmatics against a transcendental background and, therefore, seeing it as the original seed of what would later be called "transcendental linguistics". These two points leave room for the possibility that Sellars did not abandon pure pragmatics entirely, allowing a more linear reading of Sellars' philosophical history (*contra* Olen's thesis about the incompatibility of pure pragmatics with his later metaphilosophy). Far from being a relic of mere historical interest, this could enlighten some otherwise incomprehensible features of Sellars' philosophy, such as his complex relationship with logical empiricism.

I proceed in the following way: first, I present the new account of linguistic rules developed in LRB (1.3.1). Then, I enrich provisional definition PPF1 given in section 1.1.3 by adding a further specification, and I prove that the enlarged definition PPF2 is broad enough to accommodate the new conception of the linguistic rules presented in LRB (1.3.2).

Once done with that, I discuss the possibility of reading the entire project of pure pragmatics in line with Sellars' later "transcendental linguistics", starting from a suggestion made by Sellars

himself about a possible parallel between pure pragmatics and Kant's transcendental logic (1.3.3).

1.3.1 A New (Kantian) Account of Linguistic Rules

The thesis about the alleged incompatibility of pure pragmatics with Sellars' later writings is grounded by Olen on the two differing, contrasting metaphilosophies resulting from one and the other. The strong formalistic and anti-psychologistic approach that characterizes pure pragmatics essays, he notes, vanishes abruptly with the publication of "Language, Rules and Behavior" in 1949. Moreover, the formalistic vocation of pure pragmatics seems to be plainly contradicted by Sellars' attempt to sketch an adequate "philosophically oriented behavioristic psychology" in the very same article (LRB 1). In Olen's words,

> [i]n order to articulate a conception of language and linguistic rules as normatively laden, where 'normatively laden' signals treating normative concepts and terms as sui generis, Sellars required a liberalization of his meta-philosophy to include behavioral, psychological, or sociological considerations. From the standpoint of his early formalism, the rigid distinction between factual and non-factual concepts bars behavioral considerations from playing a philosophical role. Pure pragmatics could *mention* the notion of events "satisfying" norms of language (Sellars 1948a/2005, p. 52), but its staunch non-factualism stops it from utilizing the behavioral language of stimulus and response that marks Sellars' later publications.
> (Olen 2016a, p. 99)

The most problematic aspect of Sellars' undeniable shift in tone and strategy after 1949 is the fact that, it seems, "if factual concepts are used, formal concepts are not in play" (Olen 2016a, p. 94). PPE's footnote number 10 makes this point in the course of Sellars' discussion of the relationship between natural and formal languages ("or, more suggestively, the *descriptive* and the *constitutive*", PPE 41 fn10):

> In the factual-descriptive usage, a language is a set of socio-psychologico-historical facts. In this context, the concepts in terms of which we describe a language are factual concepts, such as *goal-behavior*, *substitute stimuli*, etc., together with a strong dose of statistics. The "meta-language" in terms of which we describe a language thus understood is a "meta-language" in a purely factual sense; from the formal standpoint it is no more a meta-language than is language about *non-*

linguistic socio-psychologico-historical states of affairs. As long as we are dealing with languages in the factual sense, we are not making use of the concepts of the formal theory of language, even when we talk about *sentences*, *meaning*, and *having the same meaning as*.

(PPE 41 fn10)

This footnote confirms Olen's remark about the mutual exclusion of factual and formal considerations on language. One can have, so to say, two different, alternative lenses through which to look at language: the philosopher's, or the psychologist's. Their vocabulary can even overlap – the psychologist *can* exploit philosophical lexicon (*"sentences*, *meaning*, and *having the same meaning as"*) – but this does not change one or the other's lens.

A side effect of this quote is the realization that a definition of the formalism of pure pragmatics in terms of mere metalinguistic analysis does not suffice to distinguish it from factual-empirical analyses. Indeed, factual-empirical analyses also have their corresponding meta-language, constituted by factual concepts which include, on the basis of what I have just pointed out above, both those used by psychology ("goal-directed behavior", "stimulated response", etc.), *and* traditionally conceived philosophical-semantical predicates repeatedly mentioned by Sellars ("means", "designates", etc.).

Now, one cannot avoid noticing that concepts like "goal-behavior", "substitute stimuli", etc. – those included here in the factual-empirical metalanguage – are precisely among the concepts that Sellars will incorporate into his theory of language learning and acquisition two years after this footnote was written. The conception of language and linguistic rules that would be advocated by Sellars from LRB onwards makes abundant use of descriptive concepts proper to behaviorist psychology to explain, for a start, various stages in the process of language acquisition. This apparent contradiction leads Olen to claim that:

> As opposed to the rigid distinction between formal and factual concepts in pure pragmatics, Sellars' later meta-philosophy permits a more complicated picture of the interaction between factual and non-factual concepts […]. The difference […] is that Sellars' later work incorporates the empirical dimension of concepts in ways not permitted under his early meta-philosophy.
> (Olen 2016a, p. 102)

In short, according to Olen, the inclusion of behavioral and psychological concepts explains Sellars' abandonment of the rigid metaphilosophy underlying pure pragmatics – a

metaphilosophy that, according to his reading, *bars* every interaction between factual and nonfactual concepts (*ibid.*, p. 106).

To assess Olen's claims, I now turn to Sellars' first non-formalistic essay where his new, "liberalized" conception of linguistic rule is envisioned: "Language, Rules and Behavior".

LRB begins with a scheme we are now familiar with. The goal, in Sellars' words, is that of

> an attempt to map a true *via media* (one which doesn't covertly join with one or other extreme beyond the next bend in the road) between rationalistic apriorism and what […] I shall call "descriptivism", by which I understand the claim that all meaningful concepts and problems belong to the empirical or descriptive sciences, including the sciences of human behavior.
> (LRB 1)

The starting point echoes the well-known opposition between rationalism and empiricism, with the difference that here, crude old empiricism is replaced by the broader label "descriptivism". To understand the transition, one needs to consider that LRB was first published in a volume dedicated to John Dewey,[58] which explains both LRB's declarative intent to develop a "sound pragmatism" (LRB 5), and the broadening of the label to include reductivist approaches to linguistic phenomena from a certain type of not-so-sound pragmatism.[59]

The definition of the subject-matter of the article – LRB is devoted to discussing "evaluations" in general – is immediately in need of a metaphilosophical justification. Indeed, the topic is once again under the threat of being indebtedly appropriated by psychologists: to "evaluate" or "justify" something seems to pertain to the scientific (psychological) study of behavior. The philosopher's business, however, Sellars explains, "is to explicate the *correctness* or *validity* of justifications, and not the causal structure of justifications as matters of psychological fact" (LRB 6). But this, instead of doing the trick, does not make the philosopher's position less awkward: does this mean that the only way to avoid the threat posed by descriptivism is to consider "validity" and "correctness" as non-empirical properties pertaining to something like a "rationalistic psychology"? As LRB's firsts paragraphs makes clear, Sellars' metaphilosophical placement in this essay is precisely the same as in pure pragmatics: the problem is once again the avoidance between two equally problematic domains, neither of which would be able to

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[58] "Language, Rules and Behavior" (1949) in *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom*, edited by Sydney Hook, New York, The Dial Press, pp. 289-315 – reprinted in PPPW.

[59] "But if I do not accuse the pragmatist of being a descriptivist as a matter of principle, I do contend that pragmatism has been characterized by a descriptive bias" (LRB 5).

account for some concepts' special dimension. By finding a *via media* between the two, to philosophy can be saved a proper domain which is not that much determined by a special subject-matter, but as the adequate lens through which certain facts should be looked to appreciate their special status with respect to object-language.

Sellars starts by analyzing the normative and moral vocabulary that occurs when discussing evaluations ("ought", "justify", "correct", "valid", etc.). He immediately expresses his disappointment with emotivist theories prevalent at the time. Here, a debt needs to be paid to the great defender of moral laws, who was able to appreciate a fundamental point:

> If I have become more and more happy of late about Kant's assimilation of the ethical "ought" to the logical and physical "musts", it is because I have increasingly been led to assimilate the logical and physical "musts" to the ethical "ought".
> (LRB 11)[60]

The comparison between the two domains is quickly explained: both ethical "oughts" and physical "musts" are manifestations of *rule-following behavior*. But what, then, is a rule? "As Augustine with Time, I knew what a rule was until asked. I asked myself and proceeded to become quite perplexed" (LRB 15). Beyond rhetoric, rules are a decisive issue in Sellars' thought. It is in LRB that we find the famous passage:

> To say that man is a rational animal, is to say that man is a creature not of *habits*, but of *rules*. When God created Adam, he whispered in his ear, "In all contexts of action you will recognize rules, if only the rule to grope for rules to recognize. When you cease to recognize rules, you will walk on four feet.
> (LRB 15)[61]

In finding an answer to what rules are, Sellars is particularly careful in avoiding once more two equally problematic extremes. With DeVries' words, his conception of rules must satisfy two criteria: "(i) it must not reject or neglect the normativity or prescriptive force of rules in favor of

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[60] "To make the ethical 'ought' into even the second cousin of the 'hurrah' of a football fan is completely to miss its significance" (LRB 11).

[61] Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953) was published four years later. The similarities between Sellars and Wittgenstein, both concerning the "Tractarian" and the *Investigations'* phase, cannot even be mentioned here. Although articles concerning the two exists (Bonino & Tripodi 2018, Brandt 2020), interest in the relationship between the two is only nascent and will hopefully undergo more extensive treatment in the literature.

empirical regularities; and (ii) it must not reify rules or normativity into abstract or ideal existences that we grasp in some non-empirical intuition" (DeVries 2005, p. 40). While the first point would lead to an overlap between rules and mere generalizations, thus depriving rules of their prescriptive force, in the second case the risk is that of an overtly intellectualistic conception of rules, conceiving them as detached or abstract principles, analogous to instructions on a piece of paper.

The distinction to be drawn in order to avoid the dilemma just mentioned is that between "tied behavior" (which, according to Sellars, applies mostly to animal behavior, but also covers the earliest stages of human language learning) and "free, rule-governed symbol activity" (LRB 16), which properly characterizes human experience alone. Again, the reference is to Kant's practical philosophy: regarding the aforementioned fallacy of reducing rules to logical generalizations, Sellars states that:

> [...] Kant saw all this quite clearly. He pointed out that moral action is action because of a rule, and said that to say this is equivalent to saying that to act morally is to act "so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.
> (LRB 18)

Whereas tied, constrained behavior merely *conforms to* rules, rule-governed behavior occurs *because of* a rule. What happens once we apply this distinction to linguistic rules?

It is at this point that we register the evolution with respect to PPE's footnote mentioned at the beginning. Indeed, the conception of linguistic rules now at play, which honors both merely *conforming* and properly embodied rules, is based on a fundamental *meshing* of normative concepts with causal inputs:

> Thus, as children we learn to understand the noise "blue" in much as the same way as the dog learns to understand the noise "bone", but we leave the dog behind in that the noise "blue" also comes to function for us in a system of rule-regulated symbol activity, and it is a *word*, a linguistic fact, a rule-regulated symbol only in so far as it functions in this linguistic system. The noise "blue" becomes a mediating link between what can suggestively be called a rule-regulated calculus, and a cluster of conditioned responses which binds us to our environment.
> (LRB 21)

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Even if Sellars' reverence to naturalism and the hope he places in scientific progress means that he mentions more than once that an adequate psychology of rule-governed behavior could theoretically arise (LRB 16), and he even speculates about the possibility that a "psychology of the higher processes" may, at a certain point, explain human behavior entirely (*ibid.*), for this to happen these perspectives would need to be supplemented with a fundamental aspect that they tend to overlook: the normatively laden side of linguistic apprehension. It is this latter aspect that properly distinguishes Sellars' approach from both overtly enthusiastic regulists, who rely on "sense meaning rules" to explain concept acquisition without realizing that, in order for a rule to be applied, a whole lot of other information needs to be in play; and from rationalists who justify knowledge as a special kind of acquaintance with universals – thus, committing the very same mistake as their rivals. Indeed, both perspectives result in concept empiricism. Through a blending of behavioristic and Kantian insights in accounting for the concept of rule-regulated behavior, Sellars shows how it is possible to interpret language as a rule-governed activity without falling into the trap of understanding it as obedience to explicit prescriptions, laws or norms. The alternative he outlines consists of a conception of rules that, to borrow a nice expression he introduces in LRB, *live in behavior*:[62]

> We saw that a rule, properly speaking isn't a rule unless it *lives* in behavior, rule-regulated behavior – even rule violating behavior. Linguistically we always operate *within* a framework of *living* rules. To *talk about* rules is to move *outside* the talked-about rules *into* another framework of living rules. (The snake which sheds one skin lives within another). In attempting to grasp rules *as rules* from without, we are trying to have our cake and eat it. To *describe* rules is to describe the *skeletons* of rules. A rule is *lived*, not *described*.
> (LRB 43)

By recognizing that, on the one hand, for sense meaning rules to work, the person being taught the meaning of "red" must already know when he sees red (LRB 23), and, on the other hand, by denying the existence of something like cognition unmediated by symbols, Sellars cuts the head off of both the descriptivist account of concept acquisition in terms of regulism, and of rationalist accounts that rely on the apprehension of abstract entities. In Sellars' account, as has been noted, "rules become embodied and embedded, they cease to be the abstract and detached

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[62] For an analysis of Sellars' "lived rules" in light of the debate between McDowell and Dreyfus, see Rey (2020).

principles that reinforce the Cartesian dichotomies of modern philosophy and enter the earthly and finite life of creatures like us" (Rey 2020, p. 501). How?

The answer, in brief, is that:

> The meaning of a linguistic symbol *as a linguistic symbol* is entirely constituted by the rules which regulate its use.
>
> (LRB 35)

In language, we see two dimensions co-existing one besides the other. When considered *as linguistic symbol* – that is, as a free, rule-regulated linguistic activity –, a piece of language behavior belongs to the realm of the *normative*. In a one year later unpublished manuscript, normative activity is described as an "activity in which the rule formulating the norm… enters as a causal factor" (OPL 2.222). On the opposite side, when a piece of language behavior is considered as a mere tied behavior, we see it as belonging to the causal order. In the manuscript, Sellars writes:

> 2.3232 The truth of the matter is that all words have conceptual meaning by virtue of their role in a system of rule-governed behavior. All conceptual meaning is, in the last analysis, implicit definition.
>
> 2.3233 What, then, do "observation words" have that other words do not? The answer is that in addition to their conceptual meaning, these words are related in a non-rule-governed manner to environmental and intraorganic sensory stimuli.
>
> 2.32331 The tie-up between rule-governed language and the world is not itself rule-governed.
>
> […]
>
> 2.3241 One and the same kind of utterance may serve both a rule-governed function (play a role in the language) and be a conditioned response to an external or internal stimulus.
>
> […]
>
> 2.3243 Observation expressions are expressions which play this dual role… [The noise "Daddie" was a conditioned response before it became a word, and observation word.]
>
> (OPL)

This is precisely the sense in which "[o]ur linguistic responses to the world have a double life: they are, given our training, simply *caused* by our encounter with the world; at the same time, they generally conform to the rules constitutive of the language. Thus are the real and the logical order knit together" (DeVries 2005, p. 46).

The topic of rules will come up again in the third chapter in relation to Sellars' development of inferentialism. For now, I have spelled out the gist of the new conception of rule introduced in 1949 merely with the aim of evaluating its compatibility with the formalism of pure pragmatics. This is precisely what I am going to do in the next section.

1.3.2 Pure Pragmatics' Formalism: Proposal 2

Returning to the main features of pure pragmatics, we recall how Sellars' use of the term "formal" to describe it was highly idiosyncratic.[63] This was registered as particularly problematic insofar as the concept was proved to be pivotal to Sellars' project: philosophy itself was indeed defined as a "formal theory of language" (PPE 7), and the formal treatment accorded to epistemic predicates was supposed to distinguish the proper philosophical domain from that of empirical sciences.

I am first going to go back at the provisional definition of "formal" as "metalinguistic" given in section 1.1.3 (the one I called PPF1) in light of the pragmatic toolkit spelled out in section 1.2. This allows me to enrich PPF1 with a key feature. After that, I confront this newly assessed definition of the formalism of pure pragmatics (that I am going to call PPF2) with LRB's enlarged notion of linguistic rule, and I will evaluate Olen's claim about their incompatibility.

Given Olen's preoccupation about the mutual exclusion of formal with factual predicates, the place to look to untie this knot – the one that, if true, would be fatal to pure pragmatics – is Sellars' conception of the relationship between formal and natural languages. Unfortunately, this is just another one among the many poorly treated topics in pure pragmatics essays: Sellars rarely addresses the question directly. One of the rare places where the question is dealt with is near the beginning of PPE. As a follow up to the claim according to which "formal predicates, whether syntactical, semantical, or pragmatic, are metalinguistic predicates" (PPE 8), Sellars draws an important implication out of an apparent dilemma. The problem concerns the applicability of syntactic predicates and properties to natural languages. Indeed, he notices, formal predicates seem to belong to the realm of calculus, "which is a model or norm for symbol behavior". [64] Calculus' special status as "model or norm" is granted by its being "*constituted* by formation and transformation rules". But this merely obfuscates the relationship of an alleged

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[63] See pp. 42-44.
[64] "(The terms 'model' and 'norm' are here used to suggest a problem, rather than indicate a solution)" (*ibid*).

"realm of norms" with natural languages: on the one hand, we recognize that it is nonsensical to claim that "human symbol behavior is constituted by syntactical formation and transformation rules" (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the criteria for validity and correctness of, for example, inferences, *are* determined by such rules, so that, in one way or another, *it must be* possible to attribute syntactic properties to natural languages. What, then, is the exact place of these rules? Do they inhabit natural languages? How can their interaction be explained? Here is Sellars' answer:

> Perhaps we can find a way out by drawing a distinction between language *as behavior* (that is, as the subject-matter of empirical psychology), and language-behavior *to the extent that it conforms, and as conforming, to the criteria of language as norm*; or, in the terminology we shall adopt, between language behavior *qua* behavioral fact, and language behavior *qua tokens* of language as *type*.
> (PPE 9)

The distinction between tokens and types, further clarified in the following paragraph, is thus originally introduced by Sellars in the context of the discussion of the relationship between linguistic norms and verbal behavior. To paraphrase the quotation below, the formal, metalinguistic analysis of pure pragmatics distinguishes between language as simple empirical behavior (as token), and language behavior "*to the extent that it conforms* […] *to the criteria of language as norm*" (as type). Of the two, only the latter amounts to the proper lens of pure pragmatics.[65] The type/token distinction, as we saw, is the primary, indispensable tool to set forth a metalinguistic analysis of the kind that Sellars has on his mind. Types, as I have recalled, stands for "linguistic universals", tokens for particular instances of the former. In RNWW, the relation between tokens and types is specified by Sellars in this way:

> For the moment it will help clarify the relation of symbol-types to symbol-tokens if we think of the former as norms or standards and of the latter as events which satisfy them.
> (RNWW 16, italics removed)

The same pieces of language-behavior, then, can be considered by two different points of view: either as "norms or standards", or as "events which satisfy them" (RNWW 16).

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[65] "Sellars insists that the pure pragmatic analysis of language does not consist in the empirical study of classes of linguistic occurrences, but in the formal study of linguistic types" (Turbanti 2019, p. 381).

Now, we also saw that the verb "means", *from a formal standpoint*, is not an object-language relation between words and objects. The sense of "meaning" in which Sellars is interested – that is, of meaning as belonging to pragmatic metalanguage – devoids it of any psychological connotation and considers it only in relation to the "formal roles" of predicates: as he claims in RNWW, "from the standpoint of epistemological analysis, the predicates of a language are differentiated from one another in terms of the formal roles they play in language" (RNWW 33). It is the (formal) metalinguistic treatment accorded to epistemological predicates that leads Sellars to realize that predicates need to be viewed as pieces of language performing a certain role or function. And indeed, a linguistic *type* is also described by Sellars in the same essay as "a *nexus* of formal functions" (ENWW 15). By gathering these insights together, the resulting definition of "formal" given in PPF1 ("the formalism attributed to pure pragmatics is to be interpreted as a metalinguistic kind of analysis") is confirmed, but it can be now further specified like this:

> **PPF2** = The formalism attributed to pure pragmatics is to be interpreted as a metalinguistic analysis focused on the functional role of certain linguistic items.

According to this new definition, a satisfying analysis of certain special predicates ("means", "is true", etc.) should be formal in the sense that it should capture their function in expressing metalinguistic rules which apply to object-language. While in pure pragmatics the "functionalist treatment" is restricted to a limited list of predicates, the list – as we began to see with LRB – will be soon enlarged by including, for instance, modal vocabulary of both deontological ("ought", "must"…) and alethic ("possibly", "necessarily"…) kind, up until it will later be concerned with the role played by linguistic items in general.

This definition takes pure pragmatics as an anticipation of the later functional role semantics that Sellars will develop further on. In this sense, I find Brandhoff's suggestion to look at Sellars' early formalist commitment as a "metatheoretical functionalism *avant la lettre*" to be particularly compelling (Brandhoff 2017, p. 65). In Brandhoff's words, "[w]hen Sellars refers to philosophy as pure formalism […], he champions the idea that the target of philosophical activity is language as a system of functional roles that serves as the norm for factual linguistic behavior" (*ibid.*).

The definition of the formalism of pure pragmatics in terms of PPF2 can be confirmed by two pieces of writings from 1950, that is, *after* Sellars' alleged "non-formalist" turn.

The first of these two pieces is a draft that Sellars circulated among the participants of a conference on semantics in Monterey, California, in August 1950, which resulted in "Outlines of a Philosophy of Language" (OPL). OPL, currently unpublished, is a manuscript in which the structure of pure pragmatics is set forth in Tractarian style. There, the term "pure pragmatics", is replaced by an analysis of the "phenomenology of language and meaning", treated in the first section of the manuscript.

How does Sellars conceive a "phenomenology of language and meaning"? An interesting and rather heterodox definition is ascribed to "phenomenology" in section 2:

> 2.1 Phenomenology is the exhibition of the norms of a language or region of a language by painstakingly and explicitly describing the structure of what one is conscious of in thinking about the subject-matter of the language. It is the exhibition of the norms of a language by the use of that language.
>
> 2.11 Phenomenology is rule-governed behavior enjoyed. Science is rule-governed behavior on trial. Phenomenology is contemplation, science is adventure.
>
> (OPL)

The phenomenology that Sellars is describing here corresponds precisely to PPF2. The metalinguistic stance assumed by this peculiar kind of phenomenology is indeed confirmed by the fact that this analysis is set forth using the same language that it is considering. Its attention is dedicated to the *norms* of a language − that, according to Sellars, transpire through the practical usage, in ordinary language, of predicates such as "means", "designates", and so on.

The other piece of writing confirming my (and Brandhoff's) understanding of the formal nature of pure pragmatics is a rather interesting footnote to "Question Marks, Sentences and Propositions" (QMSP), an article from the same year (1950) where Sellars introduces the notion of "functional role" and refines the type/token distinction by introducing some technical devices to distinguish different kinds of mentions (more precisely, asterisks are introduced to distinguish "pragmatic quotes" from "syntactical quotes). There, Sellars writes:

> This analysis (which was sketched in "Epistemology and the New Way of Words," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 44, 1947, pp. 653ff.) leads to the conclusion that the *formal* study of a language does

not consist in the study of a language *qua* patterns of marks, but rather in what might legitimately be called the phenomenology of linguistic functions. Phenomenology, as I interpret it, is the systematic exhibition of the rules of a language by the *use* of *that same language* for this purpose. The phenomenology of language is the exhibitory use of syntactical and semantical meta-languages, meta-meta-languages, etc. We exhibit the rules whereby we use such words as "sentence", "true", "actual", etc. I have come to realize that my use of the word formal in several papers has been confused and misleading.

(QMSP 9n3)

This footnote is particularly important, not only because it corresponds to the only place (at least as far as I know) where Sellars admits the shortcomings of his early treatment of the adjective "formal", but because here, it is reasonable to assume, Sellars gives us the key to a *correct* interpretation of the adjective. And the correct interpretation is the one concerning precisely those *linguistic functions* performed by certain elements (i.e., the goal of the metalinguistic analysis of pure pragmatics as I delineated in PPF2, which corresponds to the goal of the "phenomenology of linguistic functions" described above).

Now that the new definition of pure pragmatics' formal nature has been given some plausibility, I can finally discuss Olen's thesis about its incompatibility with Sellars' later writings.

First: functionalism and functional role semantics are traits that will remain steadfast throughout Sellars' later writings. Indeed, his functional role semantics is one of his biggest and more characteristic accomplishments in philosophy and theory of meaning especially. If we interpret pure pragmatics' formalism in line with his functionalism, the idea of abandoning pure pragmatics lends credence to the idea of its possible *evolution*. Here, I again side with Brandhoff in saying that "the special sense in which Sellars, in his earliest essays, spoke of philosophy as a 'formal' enterprise remains by and large valid after 1948" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 56).

This surely corroborates the thesis about a *continuity* between Sellars' early and later writings, and it weakens Olen's thesis about pure pragmatics as a failed enterprise. However, it still does not untangle the knot concerning the fact that Sellars, as it appears, for instance, from PPE's footnote number 10 (here quoted on page 67), tells us that formal and factual concepts are mutually exclusive. But are they really? This calls for an analysis of how he conceived, philosophically and metaphilosophically, the relationship of one with the other.

The point – that is also conceded by Olen (Olen 2016a, pp. 109ff), but that apparently is not enough to cause him to change his mind – is that the inclusion of empirical, factual, and

psychological considerations in the analysis *does not* contradict pure pragmatics' anti-psychologistic stance.

In RNWW, Sellars devotes a long footnote to the explanation of what he means by "psychologism". His idea of what counts as psychologism is quite broad, and it includes two different tendencies:

> [U]nder the broader heading of *psychologism* as the confusion of epistemology with psychology, we can distinguish two sub-forms according as epistemology or empirical psychology predominate in the confusion. If the former, epistemological content appears in the guise of psychological acts and objects sui generis (*Wesenschau*, universals as apprehendible objects, intentional acts, intentional objects, etc.). These are ranged alongside the facts of empirical psychology, which persist in the confusion. This first sub-form can be called *epistemologism* (Plato, Aristotle, Kant). On the other hand, if empirical psychology dominates, we have *psychologism* in the narrower sense attacked by Husserl (who was himself guilty of epistemologism). Here the epistemological (which has less survival power) tends to be reduced to a descriptive study of *how we think*. Epistemologism has the virtue of preserving philosophical content, though at the expense of constructing a fictitious psychology. Psychologism in the narrower sense lacks merit as philosophy, although the philosopher and psychologist can join hands in approving its avoidance of pseudo-psychology.
> (RNWW 15 fn3)

The first kind of error ("epistemologism") is one that confuses philosophical concepts with those of empirical psychology. The second kind of error ("psychologism in the narrow sense") reduces philosophical concepts to descriptive concepts and corresponds to that to which analytical philosophers are themselves committed (at least according to Sellars' reading). Now, neither epistemologism, nor psychologism in the narrow sense, claim that simply by mentioning or even *incorporating* empirical concepts into a philosophical analysis of language does commit itself to the level of a mere descriptive analysis. Rather, what matters is not confusing genuine epistemological content with psychological content, or reducing epistemological content to descriptive analysis. Therefore, even when including empirical concepts into his analysis – as happens in LRB –, Sellars still does not contradict pure pragmatics' anti-psychologism.

Let me look again at PPE's footnote number 10. There, we saw that Sellars distinguishes formal and factual treatments of language. Be it either formal *or* factual, an analysis of linguistic phenomena always needs to resort to a metalanguage. Thus, we have a formal meta-language

(of the pure, pragmatic kind – which includes the usual list of predicates we know), and a factual meta-language (of the psychological kind – which includes "concepts, such as *goal-behavior*, *substitute stimuli*, etc.", PPE 41 fn10).

Now, Sellars is clear (and strict) enough to declare that the inclusion of syntactic and semantic predicates in the factual meta-language does not make factual meta-language less factual: "As long as we are dealing with languages in the factual sense, we are not making use of the concepts of the formal theory of language, even when we talk about *sentences*, *meaning*, and *having the same meaning as*" (*ibid*.). But if for a psychologist it is possible to speak *factually* about formal predicates, why should it not be possible for the philosopher to speak *formally* about factual predicates? The latter option seems to be at least open. Indeed, Sellars never excludes it. A piece of advice in this sense is given to the reader at the very beginning of the same essay:

> Logic and mathematics are not empirical sciences nor do they constitute branches of any empirical science. They are not inductive studies of symbol formation and transformation behavior. (*And if, at a later stage in our argument, we shall find* formal *science dealing with language* facts, *it will not be because logic is discovered by a more subtle analysis to belong to empirical science after all, but rather because of a less naïve analysis of the relation of language to fact*).
> (PPE 2, italics mine)

The purely pragmatic meta-language addresses exactly the same pieces of language behavior considered by psychology. Each piece of language behavior, however, is considered only "*to the extent that it conforms, and as conforming, to the criteria of language as norm*" (PPE 9). This is in no way different from LRB's metaphilosophical claim about the irreducibility of a special kind of lexicon (normative, moral, of the causal modalities) to empirical description, and it even anticipates Sellars' introduction of the distinction between tied and free rule-regulated linguistic behavior.

A real radical, irreconcilable metaphilosophical shift (of the kind that would not have made it possible to save pure pragmatics) should have involved a shift in thinking, from one moment to the next, regarding the usual list of predicates being considered as actually reducible to descriptive accounts. But the inclusion of behavioral considerations into the analysis of linguistic phenomena presented in LRB does not make linguistic phenomena less reducible to factual, descriptive accounts than they were in pure pragmatics. Insofar as the behavioristic description of linguistic behavior is not considered sufficient to explain linguistic phenomena, the

metaphilosophy assessed in pure pragmatics concerning 1) the overcoming of two equally mistaken poles and 2) the attention to the normative side of linguistic phenomena, remains largely valid after pure pragmatics. Indeed, instead of being eliminated, it is only (luckily for us) expanded, enlarged, and sophisticated. In LRB, for instance, the list of *sui generis* predicates broadens to include moral ("ought", "need to", "correct", etc.) and modal terms ("necessarily", "possibly"). The "sound pragmatism" envisioned at the beginning of LRB is nothing but the materialization of that "stereoscopic fusion" of rationalism and empiricism towards which pure pragmatics was already striving. However, this fusion is no longer restricted to the consideration of linguistic phenomena alone. Indeed, Sellars realizes that linguistic phenomena are embedded and inseparable from practices, habits, behavior, and so on. A "sound pragmatism", then, must be able to account for both sides living in language *as used*: the normatively laden, and the causally elicited.

If the formal nature of pure pragmatics is taken to be along the lines that I have proposed above (as PPF2), the alleged *metaphilosophical* incompatibility fades into a softer, more easily treatable, *terminological* incompatibility. Although a change between PPE, ENWW, RNWW and all the articles that follows is undeniable, it does not invest the philosophical core of Sellars' proposal.

In philosophy, we are not used to thinking that some things may have more trivial reasons than we think. Sellars' abandonment of pure pragmatics terminology and his insistence on its formalism may have a simpler explanation than that concerning a profound change in his philosophical beliefs (after all, in his "early" phase, he was *thirty-five years old*. Not exactly a philosophical novice). One reason may be the fact that the three articles did not enjoy much success.[66] Or maybe Sellars simply chose to give up on his attempts to establish a new terminology (pragmatics as a "third branch" to be added to syntax and semantics) and he "moved" the core of the analysis conducted under the name "pure pragmatics" to the more philosophically dignified term "semantics", which he went on to use after 1950.[67]

The deep structure of pure pragmatics, as I see it, does not disappear. Rather, it undergoes further changes until finally evolving into Sellars' later well-known transcendental linguistics. I devote the last section of this chapter to this latter point.

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[66] For instance, see the caustic review from Nagel quoted in Olen (2016a, p. 75).

[67] This seems to be consistent with footnote 29 to "Empiricism and Abstract Entities" (EAE), a text published in 1963 but written in 1954: "In the remainder of the paper I shall drop the use of 'pragmatical' (on which I have insisted in earlier publications) and, to avoid confusion, follow current practice by using the term 'semantical' in a broad sense such that 'observation predicate' and 'confirmable' can be said to be semantical predicates" (EAE, p. 453 fn29). It is really just a "pragmatic" shift, then.

1.3.3 From Pure Pragmatics to Transcendental Linguistics

The influence of Kant on Sellars' philosophy is usually acknowledged as starting with the publication of *Science and Metaphysics* (SM) in 1968. While before that date the Kantian influence is either considered implicit or denied at all, after 1968 the influence becomes manifest. After the publication of SM, indeed, several articles follows where Kant's philosophy is exploited as the "*lingua franca* which makes communication between philosophers […] possible" (SM 1).[68] The general approach of Sellars to Kant is characterized by being "filtered" by considerations on language – something that, given the importance of the "linguistic turn" in twentieth century philosophy, should not surprise. Sellars writes indeed that:

> [O]nce it is appreciated that Kant's account of the conceptual structures involved in experience can be given a linguistic turn and, purged of the commitment to innateness to which given his historical setting he was inevitably led, his theory can be seen to add essential elements to an analytic account of the resources a language must have to be the bearer of empirical meaning, empirical truth, and, to bring things to their proper focus, empirical knowledge.
> (OAPK 31)

Can the project of pure pragmatics, as I have described it, be considered as "in line" with Sellars' later explicit recognition of the influence that Kant played in the development of his views? To the justification of a positive answer to this question is devoted this last section.

Earlier in the chapter, I had the chance to mention that this view was firmly opposed by Peter Olen. Indeed, Olen explicitly argued against a Kantian interpretation of Sellars' initial project (Olen 2016a, pp. 64-5, 84-7, 111). In particular, he firmly rules out the possibility of interpreting the formal nature of pure pragmatics as "a broadly Kantian commitment to transcendental requirements of empirically meaningful languages" (*ibid*., p. 64). He argued that interpreting "formal" as "transcendental" "ignores the historical context in which Sellars' early arguments developed" (*ibid*.)[69] and, on the whole, marks a continuity between Sellars' early and later

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[68] I am talking about the essays collected in KTM by Jeffrey Sicha in 2002.

[69] "What weighs most against reading too strong of a Kantian influence into Sellars' early writings is his historical context. Although somewhat out-of-step in the American lineage of analytic philosophy, transcendental arguments in the 1940s would have been seen as particularly problematic to articulate in terms of then-contemporary accounts of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics" (*ibid*., p. 65).

publications that, in his view, never was (*ibid.*, p. 87). But is it really mistaken to look at pure pragmatics as a transcendental project? Can PPF2 accommodate a transcendental level of analysis? If this was proved to be possible, it would be yet another reason to think about Sellars' early project as consistent with his later meta-philosophy.

On my side, I have emphasized from the outset how, in writing this chapter, it was never my intention to claim that Kant was Sellars' major influence in the years between 1947 and 1954, nor that he had already identified the core of what would be the later SM. However, the path that I have traced shows that some core Kantian insights were certainly present in Sellars' early writings, and that the idea of reformulating Kantian insights into a contemporary language – something that would explicitly characterize his later philosophy – was at least already envisioned.

I cannot but start from a curious remarks made by Sellars himself. It is a footnote to RNWW, where Sellars writes:

> We have been insisting that epistemological predicates, whether they appear in the mouth of the philosopher or the common-sense man, have the same formal status as logical predicates in the narrower sense. (I should not object to the term 'transcendental logic' in place of 'pure pragmatics').
> (RNWW 58 fn17)

Being Sellars an extremely concise writer, the reference to transcendental logic is hardly accidental. How can we make sense of it?[70] I will proceed as follows: first, I sketch an account of what "transcendental" in general means for Kant. Then, I turn to what "transcendental logic" amounts to in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the end, I confront them with my reading of pure pragmatics as described in this chapter. In this final part, I briefly refer to Sellars' later essay "Some Remarks on Kant's Theory of Experience" (KTE, 1967).

The meaning of "transcendental" is, like virtually any other piece of Kantian terminology, matter of dispute. The Cambridge Kant Lexicon (Wuerth 2021)'s entry for "transzendental" distinguishes three different senses according to which a cognition can be described as "transcendental". The second sense relies on one of Kant's most well-known definitions for it, appearing in the Introduction to the first *Critique*:

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[70] My thoughts on this matter have benefitted from the discussions I had the chance to have with August Buholzer during my stay at the University College Dublin.

I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general. A system of such concepts would be called transcendental philosophy.

(KrV A11-12)

The author of the entry, Birken-Bertsch, takes the "concepts" in the "system of concepts" to be referred to the categories (Wuerth 2021, p. 466). Categories are, in their most general definition, a priori concepts through which the understanding can "understand something in the manifold of intuition, i.e., *think an object for it*" (KrV A80/B106, my emphasis).[71] In their being transcendental, they are *pure* − that is, they lack empirical content. In this sense, transcendental reflection is concerned with spelling down a "system" collecting the general structures (categories) through which the subject can think of an object. In simpler terms, a priori cognitions reveal the conditions for the possibility of cognition or its use a priori (KrV A56/B80). What about transcendental *logic*? Definitions are discussed by Kant both at the beginning of the Transcendental Logic (which includes the Transcendental Analytics and the Transcendental Dialectic) and at the beginning of the second book of the Transcendental Analytics (Analytics of Principles). Relevant to the definition of a transcendental logic is, first, the distinction between the logic of the general (*allgemein*), that "contains the absolutely necessary rules of thinking", and of the particular (*besondere*), that "contains the rules for correctly thinking about a certain kind of objects" (*ibid.*, A52/B77). The logic of the general use of understanding (also called *Elementarlogik*)[72] is in turn divided into pure (*rein*) and applied (*angewandt*) logic: where the former "abstracts from all empirical conditions under which our understanding is exercised", the latter is "directed to the rules of the use of the understanding under the subjective empirical conditions that psychology teaches us" but it remains *pure* insofar it "has to do with strictly *a priori* principles, and is a **canon of the understanding** and reason" (A53/B77). All logic, according to its definitions, is, basically, a reflection (carried out by the understanding itself) on the *rules* governing the understanding. What is the specificity of transcendental logic, then?

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[71] "Kantian 'categories' are concepts of logical form, where 'logical' is to be taken in a broad sense, roughly equivalent to 'epistemic'. To say of a judging that it has a certain logical form is to classify it and its constituents with respect to their epistemic powers" (KTE 23).

[72] Here "understanding" is to be considered in its broadest sense, encompassing all three higher faculties (understanding, judgment and reason).

Unlike general logic, transcendental logic does not abstract from all contents of cognition. In fact, transcendental logic has as its specific subject matter

> not every *a priori* cognition […], but only that by means of which we cognize that and how certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible (i.e., the possibility of cognition or its use *a priori*). Hence neither space nor any geometrical determination of it *a priori* is a transcendental representation, but only the cognition that these representations are not of empirical origin at all and the possibility that they can nevertheless be related *a priori* to objects of experience can be called transcendental.
> (KrV A56/B81)

Transcendental logic, unlike general logic, does not "abstract from the relation that the spontaneous faculty bears to receptivity, or that cognitions bear to objects in synthetic judgement" (Wuerth 2021, p. 494). In this sense, according to Kant, transcendental knowledge is a special kind of knowledge about knowledge. As Buholzer recalls, "[i]f logic is the systematic study of mental activities, Kant's transcendental standpoint brings in an especially reflective kind of thinking *about* object-directed thoughts. […] In more contemporary terms, there is something distinctively metacognitive about transcendental logic" (*forthcoming*).

In the reconstruction that I have provided in this chapter, pure pragmatics reflects the attempt, on Sellars' side, to spell out the necessary resources for a language to yield knowledge of the world. These necessary resources, which Sellars identifies in a "stratum" of special concepts – metalinguistic semantic predicates – have an epistemological function in that they structure the object-language level. In bringing out metalinguistic rules, they make *description* possible. In this sense, pure pragmatics holds towards these predicates a relation similar to the one that transcendental logic holds towards the categories: both pure pragmatics and transcendental logic are investigations into a "higher level" than the one in which we are immersed, which brings out its conditions of possibility. Precisely as transcendental logic is concerned, by investigating on the most general acts of thinking (the categories), in accounting for the way in which an object can be thought, pure pragmatics accounts for the "pure theory of the application of a language, of the relation of a meaningful language to experience" (RNWW 21) through the study of the most general acts of linguistic functions.

Now, besides the similarities that *I* see between pure pragmatics and Transcendental Logic, an explicit parallel of pure pragmatics with a transcendental project is traced by Sellars himself.

His idea of mapping the fundamental structures that allows one to refer to the outer world – or, that is the same, the idea of mapping the structures concerning the conditions of applicability of a language to the world – is indeed precisely what will be found at the heart of Sellars' later conception of transcendental linguistics. The quote is long, but telling:

> To construe the concepts of meaning, truth, and knowledge as metalinguistic concepts pertaining to linguistic behavior (and dispositions to behave) involves construing the latter as governed by *ought-to-bes* [descriptive patterns of behavior, CC] which are actualized as uniformities by the training that transmits language from generation to generation. Thus, if logical and (more broadly) epistemic categories express general features of the *ought-to-bes* (and corresponding uniformities) which are necessary to the functioning of language as a cognitive instrument, epistemology, in this context, becomes the theory of this functioning – in short *transcendental linguistics.*
>
> Transcendental linguistics differs from empirical linguistics in two ways: (1) it is concerned with language as conforming to epistemic norms which are themselves formulated in the language; (2) it is general in the sense in which what Carnap describes as "general syntax" is general; i.e., it is not limited to the epistemic functioning of historical languages in the actual world. It attempts to delineate the general features that would be common to the epistemic functioning of any language in any possible world. As I once put it, epistemology, in the "new way of words", is the theory of what it is to be a language that is about a world in which it is used.
> (KTE 40-41)[73]

Pure pragmatics and transcendental linguistics perform the same transcendental task. This task is here defined, in general terms, as the task of bringing out the resources necessary for any language to achieve empirical knowledge. The basic idea of transcendental at play coincides, as anticipated, with a "reflection on the most general norms and structures constitutive of cognitive engagement with the world" (DeVries 2005, p. 66).

The reformulation of epistemology as transcendental linguistics, based on metalinguistic treatment of epistemological concepts already envisaged in the very first article published by Sellars (PPE) seem, in my view, precisely to make it possible to "connects his [Sellars', CC] early works with his later, explicitly Kantian project by reading this influence *back* into his earliest publications" (Olen 2016, p. 110), an internalist reading the possibility of which was firmly

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[73] Should this not be enough explicit, Sellars himself puts a footnote at the end of the quote in which he recommends the reader to go back to RNWW (KTE 41 fn11).

denied by Olen. As already said, this is not to say that Sellars was spelling out a minute and philologically accurate analysis on Kantian texts, but this is something that he will *never* do – not even in later works, where references to Kant will be both undeniable and integral to his conception of philosophy. In this sense, the reason why references to Kant are so few and scattered in essays from 1947-8 could be seen not so much in the fact that Kant had a negligible role, but rather in a certain (unfortunate) Sellarsian *modus operandi* according to which he appropriates some specific ideas without openly acknowledging their origins or inspirations.

CHAPTER 2.

The *Via Media* Between Rationalism and Empiricism Applied:

Foundations of a "Sound Pragmatism"

In the first chapter of this work, I analyzed Sellars' project to develop a pure pragmatics. Pure pragmatics is widely regarded as a failed project quickly set aside by Sellars once he realized its non-feasibility. Because of this, not much attention was accorded to pure pragmatics in the literature, nor did it enjoy much praise from scholars. A first look at the writings published between 1947 and 1948 by Sellars seems to corroborate the impression that this lack of attention is not, after all, *so* misguided. Moreover, the project seems to disappear completely after the publication of "Realism and the New Way of Words" in 1948, and it is hardly mentioned by Sellars again.

However, if one sees the causes of the failure of pure pragmatics in Sellars' acknowledgement that it was impossible to formalize that special branch of linguistic studies known as "pragmatics" during the 1940s, then it is not entirely correct to say that Sellars *abandoned* it: rather, it would be more correct to say that Sellars never actually endorsed such an endeavor. Indeed, according to the characterization of pure pragmatics provided in the previous chapter, neither Sellars' conception of "pragmatics", nor his notion of the "formalism" of pure pragmatics as PPF2 corresponds to the meaning that the two terms had back then. Pure pragmatics, as I have hopefully shown, is conceived by Sellars as something that is more similar to an adequate epistemology to be established after the "linguistic turn", than to a formalized branch of linguistic studies. This adequate epistemology has at its core a "New Nominalism" (RNWW 16) which envisions his later functional role semantics, based on a conception of formalism that is conceived *not* as a sort of logico-formal "shaping" of linguistic practices, but as a special metalinguistic treatment focused on the functional roles of certain special (that is, normative) predicates.

After having spelled out the main features and technical apparatus of pure pragmatics, I have devoted some effort to supporting the idea that the deep structure of the project is not at odds with Sellars' later philosophical developments. On the contrary, the foundations of semantical theory (here I intend it in its more general sense as a theory about meaning) presented in pure pragmatics will surely undergo further developments in Sellars' later philosophy, but they are never going to be denied or contradicted, and in fact the nominalist approach which lies at its

foundation will always be among the main pillars of Sellars' philosophy *tout-court*. Besides, in describing pure pragmatics, I have also described its metaphilosophical scope as not being limited to its formalism, but as including an original setting which foresees and strives towards an *Aufhebung*-like overcoming of "rationalists" vs. "empiricists" opposition. This opposition, under differing guises, and the "stereoscopic fusion" to which it tends, will also never be abandoned by Sellars. This same opposition is indeed in the background of the essays produced during a couple of crucial years of Sellars' philosophical development which followed the pure pragmatics "era", to which this chapter is devoted, and which will inform the rest of his philosophy under the guise of the contrast between the two images.

During 1948-1950, Sellars published some articles devoted to apparently disconnected topics: natural necessity and the causal modalities (CIL, LRB), particulars and universals (LCP, CIL), type/token distinction and its relation to functional roles (QMSP, ILE), moral and prescriptive lexicon (LRB). In all this, the earlier project of pure pragmatics seems to have silently disappeared from the scene: although the term is not *entirely* dropped (it appears, for instance, in CIL 33 fn17), nothing like the earlier specific focus on pragmatics is to be found anymore.

Following and enriching the "continuist" line of interpretation that I am proposing, in what follows I provide an analysis of essays published immediately after pure pragmatics which emphasizes their consistency with it. The connection of these texts one with the other, as yet unexplored in the literature, is alluded to by Sellars himself on more than one occasion (admittedly, mostly in footnotes), when he traces connections that bind them together.

In pure pragmatics, Sellars' dissatisfaction with both rationalism and empiricism manifested itself as an attempt to carve out a space for classical rationalistic themes within a strictly naturalistic framework that was palatable to empiricists. As he claimed in RNWW, "[r]ationalism gave grammar, but contaminated it with platonizing factualism. Classical empiricism threw out the platonizing, but continued to factualize, and confused the grammar of philosophical predicates by trying to identify them with psychological predicates" (RNWW 4). In other words, Sellars engaged with an attempt to translate substantive rationalist intuitions ("as causal necessity, synthetic a priori knowledge, intentionality, ethical intuitionism, the problem of universals, etc., etc.", AR p. 282) into the vocabulary of his New Way of Words.[74]

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[74] As DeVries remarks, this distinctive stance is part and parcel of Sellars' conviction that "virtually every important voice in the chorus of Western Philosophy has something to teach us. [...] When he considers opposed positions, it is almost never the case that he simply sides with one against the other. There will always be important truth lying within each position that only a subtle dialectic can tease out and reconcile. For instance, Sellars is widely known for his attack on empiricism, particularly the logical empiricism that was ascendant during his schooling.

As we are going to see, these themes (and many others) will be faced by Sellars one by one in the following years.

In the first part of this chapter (2.1), the guiding thread is provided by the notion of the synthetic *a priori*. Given the premises concerning the "hybrid" nature of Sellars' philosophy, it should come as no surprise that he did *not* follow the mainstream route in analytic philosophy (that is, the *tout-court* rejection of the synthetic *a priori* as a nonsensical notion) and instead adopted an original position, that works precisely as an example of the cross-fertilization of traditions that became his trademark and legacy. While Sellars certainly agreed with empiricists that classical "rationalist" conceptions of extra-logical necessity were now so tarnished that, if only "the fire burning under the smoke" (LRB 39) was to be saved, a radical change was necessary, he also thought that the empiricists' attempts, by denying the synthetic *a priori* any legitimacy, ultimately went too far. In this regard, I show how Sellars' re-interpretation of the notion does justice to the demands of both rationalists *and* logical empiricists, in the wake of that "sound pragmatism" of which he talks in LRB. The section is opened by the presentation of a debate on synthetic *a priori* propositions involving Husserl and Schlick. I argue that this debate, condensed in a famous paper by Schlick translated by Sellars himself in 1949, constitutes the covert background upon which Sellars builds his reflections on the topic.

In the second and third part of the chapter (2.2 and 2.3), I tackle the problems of universal-particular relation and of the causal modalities, which are both interconnected one with the other (even if in a way that is not always easy to clarify), and with the theme of the synthetic *a priori* itself. The fundamental outlook is that of a nominalistic strategy in which universal talk is basically "material mode" counterpart of metalinguistic claims, that is, abstract entities play neither a direct explanatory role, nor a causal role in explaining thought, meaning, or intentionality. Rather, "[a]ny abstractions that seem, as such, to play an explanatory role must be embodied in order to acquire any causal efficacy, and the primary way in which abstractions can be embodied is in language-like items" (DeVries 2017, p. 88). This is, in a nutshell, the core of "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (CIL, 1948), which is the focus of section 2.2 particularly. In CIL, Sellars confronts C.I. Lewis on the notion of *real connection* and tries to account for the necessity of laws of nature without resorting to the introduction of an *ad hoc* logical connective. The analysis provided in CIL confirms Sellars'

Yet his attack on empiricism is as much an attack on its traditional rival, rationalism [...]. He works tremendously hard to develop and defend nominalism, but a large part of that effort is devoted to showing how to account for most of what the Platonist wants to say" (DeVries 2005, pp. 18-9).

sensitivity to Husserl's distinction between logical and extra-logical necessity but also shows how the phenomenologist's insight could not be welcomed into Sellars' philosophy before undergoing profound changes.

Section 2.3 is devoted to the initial but profound re-thinking of the subject-predicate relation that will also be treated extensively in Sellars' much later production. In early essays, the topic is treated through the problem of particulars, to which Sellars devotes the essays "On the Logic of Complex Particulars" (LCP, 1949) and "Particulars" (P, 1952). Here, I emphasize how Sellars' treatment of the problem of particulars once more steers a sort of third way between two extremes (this time, bare particularism and bundle theories), the outcome of which is a "tiding up" of the ontological and "thingifying" jargon characterizing Western metaphysics.

At the end of this chapter, I will have hopefully shown that there are enough thematic continuities with the previous period such that the "sound pragmatism" envisioned in 1949 is revealed in the Sellarsian thesis of psychological nominalism about meaning and abstract entities. The preparatory analysis provided here thus prepares the full disclosure of Sellars' non-relational, functional role semantics that is the subject matter of chapter 3 and that he would never abandon throughout his career.

2.1 Form and Matter in Logic: Sellars' Synthetic *a Priori*

Nineteenth-century epistemology was deeply involved in and influenced by the scientific developments of the time. The Einsteinian revolution and the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries elicited general suspicion towards any form of assumed eternal and invariable truth. Almost every part of Kantian epistemic setup was seriously questioned, and philosophers gravitating around the Vienna Circle focused their attention on the analytic/synthetic distinction and on the admissibility of synthetic *a priori* principles. Most of them – with, of course, notable exceptions[75] – agreed on the then-widespread rejection of Kantian heritage, which took the form of criticism of the *a priori* (now variously conceived as merely relative), and of the rejection of the synthetic *a priori* altogether.

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[75] It goes without saying that not all logical positivists shared the same attitude towards the distinction: Carnap and Reichenbach were, in this sense, examples of an alternative approach. For a brief overview of theirs and other approaches, see Gironi (2015). For a more comprehensive outlook on Kant's legacy within the analytic tradition, see Coffa (1991) and Hanna (2001).

The "authentically *a priori*" label was accorded only to mathematics and logic, whose exciting developments were accounted by their analyticity. In contrast, anything intertwined with the factual and the empirical – and, therefore, a source of truly synthetic knowledge – was doomed to forever belonging to an *a posteriori* domain. The resulting dichotomy between the analytic *a priori* and the synthetic *a posteriori* – with the denial of anything in between – was especially prevalent among those whom Sellars identified as "empirically minded" philosophers – a group of people that he rarely calls by their proper name, but that we can identify with a certain confidence in the Wieners mentioned above. The rejection of the synthetic *a priori* was indeed considered a hallmark of logical empiricism: "in empirically-minded circles, it is axiomatic that there is no synthetic *a priori*, while the very expression itself has a strong negative emotive meaning", remarks Sellars in the closing paragraph from "Inference and Meaning" (IM 48).

The debate on the analytic/synthetic distinction included questions that could not be solved until many years later. The confusion in which the distinction precipitated in twentieth century stemmed in part from deeper problems concerning the definition of logic itself.

Though we are today accustomed to the Bolzanian definition of logical consequence, which identifies formal logical truths through the "substitutional strategy", according to which a sentence is logically true if its non-logical expressions can be substituted with other non-logical expressions without its truth-value being altered, this account is also somewhat disappointing since it simply presupposes, or at least takes for granted, a pre-existing distinction between terms which count as logical and those that count as non-logical (Heyndels 2022).[76] Besides, the myriad of inferences not conforming to this criterion, and yet deductively true, was simply pushed out of the domain of strictly logical truths, without the problem posed by their validity being addressed. These inferences included cases of Bolzanian truths which were puzzling at least. Take the inference from "x is red" to "x is colored", which is clearly a good inference. Is it analytic or synthetic? And what about the inference that goes from "Bob is running" to "Bob is moving"? This problem, whose history dates back to medieval logic,[77] put into question the formal nature of logic and the very distinction between logical and non-logical terms.

Throughout the first chapter, I have insisted on Sellars' consideration for external "constraints" influencing the functioning of our language. Sellars presented our language as exhibiting a sort

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[76] It is interesting to note that, as has been pointed out, Bolzano (and Tarski) themselves "were unsure about what counts as logic" (Simons 1992). For a discussion of this topic, I recommend this paper.

[77] I am grateful to Sybren Heyndels for having pointed this out to me. The distinction between formal and material inferences was indeed treated in medieval logic as the difference between formal and material *consequence*. For more on this, see Read (2012) and Toppel & Ramharter (2020).

of deep "structure" that outstrips simple formal validity. This structure, that in no way can be "captured" through the lens of logical analysis, was precisely the reason why he postulated *conformation* rules besides formation and transformation rules. In saying that conformation rules describe the primitive predicates' meaning of our language, Sellars was likely thinking of those propositions that seem to be true not in virtue of their form, but of their content. As a matter of fact, they were the propositions at the center of a debate that involved the two major philosophical currents of their time, that is, logical empiricism and phenomenology – a dispute which Sellars followed quite closely, and to which I now turn.

2.1.1 Prequel: Husserl and Schlick on the *Material A Priori*

One historical note that has never been given much prominence in Sellars' literature concerns his occasional activity as a translator from German and French, languages he had the opportunity to study during his travels in Europe. Although the quasi-biographical nature of this fact precludes us from overestimating its importance, Sellars naturally must have been quite familiar with the texts he translated. Since in his published materials Sellars was never exactly generous with quotations or references to the works of other philosophers, this parenthetic activity as a translator may help identify certain conceptual connections that would otherwise be lost in the already extensive (and almost impossible to reconstruct) web of ideas, theories, and intellectual figures from which Sellars' philosophy sprang.

In 1949, Sellars and Herbert Feigl edited a bulky anthology with the intention of gathering together the most significant contributions of "modern philosophical analysis" (Feigl & Sellars 1949, v) inspired by the humble intention of bringing order to an ever-expanding ocean of reading materials. This publishing operation was anything but insignificant, for it marked a decisive moment of self-consciousness for the tradition that was slowly beginning to recognize itself as "analytic philosophy".[78]

The editors wrote in the Preface:

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[78] Tripodi 2015 identifies Nagel's "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe" (Nagel 1936) as the first place where the term "analytic philosophy" is used to indicate something like what it is intended today. Although the article is dated 1936, "it was not until after World War II that the feeling of belonging to a common, comprehensive philosophical tradition would become more deeply rooted and widespread among analytic philosophers" (Tripodi 2015, p. 122 – my transl.).

The conception of philosophical analysis underlying our selections springs from two major traditions in recent thought, the Cambridge movement deriving from Moore and Russell, and the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle (Wittgenstein, Schlick, Carnap), together with the Scientific Empiricism of the Berlin group (led by Reichenbach). These, together with related developments in America stemming from Realism and Pragmatism, and the relatively independent contributions of the Polish logicians have increasingly merged to create an approach to philosophical problems which we frankly consider a decisive turn in the history of philosophy.

(Feigl & Sellars 1949, vi)

The volume *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (Feigl & Sellars 1949) collected articles published elsewhere (as in the case of Sellars' RNWW, which here appears in a revised version), some of which were made available to the American philosophical community for the first time through their translation. Such was the case with Moritz Schlick's influential article "Gibt es ein Materiales Apriori?" (Schlick 1949) published in Vienna in late 1931, which quickly became a manifesto for the new generation of philosophers.[79] In this article, Schlick targets the phenomenological approach to the analytic/synthetic distinction through a strong critique of Husserl and Scheler's notion of *material a priori*.[80] This critique's iconic character is well represented by Herbert Feigl's declaration, in the *Introduction*, that "[a]ll forms of empiricism agree in repudiating the existence of synthetic a priori knowledge" (Feigl & Sellars 1949, pp. 13-4) – which was an almost identical cast of Schlick's view on the topic ("The empiricism which I represent believes itself to be clear on the point that, as a matter of principle, all propositions are either synthetic *a posteriori* or tautologous; synthetic *a priori* propositions seem to it to be a logical impossibility" (Schlick 1949, p. 281)).

According to the reading that I am going to provide, the dispute over the material *a priori* strongly influenced Sellars' reflections, and it specifically informed his re-conception of conformation rules as synthetic *a priori* principles. Specifically, his conception of conformation

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[79] Regarding its impact on the philosophical community, De Santis remarks that "[i]f the text that gave form to the mature reflection of *der geistige Führer* of the so-called 'Vienna Circle' and that represented the peak of a twenty-year *Auseinandersetzung* with phenomenology was soon held as a required reading for an entire generation of Anglo-American philosophers, it is thanks to the 1949 translation by Wilfrid Sellars" (De Santis 2015, p. 163).

[80] To be sure, although Schlick's article has been most often considered as a direct attack on Husserl, the main references to be found in the text are to Scheler (2014 [1913]). This led several scholars to claim that Schlick's argument was affected by a substantial misunderstanding (Miraglia 2006, Livingston 2002) and that a more careful reading of Husserl's text would have allowed Schlick to rewrite Husserl's argument in a form acceptable to him (Livingston 2002, pp. 248ff).

rules and their later processing as material rules of inference can be seen as the response to the problem raised by Husserl and plainly misunderstood by Schlick. I now delve into the debate between the two, which serves as a prequel to Sellars' own reflections on the matter.

Paul Livingston correctly points out that, in the *querelle* between the two major European philosophical movements of their time (i.e., phenomenology and logical empiricism), the idea that was truly at stake was the logical form of experience (Livingston 2002). The idea was a common starting point both for Husserlian phenomenology and for the Vienna Circle: in different ways, they both believed that some extremely general structures governing our experience could be made explicit through certain "special" propositions. The difference between the two was that whereas phenomenologists believed that these propositions conveyed authentic synthetic knowledge, logical empiricists regarded them to be mere empty tautologies. Subsequently, Schlick launched a series of attacks on Husserl's doctrine, the most famous of which is presented in the article mentioned above. The kernel of the argument was Schlick's belief that the propositions presented by Husserl as synthetic *a priori* were not true in virtue of certain facts relating to experience, but rather in virtue of their meaning – making them logically true and, therefore, analytic.

The argument begins with an abrasive remark by Schlick about the "completely unkantian"[81] and "confounded" way in which the term *a priori* is misunderstood, "particularly by phenomenologists" (Schlick 1949, p. 277). Indeed, he observes how Scheler laments "the identification of the '*a priori*' with the 'formal'" as "a fundamental mistake of the Kantian doctrine" (*ibid.*, p. 278). Schlick, on the contrary, held that the Kantian approach of equating the formal domain with the *a priori* domain was one of Kant's greatest achievements, while Scheler's separation of the two domains had the unwelcome consequence of inviting the formulation of *non-formal propositions of absolute validity* – something that was unacceptable to a logical empiricist. The Husserlian *Wesensschau* accomplishes precisely this: it "leads to proposition of absolute validity which nevertheless have something to say concerning the stuff

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[81] I choose not to address the question of the relationship between Husserl's material *a priori* propositions and Kant's synthetic *a priori* judgments. As Paolo Parrini rightly points out, although Schlick believed that Kant was wrong in admitting the existence of synthetic *a priori* judgments, he certainly agreed with him on the co-extensionality of the *formal* with the a *priori*. According to Kant, both logical-analytic (Aristotle's syllogistic) *and* logical-transcendental conditions of knowledge (space and time and schematized categories of understanding) were *formal*, while material conditions were related to experience. From this perspective, Schlick's view – which firmly denies the existence of an *a priori* that is at the same time *material* – is truly more similar to the Kantian stance than Husserl. For more on this topic, see Piana (1998 [1971]), Paolo Spinicci's lectures collected in Spinicci (2007) and Parrini (2006).

or material of experience" (*ibid.*). The reasons behind Schlick's rejection of this approach are not hard to see:

> For we are today of the opinion that the propositions of pure mathematics are not synthetic, while those of the science of nature […] are not *a priori*. Our empiricism makes the assertion that there are no other *a priori* judgements than the analytic, or rather, as we prefer to say today, that only tautological propositions are *a priori*.
> (*ibid.*, p. 280)

In other words, since the logical tools developed by Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein proved, *against* Kant, the *a priori* analytical character of mathematical propositions, Schlick was convinced that further analysis (such as the one that he is providing) was going to succeed in proving the same tautological nature of phenomenologists' alleged synthetic *a priori* propositions.[82]

The acknowledgement of the analytic *a priori* nature of mathematics and logic made the gulf between purely formal domains and empirical sciences wider than ever. If, on the one hand, only synthetic sentences "give expression to cognition" and are "always used in science and life to communicate a state of affairs", to belong to this domain implies being inevitably relegated to the empirical. On the other hand, an analytic sentence, or tautology, "is naturally an *a priori* truth, but gives expressions to no state of affairs, and the validity of a tautology rests in no way upon experience" (*ibid.*, p. 281). It is this sharp dichotomy that characterizes Schlick's approach, which made the *a priori* co-extensive with the analytic and the *a posteriori* with the synthetic. In his words,

> [a]n analytic proposition is one which is true by virtue of its form alone. Whoever has grasped the meaning of a tautology, has in doing so seen it to be true. It is because of this that it is *a priori*. In the case of a synthetic proposition, on the other hand, one must first understand its meaning, and afterwards determine whether it is true or false. It is because of this that it is *a posteriori*.
> (*ibid.*, pp. 278-9)

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[82] For more on logical empiricists' approach to analytic/synthetic distinction and the *a priori*, see Parrini (2002, esp. chapters 4 and 10).

We can easily understand what Schlick meant if we look at the instances of synthetic *a priori* assertions provided by phenomenologists. The last kind of propositions, which Husserl dubbed material *a priori* propositions – were "judgements such as these, that every tone has an intensity and pitch, that one and the same surface cannot be simultaneously red and green […], and so on" (*ibid.*, pp. 280-1). According to Schlick, propositions such as those listed by Husserl only seem to give expression to a material content – the impression being confirmed by references to colors and sounds – when in truth they are nothing but tautologies. Indirect proof of this claim is their actual use in everyday language: it is no accident that these propositions are never stated aloud outside philosophical discourse. The reason, according to Schlick, is precisely that they are trivial truths that say nothing about the world:

> In accordance with our program, we ask how these sentences are actually used, in what circumstances they make their appearance. Here we note the remarkable fact that they are to be met with neither in science, nor in life, with the exception of a purely rhetorical usage (thus an orator might say, "After all, what is black is not white"). Only in phenomenological philosophy do they play a rôle (*sic*). This is already a startling fact. It is beyond doubt that exactly those phenomenological judgements which are recognized on all sides as true, are never encountered in the language of everyday life. The reason for this is obvious; they are recognized to be completely trivial. Should anybody tell me that a certain lady wore a green dress, it would surely strike him as odd were I then to ask, "Can I take it that the dress wasn't red?". He would insist, "I have already told you that it was green".
> (*ibid.*, p. 282)

While in order to ascertain the color of a dress I certainly need experience (the proposition "the lady wore a green dress" is, indeed, synthetic *a posteriori*), once the color is acknowledged, I do not need further experience to know that the dress was not red.[83] When the empiricism advocated by Schlick "is confronted by an assertion such as 'A surface cannot be simultaneously red and green', it does nothing more than simply and without prejudice make clear the meaning of the assertion. For this is in general the true task of philosophical activity" (*ibid.*, p. 281). But this implies that validity of materially *a priori* propositions is merely logical: far from being expression of an alleged "Gesetzmaessigkeit (*sic*.) des 'Soseins'",

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[83] "We have only a posteriori knowledge concerning the qualities of the clothes worn by this or that person, or by people generally; whereas we know *a priori* that a green dress is not a red dress" (*ibid.*, pp. 282-3).

> [o]ur "materially" *a priori* propositions are in truth of a purely conceptual nature, their validity is a logical validity, they have a tautological, formal character.
>
> (*ibid.*, p. 284)

In this sense, to deny the truth of these alleged material *a priori* propositions amounts to simply violating "the logical rules which underlie our employment of color-words" (*ibid.*, p. 284), in the same sense in which "if I hear that the dress was both green and red, I am unable to give a meaning to this combination of words; I just do not know what it is supposed to mean" (*ibid.*).[84] It is the very meaning of the concepts of color or sound – their "logical grammar" Schlick says, quoting Wittgenstein – that makes it impossible for the same spot to be both red and green, or for a tone to be without pitch. This kind of propositions are true in virtue of the meanings of their constituent terms, rather than in virtue of the fact that I have never seen a spot that was both red and green, or heard a tone without pitch. Schlick can therefore state that:

> The error committed by the proponents of the factual a priori can be understood as arising from the fact that it was not clearly realized that such concepts as those of the colors have a formal structure just as do numbers or spatial concepts, and that this structure determines their meaning without remainder.
>
> (*ibid.*, p. 285)

Material *a priori* propositions, in this sense, make no contribution at all to concepts' empirical content. They do not give rise to any special knowledge, and certainly cannot ground any special science, as Husserl would have it.

Now, the debate between Husserl and Schlick has received a good deal of scholarly attention, and many have pointed out that Schlick's criticism was flawed by a basic misunderstanding of Husserl's views (Piana 1998 [1971], Livingston 2002, Miraglia 2006). The crux of the misunderstanding can be seen in Schlick's blindness to a distinction that, in the end, had a

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[84] The quote goes on: "If someone speaks of a tone that lacked a determinate pitch, I know beyond question that it was no simple musical tone; and if someone speaks of a green dress, I know beyond question that it wasn't a red dress; in the same way I know that a man who is 1.60 meters tall, isn't at the same time 1.80 meters tall. Everyone will admit that it requires no special kind of experience or insight in order to know that the lengths corresponding to 1.60 and 1.80 meters are incompatible with one another, for this follows from the nature of the concepts. As long as I take them to be compatible, I simply have not understood what is meant by the words '1.60 meters long'" (*ibid.*).

certain plausibility. To understand how deep the misunderstanding runs, I now briefly turn to Husserl's argument in defense of the material *a priori*.

The analytic/synthetic distinction is dealt with in the third book of the *Logische Untersuchungen* (Husserl 2001), whose subject-matter is the relationship between Wholes and Parts. There, Husserl defines *analytically necessary propositions* as

> propositions whose truth is completely independent of the peculiar content of their objects […]. They are propositions which permit of a *complete "formalization"* and can be regarded as special cases or empirical applications of the formal, analytic laws whose validity appears in such formalization. In an analytic proposition it must be possible, without altering the proposition's logical form, to replace all material which has content, with an empty formal *Something*, and to eliminate every assertion of existence by giving all one's judgements the form of universal, unconditional laws.
> (Husserl 2001, p. 21)

Ironically enough, Husserl's definition of analyticity in this passage corresponds entirely to that given by Schlick: both philosophers define analytic propositions as propositions whose validity is based solely on their logical structure ("true in virtue of their form"). The disagreement between the two, then, must consist in deciding *which* propositions belong to the analytic domain: in this sense, "the real problem comes down to the acceptance or rejection of their [materially a priori propositions', CC] analyticity" (Piana 1971, p. 9). What are the implications of such a conception of analyticity?[85]

Both Husserl and Schlick define analyticity in terms of the classic Bolzanian criterion, that is, the standard "substitutional" account according to which a proposition is analytic if and only if it is possible to replace its terms with other variables without altering its truth-value. In a nutshell, for a proposition to be analytic it must be reducible to purely logical principles: in this sense, propositions such as

A. *x* cannot be colored and not colored.
B. *x* is either a sound, or it is not.

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[85] For more on this, I recommend Bordini 2011 (in Italian).

are instances of propositions whose logical validity is based on the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of the excluded middle, respectively.

Assuming that both phenomenologists and logical empiricists would convene on regarding A and B as analytic propositions, the case of the following propositions is less straightforward:

C. There is no color without extension.
D. Every sound has a pitch.
E. One and the same spot cannot be simultaneously (entirely) green and (entirely) red.

Indeed, the terms that appear in the above cluster of propositions are not substitutable *salva veritate*: on the contrary, the truth of the above propositions seems to depend precisely on the special *content* (sound, color, extension) to which they refer. C, D and E are especially peculiar since, while in a sense *a priori*, their truth does not owe its force to their logical form.

Comparing the two different sets of propositions allows us to see that Husserl carved his reflections on the material *a priori* on the distinction between two different kinds of necessity: one according to the logical form, and one according to the material content. In this sense, underlying the distinction between *formal a priori* (expressed by analytic *a priori* propositions) and material *a priori* (expressed by synthetic *a priori* propositions) there are two different kinds of necessity: logical and extra-logical.[86]

Schlick, on the other hand, never acknowledges this distinction. His proposal of a sharp separation between the analytic *a priori* and the synthetic *a posteriori* simply eludes it: according to his view, propositions from A through E are all of the same kind. Of course, bringing the domain of the alleged material *a priori* back to the analytic *a priori* provides a valuable insight, entirely in line with Schlick's logical empiricism: in Livingston's words, "[i]f the rules defining the structure of experience could be treated as logical, then the *a priori* character of propositions about it could be explained without metaphysical commitment; and the purely structural nature

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[86] This is precisely what leads Giovanni Piana to argue that the most relevant distinction in the debate is not between "analytic" and "synthetic" propositions – terms that Husserl tries to avoid overusing – but rather between "form" and "matter" (Piana 1998 [1971], p. 6), where the former is to be intended as akin to "logical" and "conceptual", and the latter as involving "facts" of experience. As stated by Livingston, "Form (in the sense relevant to the debate) was, for both Schlick and Husserl, conceptual or logical; whereas to say of a proposition that it was 'material' meant that it depended on facts, intuitions, or the nature of experience. On the basis of this distinction, both philosophers agreed that propositions true in virtue of form are true *a priori*; their official difference, on Schlick's construal at least, simply concerned whether there are further *a priori* propositions whose truth depends not on logical or conceptual form, but on the specific characteristics of experiential matter or worldly states of affairs" (Livingston 2002, p. 246).

of such a description would make good the positivist's claim to deal only in formal terms, without having to make any reference to the purely qualitative, private, or subjective *content* of experience itself" (Livingston 2002, p. 240).

While Schlick held that concepts like colors or sounds were *formal* concepts, so that propositions such as those mentioned by phenomenologists would merely express, tautologically, their grammatical structure, Husserl regarded them as *material* concepts (*sachhaltige Begriffe*).[87] Synthetic *a priori* propositions' material character is therefore grounded in the latter's specificity – or, in other words, is expression of *something embedded in colors and sounds themselves*:[88]

> The necessities or laws which serve to define given types of non-independent contents rest, as we often have emphasized, on the specific essence of the contents [*in der Besonderheit der Inhalte*], on their peculiar nature [*Eigenart*]. […] To these essences correspond the concepts or propositions which have content, which we sharply distinguish from purely formal concepts and propositions, which lack all 'matter' or 'content'. […] This cardinal division between the 'formal' and the 'material' spheres of Essence gives us the true distinction between the *analytically a priori* and the *synthetically a priori* disciplines (or laws and necessities).
> (Husserl 2001, p. 19)

Husserl's reflections on the material *a priori* are indeed part of a larger systematic framework that aims to lay the foundations of *real* (or *material*) *ontologies*. Material *a priori* propositions are expressions of a *Geseztmäßigkeit* embedded in sensible contents themselves: the impossibility of experiencing sounds without pitch or colors without extension does not simply stem, as Schlick argues, from linguistic nonsense, but is grounded in *regional ontologies* describing specific portions of reality. In this sense, "to argue for the existence of material a priori is indeed equivalent with the thesis according to which a certain complexity belongs to the domain of (sensuos) *data* themselves" (Miraglia 2006, p. 111, my transl.). Material *a priori* propositions express something akin to a physical necessity: they bring to linguistic manifestation an extra-logical feature that

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[87] "Concepts like Something, One, Object, Quality, Relation, Association, Plurality, Number, Order, Ordinal Number, Whole, Part, Magnitude etc., have a basically different character from concepts like House, Tree, Colour, Tone, Space, Sensation, Feeling etc., which for their part express genuine content. Whereas the former group themselves round the empty notion of Something or Object as such, and are associated with this through formal ontological axioms, the latter are disposed about various highest material Genera or Categories, in which *material ontologies* have their root. This cardinal division between the 'formal' and the 'material' spheres of Essence gives us the true distinction between the *analytically a priori* and the *synthetically a priori* disciplines (or laws and necessities)" (Husserl 2001, p. 19).

[88] For a more detailed comment on the matter see De Santis (2015, pp. 172ff).

belongs to colors and sounds themselves. It is no accident that propositions such as C, D or E are sometimes called *laws* by Husserl:

> Having formed the concept of an analytic law and of an analytic necessity, we also have *eo ipso* formed the concept of a *synthetic a priori* law, and of a *synthetic a priori* necessity. Each pure law, which includes material concepts, so as not to permit of a formalization of these concepts *salva veritate* – each such law, i.e., that is not analytically necessary – is a synthetic a priori law. Specifications of such laws are synthetic necessities: empirical specifications of course are so also, e.g. *This red is different from this green*.
> (Husserl 2001, p. 21)

Synthetic *a priori* laws are categorical laws based on the specific character of certain material regions. Material *a priori* propositions, then, express synthetic *a priori* laws governing the contents of our experience's structure.

What Schlick fails to see is that, although Husserl's solution remains contestable – it is surely a rather large undertaking to claim something about the world's inner structure, one that would raise the eyebrows of any empiricist – there *is* indeed a difference between propositions like A and B and propositions like C, D and E. The validity of propositions A and B can be easily traced back to their logical form – respectively,

A. $\neg(P \wedge \neg P)$
B. $P \vee \neg P$

However, if we apply the same strategy to the last set of propositions, we see almost immediately that they *resist* formalization. The fact is that whereas A and B owe their validity to the way in which their logical repertoire (i.e., their function-words and logical connectors) is presented, C, D, and E's validity is strictly tied to their content-words (that is, their *non* logical repertoire, e.g., the empirical concepts involved). This is where the actual difference between strictly logical validity and a broader deductive validity lies. Of course, only logical validity is assertable in abstraction from any experience.[89] The validity of C, D and E, on the contrary, is not. Here,

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[89] Their semantic dimension is, so to speak, entirely correspondent to their syntactical form. To quote Piana, "according to Husserl, it is necessary to establish a clear-cut separation between those examples that are *necessities* in virtue of their logical form or, so to say, their 'syntactical' moment, and examples of propositions that are necessities in virtue of their meaning, or their 'semantical' moment" (Piana 1998 [1971] paragraph 2, my transl.).

Schlick is seconding Wittgenstein's remarks on the topic from roughly the same period, according to which there is no point in formalizing C, D, or E, since "x is red" and "x is green" *do not* contradict each other as "P" and "¬P " do (Wittgenstein 1929).

Besides the misunderstandings that surely took place between them, the Schlick-Husserl dispute really saw two conflicting views at play: "[w]hereas Husserl's eidetic analyses remained grounded in the examination of the specific character of particular perceptual domains and regional ontologies, Schlick's spare and nominalist conception of logic […] eschewed the specific description of experience, preferring to operate on the level of language and understanding conceptual analysis essentially as grammatical analysis" (Livingston 2002, p. 264).

In the first chapter, I often emphasized the, so to speak, "hybrid" nature of Sellars' philosophical enterprise, an aspect widely recognized as his most distinctive trait and considered integral to his overall philosophical strategy. Although his philosophical reflections sprouted in a context where empiricism was considered the "starting point" for any philosophy aspirating to be taken seriously, the story of Sellars' "imprinting" with philosophy is quite different and it involves the "continental" education he received in his youth while traveling around Europe with his family.[90] The tension simmering in his philosophical system – which earned it the name "naturalism with a normative turn" (O'Shea 2007) – is embodied during the early years in the opposition between rationalism and empiricism, and in later years in the contrast between the manifest and the scientific image. The remarks that I will present before closing this section supports the idea that his education played a role in shaping both these contrasts.

A more fine-grained reader of Husserl than could be guessed from the outer package, Sellars surely took the phenomenologist's considerations seriously. In this sense, even though he was entirely acquainted with Schlick's (and his fellow logical empiricists') method, lexicon, and main insights, it should not surprise us that part of Sellars' later re-elaboration of the notion of synthetic *a priori* sprang from his sensitivity to two differing kinds of necessity.

The influence of phenomenology on the development of Sellars' thought have been widely recognized.[91] Meanwhile, considerable efforts have been devoted to the reconstruction of the history and reception of phenomenology in the U.S. (Nunziante 2018c, Ferri 2019, Manca & Nunziante 2020). It is important to keep in mind that the encounter was anything but neutral:

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[90] For a short Sellars' biography, consult DeVries (2005, pp. 2-6) and O'Shea (2007, pp. 4-9).
[91] For a deeper analysis of the relationship between Sellars and phenomenology, see Nunziante (2018b), (2020), and (2022), Sanguettoli (2020), and the essays collected in De Santis & Manca (*forthcoming*).

"in the transition from one side of the Atlantic to the other, connotations and uses of the term 'phenomenology' change in meaning, and the very purposes of phenomenological agenda are redefined" (Nunziante 2018b p. 152, my transl.).

Sellars' education took place precisely during the time span in which this shift was happening. An important step in his education, emphatically recalled in his already mentioned *Autobiographical Reflections* (AR), is the period spent at the University of Buffalo as Marvin Farber's teaching assistant starting from 1933. Back then, Farber was a leading figure of the phenomenology recently imported into the United States, having been taught himself by Husserl in Freiburg and Heidelberg during his doctoral studies in the 1920s. In Sellars' words,

> Marvin Farber led me through my first careful reading of the Critique of Pure Reason and introduced me to Husserl. His combination of utter respect for the structure of Husserl's thought with the equally firm conviction that this structure could be given a naturalistic interpretation was undoubtedly a key influence on my own subsequent philosophical strategy.
> (AR, p. 75)

Far from being a passive recipient, Farber had quite an original standpoint regarding Husserlian phenomenology: the aspect worth highlighting – which Sellars himself recalls as a "key influence" on his subsequent philosophical strategy – was Farber's commitment to the project of a naturalized phenomenology, which mirrored two then-indispensable prerequisites to the American philosophical discourse: namely, realism and the idea of philosophy as a scientific enterprise (Nunziante 2018b, p. 153). Indeed, Farber considered phenomenology to be more fruitful when taken as a *method* rather than as an autonomous discipline, and he was always critical of the more idealistic and subjectivistic aspects of Husserl's philosophy: it was no accident that he preferred texts like the *Logical Investigations* or *Experience and Judgement*, while he didn't particularly enjoy the more idealistically inclined *Ideen*.

To acknowledge Farber's relation to Husserlian phenomenology hints at how Sellars himself relates to it: Farber's will to naturalize phenomenology to make it resonate with a fully scientific conceptual framework will be inherited by the philosopher from Pittsburgh.[92] However, in line

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[92] That the path pictured by Sellars was that of a linguistic analysis is attested also by the curious definition of phenomenology given in QMSP, here discussed in 1.3.1, where Sellars said that "[p]henomenology, as I interpret it, is the systematic exhibition of the rules of a language by the *use* of *that same language* for this purpose. The phenomenology of language is the exhibitory use of syntactical and semantical meta-languages, meta-meta-languages, etc. We exhibit the rules whereby we use such words as 'sentence,' 'true,' 'actual,' etc." (QMSP 9 fn3).

with his histrionic philosophical personality, Sellars never commits himself to a definite phenomenological "canon". There is no point in searching for minute analysis or discussions of text passages from one or another of Husserl's writings, since what Sellars does is simply to appropriate a certain philosophical strategy that he then exploits to solve his own problems.[93] As he will later recall, "sheer phenomenology […] takes us part of the way, but finally let us down" (SRPC, p. 178) – evidence that Sellars shared Farber's idea of phenomenology as a method that could be supplemented with other conceptual and scientific resources according to his needs. The profound modifications impressed on the notion of synthetic *a priori* in order to make it resonate with a nominalist ontology are living proof of all this. I can now begin to show how Sellars' conformation rules could be seen precisely as the naturalized counterpart to Husserl's material *a priori*.

2.1.2 Conformation Rules Again

The first chapter of this work was devoted to Sellars' first philosophical project of pure pragmatics. I showed how pure pragmatics can be seen as containing all the germs that would later develop into his well-known Kantian project. In my view, to ignore the Kantian impulses underlying pure pragmatics makes it more difficult to appreciate the project as a whole: the "correction", through implementation, of logical empiricists' account of language as *calculus* by replacing it with the notion of an *empirically meaningful language*. I have therefore shown how, considering the background of a general endorsement of main insights and lexicon of logical empiricism, Sellars' resistances to what he perceived as its shortcomings are motivated by some broadly Kantian themes such as the intrinsic "aboutness" of the language and the normative structures that makes it possible. Even though they were not yet openly labelled as Kantian, the later characterization of Sellars' entire philosophical project as a linguistic version of the Kantian one makes it plausible to look at pure pragmatics as the first attempt to spell out this idea. But why pure *pragmatics* specifically? What made it so special to Sellars?

The great discovery underlying the "formal turn" of nineteenth century analytic philosophy has been that, by "assembling" symbols according to syntactic rules and establishing an interpretation of those symbols according to semantical rules, sophisticated and powerful

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[93] Even though this remains valid, it is also true that in the later production there are a few places where references to Husserl are massive and more explicit: I am talking about two of the talks collected in WSNDL, namely "Perceiving and Perception" (1973) and "Scientific Reason and Perception" (1977).

systems characterized by internal soundness and completeness can be created. The two languages (Language I and Language II) developed by Carnap in the *Logical Syntax of Language* are precisely examples of this. According to Sellars, however, the artificial languages invented by logicians are separated by a gulf from the language we speak in everyday life. It is precisely the difference between formal[94] and natural languages that call, besides syntactic and semantical analysis, for the inclusion of a pragmatic analysis to account for languages proper.

While *descriptive* pragmatics belongs to empirical psychology and linguistics (since it studies habits and patterns of behavior), *pure* pragmatics, as an attempt "to formalize models of linguistic behavior without using behavioral or psychological facts" (Olen 2016a, p. 3), has the specificity of "detecting" the normative structures underpinning language by investigating its very *use*: "as the pure theory of empirically meaningful languages, philosophy faces the task of clarifying what structure an ideally coherent system of norms must have in order to constitute a language that represents the world in which it is used" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 58).

The most fundamental "unit" with which pure pragmatics is concerned is that of a *world-story*, an exhaustive, internally consistent set of sentences representing the world in which the language is used and thus making up the "meaning-base" of a language (ENWW 19). The notion of a world-story is clarified through the help of some restrictions characterizing empirically meaningful languages. Among them, Sellars lists:

- The so-called *co-ex predicate* (PPE 17, ENWW 16), which describes a relation modeled on the expression "is-present-to-consciousness-along-with" or "is-co-experienced-with" in which the language user's private experience is connected to her linguistic behavior. Being pure pragmatics a formal analysis, the connection is fleshed out through the type/token device: in this sense, it refers to the subject's inner experience only in terms of her tokenings of, e.g., certain sentences about her "perceptual biography".

- The distinction between *verified* and *confirmed* sentences and the related notion of *experiential tie*. Altogether, the three account for observation sentences in a way that avoids crude verificationism by overcoming the empiricist notion of *Konstatierung*. The pure pragmatic account of verification is constructed in such a way that "[w]hile

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[94] Here the term "formal" *is not* used in the Sellarsian sense, but in the standard sense according to which the logical validity of an argument turns on its form, with the form being determined by the role of logical terms. As mentioned in footnote 76, the meaning of logic's formality has been disputed itself: for more on this, see MacFarlane (2000).

verifiable sentences are 'basic' in the sense of being co-experienced with their *designata* (sensory events), confirmable sentences are merely indirectly tied to the coex-basis, *but nevertheless are meaningful*" (Neuber 2017, p. 131). In other words, although some sentences in language must have tokens which *denote*, it is not necessary that all the sentences do.[95]

- Conformation rules. They are the genuinely pragmatic addition to syntax rules (*formation* rules) and truth-preserving rules (*transformation* rules): while the former specifies the ways in which symbols in a language can be joined to form new expressions (e.g., sentences) and the latter govern laws of inference from one linguistic expression to another, conformation rules introduce specific restrictions on how to apply predicates to individual constants and how to combine these "minimal unities" one with the other.

Since they were first introduced in PPE, conformation rules exhibited a distinctive feature. Indeed, among the various elements that make up the body of pure pragmatics, they were introduced to satisfy a more sophisticated level than simple syntactic consistency, which represented an inherent difficulty. It is the object of pure pragmatics – again, that of an empirically meaningful language, as opposed to uninterpreted *calculus* of syntax – that requires the inclusion of rules that must be able to "represent the kind of unity and limitations found in empirically meaningful languages" (Olen 2016a, p. 48). In this sense, the task of conformation rules is precisely to provide additional constraints on the language, beyond mere logical contradiction.

All things considered, pure pragmatics metalinguistic analysis encompasses both the study of the "grammar" of predicates through which language speaks normatively about itself (the logic of "means" and "designates", of verification and confirmation, and so on), and very general features concerning natural languages such as the fact that they become properly *meaningful* only in relation to specific "constraints" to which they must respond. These constraints, as I mentioned in 1.2.2, are essentially laws of nature. Actually, the nexus between conformation rules and laws of nature was already established in RNWW:

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[95] "The concept of an empirically meaningful language rests on that of a verification base, but by no means presupposes that every sentence in the story which is its meaning base is to be found in that verification base" (RNWW 56).

Languages come in families which have primitive descriptive predicates and skeletal relations in common, but not individual constants. The predicates of a language family are differentiated from one another by conformation rules. These latter specify certain formal implications which hold in all world-stories which are meaning bases of languages in the family. Hence they specify the natural laws of the worlds designated by these stories.

(RNWW 38)

Now, even after the link between conformation rules and laws of nature has been established, Sellars' articles on pure pragmatics provided no concrete instantiation of conformation rules. It is only in 1949 – contemporary to the translation of Schlick's article –, that Sellars provides two examples that, whether by chance or not, happen to directly echo Husserl and Schlick's.[96] They are found in the already mentioned "Language, Rules and Behavior" (LRB) and in "The Logic of Complex Particulars" (LCP). I merely mention them now, while I will fully clarify later on. When I introduced LRB in section 1.3.2 of the previous chapter, I provided a metaphilosophical collocation for it. The "stereoscopic fusion" envisioned in pure pragmatics as the overcoming of rationalism and empiricism is, in LRB, settled as a "sound pragmatism" (LRB 5) for which Sellars was paving the way. Far from being an alternative or radically different metaphilosophy from the one resulting from pure pragmatics, LRB re-proposes the same opposition which characterized pure pragmatics, which is here labelled as the contrast between rationalists and "descriptivists" – the latter standing for old "empiricists", but now also including pragmatists of the "reductivist" type.

The first part of the essay was concerned with an analysis of moral and prescriptive vocabulary of the kind we make use of when setting forth evaluations. Sellars finds the key to the adequate treatment of these concepts in their being expressions of *rule-following behavior*. Human verbal behavior, he notes, is not entirely constituted by deliberated and purposeful "free, rule-governed symbol activity" (LRB 16): rather, it consists of a meshing of it – which corresponds to the dimension "properly" defining humans – with constrained, causally environment-tied behavior which is accounted for by behavioristic psychologies as stimulus-response schemas ("the *dog-fingersnap-sit-up-sugar* schema of tied responses to environmental stimuli", *ibid.*).

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[96] Not that I intend to lean on this as a significant proof for my argument (that is, that the Husserl-Schlick debate influenced Sellars), but I still find it remarkable that while Sellars did not provide any example of conformation rules before, the only actual examples are found in two essays dated the very year of Schlick's translation (1949) and are precisely *Schlick and Husserl's examples.* Even though this could corroborate the case that Sellars was thinking about Husserl and Schlick when talking about conformation rules, I admit that those kind of examples (colors, sounds etc.) were common at the time.

The process of concept acquisition cannot work in the way pictured by "overtly enthusiastic regulists" (*ibid.*, 21) who postulate explicit rule-following behaviors to be at play from the very first moment since, as Sellars remarks anticipating his critique of the myth of the given, according to them "[i]n order for the rule to be intelligible, the person who is to obey it must already know when he sees red. But to know when he sees red he must […] understand the meaning of either the symbol 'red' or a synonym" (*ibid.*, 23). No, things cannot work like this: rather, certain predicates in language ("green", "sweet", etc.) – and, Sellars perspicaciously adds in footnote, also certain individual constants ("Jones", "Piccadilly", etc. *ibid.* 21 fn4) – must have a sort of "double role" according to which they are both free (normatively laden) and tied (causally elicited) symbols.[97]

How does all this work once we step from thing-level up to the realm of abstract entities, properties, and qualities? Here begins the second part of the essay, which is explicitly devoted to sketching an account "of real connections and of the 'synthetic *a priori*' which preserves the insights of the rationalistic doctrine, while rejecting its absolutism as well as the pseudo-psychology of cognitive givenness on which this absolutism is based" (*ibid.*, 26).[98]

Sellars proceeds with some remarks on the "classical doctrine of the synthetic *a priori*", saying that:

> It is important to note that the classical doctrine of synthetic *a priori* knowledge distinguishes carefully between the *ontological* and the *cognitive* aspect of such knowledge. Ontologically there is the real connection between the universals in question, say, Color and Extension. It is here that the necessity is located. On the other hand there is the cognitive fact of the intuitive awareness of this real connection, the *Schau* of the phenomenologist. Since it is a necessary consequence of the real connection of the universals that any exemplification of the one (Color) must also be an exemplification of the other (Extension), to *see* this real connection is to have rational certainty that the corresponding universal proposition "All colors are extended" will not be falsified by any future experience […].
>
> (LRB 27)

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[97] Sachs (2022) is an excellent article where the "double role" of languagings is tied to Sellars' contemporary behavioristic psychology and cybernetic in a deeply Kantian way.

[98] The "cognitive givenness" to which Sellars is referring to here is precisely the givenness of universals that he criticized in CIL the year before (cf. the third mistake mentioned in CIL 21). I am going to analyze it in the following pages.

This quote sums up the "rationalist prong" of the problem of *real connections* between universals. With regard to the relation between color and extension, the rationalist prong immediately rehearses the "physically necessary" talk, seeing a "real connection" between the two. To state a real connection between color and extension, he says, amounts to saying more than *in point of fact* saying all colors come with extension. To state that "all colors are extended" implies that, although logically separable, colors and extension are *materially inseparable*: they are rooted one in each other. The examples mentioned later on are again drawn off the Schlick-Husserl debate: "'All colors are (necessarily) extended', 'All tones have (necessarily) an intensity and a pitch', etc. The list is a familiar one" (LRB 39). This prong, while not corresponding to Sellars' own solution, still hides something valuable: "that there is *something* is suggested by the fact, which empiricists are surely sophisticated enough by now to recognize, that where there is rationalist smoke there usually can be empiricist (regulist) fire" (*ibid.*).

Before going on to the conclusions of this argument, let me spell out the second example. It is the one found in "The Logic of Complex Particulars", which is even more telling.

LCP is a complex essay devoted to clarifying "certain issues relating to the concept of predication" (LCP 1). As the rest of this chapter will prove, in essays from 1948 and 1949, the topic of universals and particulars is central to Sellars: more precisely, if in "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (CIL) Sellars deals with the logical structure underlying universals and universally quantified sentences, in LCP it is "the logical structure of statements on the thing level" under scrutiny (*ibid.*, 7).

In LCP, Sellars stages a dialogue between Smith and Jones where they discuss what it means, for two concepts, to be *incompatible* with one another. Smith has a straightforward answer:

> Incompatibility is a relation which exists between determinate universals which fall under the same determinable universal. Thus the various color qualities are incompatible. Thus '$\neg\varphi(b)$' is true by virtue of the fact that $\psi(b)$ is the case, ψ being a quality of the same genus or family as φ.
>
> (LCP 18)

We recall from chapter 1 (see footnote 40) that, in Sellars' writings, it is usually the individual called "Jones" who is avatar of the truth. Indeed, Smith's answer is quickly dismissed when Jones points out a fatal flaw of his theory: "Surely it is an empirical and contingent feature of a world that it involves qualities which come in families! Yet your account makes it a matter of

logical necessity, for you make the incompatibility of the predicates of a family the basis for your account of falsity" (*ibid.*). And this can't be right, because if we are talking about basic particulars – that is, particulars which exemplify one and only one non-relational predicate – to assert '¬$\varphi(b)$' from $\psi(b)$ is not a *logical* consequence: rather, it can be asserted "*merely by virtue of the fact that ψ is a different quality than φ*" (*ibid.*). If the incompatibility between color qualities is clearly not an instance of logical necessity, what is Jones' account of incompatibility? Here is his answer:

> Incompatibilities as well as real connexions (*sic.*) are specified by the "axioms" or conformation rules of a language, defining its "P-structure". Each such rule specifies a formal implication which involves as many individual variables as (primitive) one-place predicates, and which sets forth a relational pattern to which exemplifications of these qualities conform in all possible worlds to which the language applies.
> (LCP 18)

These last lines are especially instructive because they define which kind of relations conformation rules are responsible for. Specifically, we see that they determine relations of incompatibility (like the one existing between different color qualities) and of a special kind of consequence (material consequence – like the one linking color with extension) between predicates. On the "applicative" side, conformation rules are therefore extra-logical transformation rules governing "direct transitions from the statement of one or several others" (Brandhoff 2017, p. 59) in two senses:

- In one sense, to state an elementary sentence P (for example, that *x is red*) necessitates the exclusion of a whole set of other sentences like Q (*x is yellow*) and R (*x is blue*).

- In the other sense, to state an elementary sentence P (*x is red*) necessitates stating a whole set of other sentences like V (*x is extended in space*) and Z (*x is colored*).

Neither of these relations can be accounted for as logical necessities. Their necessity does not stem from their logical validity, and it is thus not identifiable with logical necessity. Their validity has nothing to do with the way their logical repertoire is arranged: rather, it depends entirely on the meaning of their content-words. From this angle, conformation rules express physical or

extra-logical necessity – which seems to place them very close to Husserl's material *a priori* propositions, and which also permits to look at them as a sort of synthetic *a priori* laws.

However, by following the course of Sellars' reflections on the topic through its end, we will see that this likelihood with Husserlian material *a priori* will slowly fade away. The first step to appreciate this concerns Sellars' treatment of those universals that real connections are supposed to bind together.

2.2   Real Connections Revisited: Universals

Sellars' treatment of abstract entities is one well-known and fruitful part of his system. The first place in which the topic is treated is also claimed to be Sellars' very first piece of writing,[99] which is evidence of the relevance of the topic to his thought. I am talking about the essay "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (CIL), an article published in 1948, together with ENWW and RNWW.

This complex essay is not easy to summarize. It deals with a variety of topics including extra-logical necessity, laws of nature, modal claims, and universals. The entire essay is delivered in the form of a confrontation with C.I. Lewis' notions of strict implication and real connection.

C.I. Lewis is a distinctive character of American philosophical landscape: with one foot in pragmatism and one in analytic philosophy, his name has never figured among the greats of either movement.[100] Despite now being considered a somewhat minor chapter of the history of American philosophy, Lewis was well known among his peers when alive, and his reflections on the main themes animating contemporary philosophy were profound enough to capture the attention of both Sellars, father and son.[101] His philosophical heritage includes mainly

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[99] Brandom (2015, p. 67 fn33).

[100] This is well acknowledged in the lucid Introduction to Kammer, Narboux & Wagner (2021). Although the relevance of Lewis' thought cannot realistically be overstated, the volume nevertheless succeeds in highlighting the philosophical importance of the two main issues around which Lewis built his philosophy, namely the *a priori* and the given. A further collection of essays devoted to C.I. Lewis has been published in 2017 by Olen and Sachs (Olen & Sachs 2017). That in the past few years two collections entirely devoted to C.I. Lewis have been published seems to bear witness to how the significance of his thought is currently under re-evaluation.

[101] It has been pointed out that Sellars' relationship with Lewis was surely mediated by his father's relation to Lewis. Chapter 3 in Sachs (2014, esp. pp. 43-52) is devoted to the exploration of how Sellars' philosophical enterprise can be seen as a mediation between Lewis' conceptual pragmatism and Roy Wood's physicalism. Sachs maintains that Wilfrid's frequent accusation against Lewis of phenomenalism is essentially misconstrued, and it is indeed part of his father's heritage. Whereas Sachs and Westphal (2017) defend Lewis from the accusation, O'Shea (2020 and 2021), on the contrary, is convinced that Lewis' epistemology does indeed fall afoul of phenomenalism – or, with the terminology that is soon to be introduced in Sellars' writings, it falls prey to the Myth of the Given.

contributions in logic and epistemology – the latter being presented by Lewis himself as overtly Kant-inspired.

Lewis' philosophical history is an integral part of the history of the early reception of Kant among north-American philosophers.[102] Even though, as the tale goes, it seems that the appearance of Peter Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense* in 1966 (Strawson 1966) – often mentioned as the milestone that led to today's re-evaluation of Kant and Hegel's philosophy in the anglophone philosophical community (ignoring Sellars' *Science and Metaphysics* from the very same year) – suddenly awakened a previously dormant interest in Kant, in truth, things were never so clear-cut. Although the caricatures produced by Russell and Moore undoubtedly contributed to his partial eclipse,[103] Kant always had supporters overseas, and among these, the one who undoubtedly contributed most to the survival of the teaching of Kant's philosophy in North American universities was Lewis.

Sellars' relationship with Lewis spans a long period, although the most intense phase of the exchange – probably due in part to the age gap between the two, and to the fact that Lewis died in 1964 – belongs certainly to Sellars' "early years". Indeed, between 1948 and 1953 Lewis is often mentioned in the various articles written by Sellars, some of which are explicitly devoted to certain aspects of his philosophy: besides CIL, there is also "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?" (1954, ITSA) and "Physical Realism" (PR, 1954) – the latter being devoted to a confrontation between Lewis and Sellars' father on the perceptual given.

In his "Autobiographical Reflections" (AR), Sellars recalls reading Lewis' *Mind and the World Order* (MWO, 1929) in 1936, together with John Austin and Isaiah Berlin, as "the highlight of the year" (AR, p. 287). He also recalls his exposure to Lewis and Langford's *Symbolic Logic* as an important step in the development of his thoughts on logic. Indeed,

> [i]t seemed obvious, even at the time, that this strategy should be extended to the causal modalities. The result was an immediate sympathy with the causal realism of C. D. Broad and, later, W. C. Kneale. Yet I was puzzled by what it could mean to say that necessity (logical or causal) was in the world, which, it seemed, must surely be the case, if modal concepts are genuine concepts and any modal propositions true. Was negation in the world? I was tempted by the approach to negation which grounds it in a 'real relation of incompatibility', and it was years

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[102] For more on Kant's reception among analytic philosophers, see Westphal (2010), O'Shea (2006) and (*forthcoming* 2).

[103] For a brief recollection of analytic philosophy's beginnings in Cambridge, see Corti (2014, pp. 15-27) and Tripodi (2015, esp. chapters 1 and 2) (both in Italian).

before I sorted out the confusions (and insights) involved. Was generality in the world? I saw this as one aspect of the problem of universals, which was never far from my mind. It can be seen that my early reading of the *Tractatus* had had but little effect. I regarded it as almost a *reductio* of Cambridge Analysis.

(AR, pp. 282-3)

The solution to the problem mentioned in this quote (where Sellars is recalling the early 1930s) will be given in CIL a good fifteen years later. As a matter of fact, the essay that I am going to present is devoted precisely to clarifying some aspects of that non-logical necessity expressed by conformation rules by treating the problem of universals through a Leibniz-inspired possible worlds semantics. Before delving into that, however, it is necessary to present Sellars' target, that is, C.I. Lewis' notion of real connections.

2.2.1 Prequel: Lewis on Implicative Relations

In the opening of CIL, Sellars quotes a long passage from Lewis' monumental "An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation" (AKV, 1945), where the limits of formal implication are under scrutiny. More precisely, Lewis is wondering about the correct interpretation of formal implication. Formal implication is a special kind of implication introduced in *Principia Mathematica* to strengthen classic material implication by adding the clause "for every variable" (denoted $\forall x(\Phi x \to \Psi x)$).[104] Lewis, a fine logician and the "inventor" of modal logic, finds this implicative relation ambiguous because, he observes, it can be interpreted at least in two senses: either as stating that "every *actual* particular that is Φ is also Ψ", or as stating that "every *possible* particular that is Φ is also Ψ".

Lewis' reflections on conditionals in AKV are not his first encounter with the topic. In fact, he spent much effort on problems related to implication starting in his youth, and his critique of Russell and Whitehead's material implication in *Principia Mathematica* – which led to the development of his famous "strict implication" – is often identified with the official birth of modal logic (Curley 1975, p. 517, Shieh 2012, pp. 294-5, Tripodi 2015, p. 116).

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[104] Whitehead & Russell (1977, p. 50). Lewis and Sellars employ *Principia Mathematica*'s notation. However, because it is clumsy and not very practical, I am going to replace it with standard predicative logic notation. I leave unaltered the symbol for Lewis' connective for "strict implication" ($\prec$) and, since I am not using Lewis' symbol for "real connection" ever ($\to$), there will be no danger of mistaking it for material implication.

The starting point of Lewis' reflections concerns some peculiar theorems of material implication. Although there are many, he focuses on the two most popular examples:

1. $(\neg P \rightarrow (P \rightarrow Q))$
2. $(Q \rightarrow (P \rightarrow Q))$

These theorems, whose singularity was not unknown to Russell and Whitehead, prompted Lewis' doubts on material implication's "fitness" for translating natural inferential practices that we make use of in everyday life. (1) corresponds to the theorem known as *ex falso quodlibet* (that is, that a false proposition implies any proposition) – a syntactical property of material implication that seems to be completely at odds with how implicative relations works in natural languages. The same goes for (2), which corresponds to the converse theorem according to which a true proposition is implied by any other.

In short, these theorems are completely at odds with our intuitive grasp of how inferences work. However, they derive from nothing but the formal definition of implication, and as such are entirely consistent within the system of logic developed in the *Principia*: how are we to make sense of this? In a nutshell, Lewis' answer regarding whether the logic of *Principia Mathematica* really applied to "our world" was a firm "no" . In Shieh's words, "Lewis developed the modal logic of strict implication because Russell's material implication accords so ill with our intuitions about logical consequence, and Lewis wanted to formulate logical principles that better reflect these intuitions" (Shieh 2021, p. 104).[105]

One problem related to material implication lurked from behind classic material conditional's disjunctive paraphrasing:

3. $P \rightarrow Q \equiv \neg P \lor Q,$

Regarding this, Lewis writes:

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[105] "The point Lewis was chiefly anxious to insist upon was that the definition of implication adopted by Russell and Whitehead was very much at variance with the 'ordinary meaning' of implication. On Russell and Whitehead's account a true proposition was supposed to be implied by any proposition and a false proposition to imply any proposition; but on any ordinary understanding of implication this simply is not true. The implications a proposition has are never a function of its truth-value and knowing that a proposition is true, or false, never adds anything to our knowledge of what it implies. Implication is rather a function of the intension or meaning a proposition has – it is its meaning which determines what the proposition does and does not imply, not its truth-value" (Curley 1975, p. 519).

In the algebra of logic, "*p* implies *q*" is defined to mean "either *p* is false or *q* is true" […]. But this last expression is equivocal. Implication is defined in terms of disjunction, but "either-or" propositions may have at least three different meanings. One of these is ruled out when we understand that "*p* or *q*" – either *p* is true or *q* is true – must not be taken to exclude the possibility that both p and q may be true. Disjunctions in the algebra do not signify mutual exclusion […]. Two meanings of disjunction still remain. The implication of the algebra of logic bears the same relation to the one of these that the Aristotelian "implies" bears to the other. Hence the need of distinguishing carefully between these two sorts of disjunction.

(Lewis 1912, pp. 522-3)

What are these "two sorts of disjunction" that make the above equivalence ambiguous? According to Lewis, two interpretations can be given to the disjunction above: an intensional and an extensional one. For the intensional interpretation, it is impossible for both the disjuncts to be false, since the negation of one of them strictly implies the truth of the other – that is, one or the other disjunct (or even both) *must* be true. Examples for this kind of implicative relation are propositions such as "Either Matilda does not love me or I am beloved" (*ibid.*, p. 523). This special implicative relation corresponds to Lewis' strict implication, which he represents with the famous "hook":

4. $P \prec Q = \neg \lozenge (P \wedge \neg Q)$

In contrast, the second sense corresponds to the definition of material implication given in *Principia Mathematica*: according to the extensional disjunction's truth-conditions, the disjunction is true if one of its disjuncts is true, but there is no special relation between the disjuncts. The example given by Lewis is "Either Cæsar [sic.] died or the moon is made of green cheese": "to suppose it false that Cæsar died, would not bind one to suppose the moon made of green cheese, – if conditions contrary to fact have any meaning at all" (*ibid.*).

Strict implication does not represent the final checkpoint in Lewis' reflections on implicative relations. As a matter of fact, his account of implication will be further enriched after undergoing some reflections on contrary-to-fact conditionals required to support laws of nature: this is CIL's starting point, where Sellars declares that "[i]n his earlier account he [Lewis, CC] was satisfied to point out that, for obvious reasons, this implicative relation cannot be material implication,

and to refer the curious reader to his logical writings for an account of strict implication" (CIL 1). However, Sellars notes, in both MWO[106] and AKV "a distinct advance" (*ibid.*) is scored: this advance is the development of an account for real connections.

The fundamental premise of the confrontation between Sellars and Lewis is their agreement on the need to recognize the reality of real connections as the only way to avoid the fatal trap of Humean skepticism: as Sellars recalls, the "conviction that real connections of universals must be recognized in epistemology has been the most abiding of my philosophical prejudices" (CIL 3). What are the reasons behind Lewis' introduction of real connections? Why was strict implication not sufficient?

Let me go back to the interpretative dilemma with which Sellars opens CIL. Lewis claims that the implication in $\forall x(\Phi x \rightarrow \Psi x)$ can be interpreted in two senses:

- Either we take the values of x $(x_1 \ldots x_n)$ as *actual* particulars, so that the implication is read as "every actual particular which is Φ is also Ψ" – but in this case we fall back to standard material implication that, being a truth-functional connective, does not account for counterfactuals;

- Or we enrich our account by taking into consideration *possible* particulars, so that the implication above is read like "every possible particular which is Φ is also Ψ". In this case we gain counterfactual force but at the price of reducing it to a *logical* necessity: indeed, it "holds only when having the property Φ logically entails having the property Ψ" (AKV, p. 218).

Given that what Lewis and Sellars were looking for was an account for laws of nature, it does not take long for them to recognize that neither the former, nor the latter account can succeed. In Sellars' words,

> [t]he import of a law of nature cannot be represented by "Every actual particular which is Φ is also Ψ" for, as Lewis correctly points out, the latter kind of sense cannot have the implications for circumstances contrary to fact which are part and parcel of the import of a law of nature.

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[106] Actually, in MWO Lewis was still convinced that real connections could be explained in terms of strict implications. Sellars then must have had in mind the later AKV, in which Lewis changed his mind in this regard. See AKV, especially chapter VIII.

On the other hand, since the laws of nature are not analytic truths, they can hardly be represented by such a statement as "Every possible particular which is Φ is also Ψ" for the latter, according to Lewis, must be analytic in order to be true.

(CIL 2)

The latter sense of implication coincides indeed with Lewis' *strict implication*, which does not merely have its truth-value preserved across transformations but posits the *necessary* preservation of its truth-value. Strict implication's modal force is gained but not without a certain amount of sacrifice: it makes it a matter of logical necessity. As Shieh correctly points out, the difference between intensional and extensional disjunction is that "in the case of the intensional […], the necessity of one disjunct being true is not hypothetical, not dependent on the assumption that the disjunction is true. […] [T]he truth of [intensional disjunction, CC] need not be assumed; it is guaranteed, that is, it is necessarily true" (Shieh 2017, p. 112). And it is precisely this aspect of strict implication that is connected to what, according to Lewis, is the most significant distinction between the two:

The second disjunction [the intensional, CC] is such that its truth is independent of the truth of either member considered separately. Or, more accurately, its truth can be known, while it is still problematic *which* of its lemmas is the true one. It has a truth which is prior to the determination of the facts in question. The truth of "Either Cæsar died or the moon is made of green cheese" has not this purely logical or formal character. It lacks this independence of facts. Its contradiction would not surprise a logical mind unacquainted with history.

(Lewis 1912, p. 523-4)

Given that material implication is clearly too *weak* to convey the kind of necessity characterizing laws of nature, strict implication seems to be too *strong*, because it concerns logical necessities knowable prior to any experience. The apriority of intensional disjunctions makes its truth *independent of facts* – which, of course, cannot be the case for laws of nature. This means that we cannot have it both ways: on the one hand, if we want laws of nature to support subjunctive conditionals (as we clearly do), we need to account not just for actual, but also for *possible* particulars (otherwise they would be mere generalizations). This calls for a shift from classic to modal logic – a shift which, however, leads to the *analytic* character of propositions like "Every

possible particular which is Φ is also Ψ", which clearly flies in the face of laws of nature's synthetic character. [107]

How does Lewis solve the dilemma? He introduces a special connective which is neither material conditional, nor strict implication: the real connection.[108] This solution, that Sellars labels as an *ad hoc* move (CIL 3), is what motivates his search for a different kind of explanation for physical necessity in CIL.

2.2.2 Concepts as Involving P-Laws

The "real connection" solution proposed by Lewis leaves Sellars deeply unsatisfied: "I am disturbed [...] by the ease with which Lewis gets what he wants. One would have expected real connections to be a bit more expensive" (CIL 3). What Sellars engages with in CIL is the "unpacking" of the logical structure underlying real connections in the conviction that, behind the aforementioned apparent dead end, there are "certain presuppositions, by no means peculiar to Lewis, which are not examined in the course of his argument, and which […] are the source of much confusion and perplexity in contemporary epistemology" (*ibid.*, 1).

The undertaking is accomplished in an original fashion: "it is only by taking seriously and, indeed, expanding the Leibnitzian conception of possible worlds that the concept of natural necessity can be given an adequate explanation" (*ibid.*, 3). The concept of natural necessity – sometimes also called physical or extra-logical necessity by Sellars – will be clarified through the lens of a sophisticated possible worlds semantics developed in the spirit of Leibniz, with the clause that "as our purpose is not historical, we shall have to disregard much that he said, and add much that he didn't say" (*ibid.*, 9).

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[107] As O'Shea explains, in AKV "Lewis would further clarify that since the relevant hypotheticals in the assertion of law must support counterfactuals concerning what further sense-qualities *would* be given if such and such *were* experienced, the connections involved can (he explains) be neither (i) mere deductive entailments, nor even (ii) 'strict implications' […], and also not simply (iii) universally quantified material conditionals; rather, they must state what Lewis in AKV calls *real connections* or *natural connections* between matters-of-fact" (O'Shea 2016, p. 202).

[108] The irreducibility of causal necessity to logical principles was a well-known problem at the time. Feigl shares with Sellars the same suspicion about real connections' adequacy in advancing the problem at all (Feigl 1963, p. 126). He recognizes that "Hume's (and generally the radical empiricist) analysis of causal propositions is in need of emendation", and he also acknowledges the urge "to establish and clarify a meaning of 'causal connection' that is stronger than Hume's constant conjunction and weaker than entailment or deductibility" (*ibid.*). In footnote, he then refers precisely to Sellars' CIL as the demonstration that physical laws have a stronger necessity than the law characterizing material implications, physical necessities being "constitutive principles of the conception of a given world, or rather of a class or family of worlds which are all characterized by the same laws" (*ibid.*). More on this will be said in the following.

Sellars starts by stipulating some vocabulary: instead of using the Leibnizian-flavored term "possible worlds", he prefers to speak of possible *histories*, each of which exhibits certain "uniformities of the sort we have in mind when we speak of the laws of nature" (*ibid*., 11). Histories have *particulars*, not to be intended as substances but rather as "events, or, better, states of affairs" (*ibid*.). Each particular exemplifies a simple qualitative (non-relational) universal. Now, the minimal unit included in Sellars' analysis – and this is key to his argument – is not a single possible history: rather, it is a *family of possible histories*. In section three, some denotations follow:

- A family of possible histories H^0, H^1, H^2... with H^0 being the actual history,
- A set of simple non-relational universal (U_1, U_2, U_3...),
- "Sets of possible particulars which are ingredient in these possible histories" (CIL 12):

  K^0 consists of the particulars x_1, x_2, x_3... in H^0,

  K^1 consists of the particulars x_1, x_2, x_3... in H^1,

  Etc.[109]

How does this framework work? First of all, Sellars does not admit unattached particulars: "*every possible particular belongs to one or other of the possible histories making up this family*" (*ibid*.). This implies that histories are basically arrays of exemplifications of universals. Particulars, or state-of-affairs, however, can themselves be possible or actual with respect to each history: this gives birth to a complex denotation system that makes abundant use of superscripts to design a model in which different evaluations are allowed: for example, "Blue x_6^3 which can be *possible* relative to H^3 in which Yellow x_6^3 is true (if the family of possible histories includes a history in which Blue x_6^3 is true) but *impossible* relative to H^3 (if the family of histories does not include a possible history in which Blue x_6^3 is true)" (Heyndels *forthcoming*). This complex structure accounts for the fact that each history can be provided with false statements, i.e., by formulating statements which are possible, but not actual, relative to a history.

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[109] I remark in passing that the fact that particulars come only in sets and not as single entities fits entirely with the account of complex particulars that Sellars will spell out the following year in LCP. In what follows we will see that, according to Sellars, not just particulars, but also universals come in sets.

In an attempt to better explicate on what grounds a family of possible histories is grouped, Sellars introduces the universals talk. The basic assumption is that "*universals and laws are correlatives: same universals, same laws; different universals, different laws*" (CIL 16). Distancing himself from the Western philosophical tradition which, in his view, has approached the problem from the wrong direction (*ibid.*,17), Sellars not only takes the existence of universals for granted, but he enriches it by adding "the existence of domains of *possible universals*, and not just as a queer speculation to which one should pay one's respect in a systematic discussion", but as "the key to the puzzle of real connections, a key which, when translated into the language of modern empiricism, opens the way for a reconciliation of the rationalistic and empiricist traditions in modern philosophy" (*ibid.*, italics mine). Indeed, the clarification of the concept of *law* will be given through answering the question of how it is possible to distinguish between different possible universals[110] – an answer that "is not so easy as it might seem, and far more significant" (*ibid.*, 18). In the following paragraphs, Sellars explores some options: neither separating families of universals according to patterns of determinable-determinable relations (*ibid.*, 19), nor differentiating them by appealing to their relation to *actual* particulars (*ibid.*, 20) seems promising. The path of the ineffability of universals which "reveal" themselves to our minds is also mentioned: "[w]hat a fantastic end for the Platonic Realm of Intelligible Being this would be!" (*ibid.*, 21). Luckily there is no need to go down this path: its obvious platonic and psychologistic tendencies prevents us from embracing it.

Even though it is wrong, the second route at least points to the right direction: the differentiation of universals cannot be understood without taking into account particulars, but they must include not just actual but also *possible* particulars.[111] Possible histories, possible universals, possible particulars: this is the framework Sellars works with in CIL.

It is at this point that the "constructive" part of the essay really begins. The question is still the same: on what basis are universals differentiated from each other? And how are they grouped into families?

One point to be held steady is that a family of possible histories does *not* consist "of all 'logically possible' arrays of exemplifications of the universals by sets of particulars, where by this is meant the arrays that would be possible if a domain of universals were a sheer multiplicity of

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[110] "In virtue of what is each of these universals a different universals from its fellows?" (CIL 18).

[111] "*The truth of the matter is not that the differentiation of universals is unintelligible, but rather that it cannot be understood without taking particulars into account. When we made an attempt along these lines a moment ago, we limited our attention to actual particulars. This time we must take possible particulars into account*" (CIL 21).

exemplifiables, as substitutable for one another in any context as pennies" (CIL 23). The key to the solution of this problem is something that we met before:[112] Leibniz' principle of compossibility, which can now be now developed "to its full stature" by giving up on the idea that the only non-compossibilities between simple universals are logical contradictories (*ibid.*, 24). This means that the arrays of exemplifications allowed into a certain family (of possible histories) is somewhat determined by certain *non-logical restrictions*. This is how Sellars spells it out:

> In exemplifying a common domain of universals, the histories of the family exhibit certain common invariancies involving the relations in which particulars stand and the qualitative universals they exemplify. […] since these invariancies restrict the family to less than […] the "logically possible arrays of exemplifications of the universals" and are therefore not the invariancies which are exhibited in the formulae of logic we may call them *material invariancies*. We have thus found out that the notions of a *domain of universals*, a *family of possible histories* and a *set of material invariances* are correlative, being internally related, that is, essentially bound up with one another.
> (CIL 25)

Sellars is telling us that, in order to discern between different histories, what we need to look at are *material invariancies* characterizing each of them. The role of material invariancies is precisely to set boundaries to the infinite logically conceivable arrays of universals and particulars thinkable in a family of possible histories: in this sense, the various families of possible histories are a restricted subgroup of the larger group containing all the wildest conceivable histories that one could think of if the only restrictions available were merely logical.[113] The key here is precisely the distinction between *logical* and *physical* possibility. A family of possible histories contains "materially consistent" histories, but it need not include all the logically consistent histories.

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[112] Here on page 61.
[113] Sellars imagines this objection to be spelled out by an imaginative interlocutor: "'Surely,' one might say, 'once you start talking about 'possible histories', you must admit even the 'wildest' history to be possible. Is it not a truism to say that all conceivable histories are possible histories? And surely only the 'invariancies of logic', if even these, can set a limit to the conceivable wildness of a history! […] To be sure, you went on to argue that the family of possible histories which is correlated with a domain of universals must be smaller than the set of all 'logically possible' arrays, but while your reasoning seemed plausible enough at the time, I am now very uncomfortable. How can the number of *possible* histories be fewer than the number of *conceivable* histories?'" (CIL 26).

After a refinement of the vocabulary introduced at the beginning (CIL 35-7),[114] Sellars is ready "to consider the light which is thrown on the status of 'law of nature' by the distinctions to which we have been led" (*ibid.*, 35). Let us then go back to the initial question: "Must a statement of the kind '$\forall x(\Phi x \rightarrow \Psi x)$' be analytic if true, '$\Psi x$' being logically contained in 'Φx', when the values of 'x' are taken to be all possible particulars?". Sellars' answer, in line with his intent to clarify the logical structure underlying real connections, is that such a question is based on a mistake. Indeed,

> [t]here are no universals which combine with all possible particulars (without qualification) to constitute possible states of affairs. A universal can combine with only those possible particulars which belong to the family of possible histories in relation to which the universal has its being. Thus, if 'Φ' and 'Ψ' are to be the names of definite universals […], they must belong to the set of universals characteristic of one family of possible histories, and the values of 'x' associated with them can only be the possible particulars belonging to that family.
> (CIL 38)

The universally quantified implication with which Sellars began the essay is not a real problem: according to the framework described by Sellars, universals combine not with all possible particulars, but only with the ones belonging to the family in which they belong.[115] In such a framework, a law of nature become "*a universal proposition, implicative in form, which holds of all histories of a family of possible histories; as such it is distinguished from 'accidental' formal implications which hold of one or more possible histories of the family, but do not hold for all*" (CIL 41): in other words, the material invariancies mentioned above "are exactly laws of nature" (*ibid.*, 42). They have been called *material* since the beginning because they are extra-logical: "[i]t takes but a moment to see that not only are the material invariancies (bound up with a set of universals) laws of nature which obtain of all histories which exemplify these universals, they are also the only non-logical invariancies common to all these histories" (*ibid.*, 43). The resulting picture of logical necessity is that of a formal, empty notion, whose generality is such to make it valid for all the families of possible histories. Natural necessity, conversely, has a generality such that it holds only for a certain family of histories (among which there is the actual one). CIL's material invariances, in

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[114] Here on page 119.
[115] "The very idea that there could be two universals one of which materially implies the other in all possible histories of all possible families of histories is a mistake, and *consequently the question as to whether a statement which makes such a claim with respect to two universals must be analytic if true cannot arise*" (CIL 39).

this sense, are clearly counterparts to conformation rules: while formation and transformation rules dictate rules for the combination of sentences on purely logical compatibilities, conformation rules mirror necessary restrictions to which empirically meaningful languages are tied. Contrarily to freely invented syntactical rules for calculi, conformation rules concern actual restrictions dictated by physical necessities. As Jeffrey Sicha remarks, "it is part of being an empirically meaningful (i.e., applied) language that there be natural laws which connect the language, through the tokening of language user, to natural objects. Such natural laws are, for Sellars, 'material transformation rules'" (Sicha 2005 [1980], p. 47).

At the beginning of the essay, Sellars presents the task brought forward in CIL as basically aimed at the clarification of some "conceptual structures" taken for granted by philosophers when approaching questions about modality, laws of nature, and the universal-particular relation. The complex apparatus spelled out in the essay should allow the reader to understand that, contrary to numerous attempts during the course of Western philosophy – especially among empiricists –, an analysis of physical necessity cannot be cashed out in terms of logical necessity. However, the real outcome of the argument lies elsewhere. Let me explain.

At the beginning of the paper, Sellars says that the discourse brought forward in CIL was to be intentionally developed within a naively realistic framework (CIL 10) that, in the end, would be dropped. At the end of the essay, the initial remark is repeated and he recognizes that

> [i]n speaking of an "exploration" of the Conceptual Realm, we have been making use of a ladder which we must throw away, for to rely on this metaphor is to give aid and comfort to the notion that thinking involves "acquaintance" with universals and other meanings. This notion, however, is a mistake.
>
> (CIL 53)

Now, the *non*-naively realistic framework that Sellars is referring to has already been developed – he says it himself in one of the last footnotes of the essay (CIL 53 fn20) – in pure pragmatics essays, especially RNWW. What happens, then, once the ladder is thrown away? How is universal talk supposed to fit into the "adequate empiricism" envisioned in pure pragmatics? Can the "Realm of Being" be squeezed into a naturalistic framework? Why has universal talk been introduced at all, then?

Metaphysical explanations can appeal to universals for various reasons. Historically, philosophers have used abstract entities to explain resemblances and differences between

objects; to account for laws of nature and distinguish them from generalizations (Dretske 1977); to ground correspondentist theory of truth, or to justify shared causal properties among entities. Debates on universals and abstract entities in general are as old as philosophy itself, but they were flourishing in Sellars' philosophical neighborhood, among analytic philosophers especially.[116]

After the linguistic turn, debates did not focus as much on the existence or individuation criteria for universals, but rather on "the legitimacy of explanations or justifications into which such objects traditionally figure" (Kraut 2010, p. 593). The need for an answer to this problem was made urgent especially by the pragmatists' "anti-metaphysical stance" regarding alleged supernatural entities guiding human practices (Williams 2010, fn4). However, Wittgenstein's theory of language games was needed in order for a further possibility to arise: "that talk of universals provides neither explanation nor justification for our classifications, but rather serves [...] as a mechanism for marking the correctness of such classifications. That correctness, in turn, is grounded in linguistic normativities rather than shared entities" (*ibid.*, p. 596). This intriguing possibility seems to be precisely what lies at the bottom of Sellars' treatment of universals and abstract entities as fostered in CIL.[117] Indeed, if we were to plug the modal analysis spelled out above into the epistemological analysis of RNWW, we would reach the conclusion that the "acquaintance" with universals can be accounted for only as a linguistic fact. Sellars' New Way of Words – or, to be more precise, the "New Nominalism" espoused by Sellars' New Way of Words – is indeed said to avoid both "*ontological realism* with respect to classes and universals", and "the absurdities of *logical nominalism*", and instead to defend "*logical or epistemological realism* with respect to universals and classes" (RNWW 15). This epistemological realism is set forth through pure pragmatics' metalinguistic analysis as described in PPF2, that is, a metalinguistic analysis which discriminates linguistic expressions based on how they are *used*.

If we apply the (pure) pragmatic analysis to the operation spelled out in CIL, we see that:

> under the guise of 'exploring' the 'realm of possibility' we have been rehearsing explicative metalinguistic activity of the sort which is characteristic of the 'analytic philosopher' who is but a few steps removed from common sense.

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[116] For more on this, I recommend the collection of essays MacBride (2018).

[117] In Kraut (2016), the author shows how Sellars' account of abstract entities is perfectly compatible with the anti-metaphysical hostility of pragmatism.

(CIL 53)

In other words, modal claims can be accounted for as rule-regulated behavior: with a nice expression from Jeffrey Sicha, terms like "necessarily" are taken by Sellars as "rule indicator terms" (Sicha 2005 [1980], p. 63). Basically, modal terms indicate the presence of a rule, whose place is in the metalanguage, that is "mirrored" or "reflected" in object-language – something that confirms "that modal terms can find a place in the naturalistic account of language as rule-governed" (*ibid.*).

Published in 1948 and likely written earlier, CIL anticipates most of the elements of Sellars' later treatment of abstract entities. As Kraut remarks, "Sellars's work on this topic […] focuses precisely upon the extent to which universals are not in the business of explanation or justification. Such "objects" are […] codifications and reifications of linguistic norms" (Kraut 2010, p. 598). And this is precisely the conclusion to LRB's example (reported here on page 108). So, what is the truth about real connections?

The relation between color and extension works perfectly as an example of one of those "material invariances" mentioned in CIL, according to which universals are rooted one into each other. The fact that colors come with extension is precisely that kind of *non-logical* uniformity shared among all possible worlds of the family to which *our* world belongs (while, on the contrary, *logical* uniformities hold not just for all possible worlds, but for all possible worlds of all possible families). In LRB's example, then, Sellars distinguished the ontological and the cognitive side of the classic doctrine of synthetic *a priori*: "Ontologically there is the real connection between the universals in question, say, Color and Extension. It is here that the necessity is located. On the other hand there is the cognitive fact of the intuitive awareness of this real connection, the *Schau* of the phenomenologist" (LRB 27).

Now, granted that "it is just as legitimate and, indeed, necessary for the philosopher to speak of real connections, as it is to speak of universals, propositions and possible worlds", Sellars declares that, on the contrary, "it is just as illegitimate to speak of real connections as possible objects of awareness or intuition or *Schau* […] as it is to speak of apprehending universals, propositions and possible worlds" (*ibid.*, 33).[118] Towards the end, the whole argument is summed up:

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[118] This amounts to what Carl Sachs refer to as "the circularity objection", which hinges on the following thought: "in order to *begin* to apprehend abstracta or universals, we would need to be able to *notice* them. But we cannot notice them without having the requisite concepts. But according to this pseudo-psychology, the requisite concepts

What, then, is the truth about real connections? What is the significance of modal words in logically synthetic sentences? The answer is the twin brother of the regulists conception of the logical modalities. Our use of the term "necessary" in causal as well as in logical contexts is to be traced to linguistic rules. Where Hume charged the rationalist […] with projecting a subjective feeling of compulsion into the environment, we charge the rationalist with projecting the rules of his language into the non-linguistic world.

(LRB 34)

With this quote we have finally come full circle: Sellars declares that the term "necessary", whether in logical *or* causal contexts, is ultimately accounted for by the linguistic rules governing it. Which rules? None other than conformation rules. It is in this sense that Sellars can say, immediately afterwards, that he has made "real connections, so to speak, entirely immanent to thought" (LRB 40).

All this allows us to acknowledge that the early resemblance of conformation rules to Husserl's material *a priori* propositions survives in Sellars' account only in an extremely truncated form. The quote from LRB shows that Sellars does not consider the phenomenological doctrine of *Wesensschau* as a viable option. Even though it is true that Husserl's reflections on the material *a priori* points to something essential that Schlick's account oversimplifies, it is only by stripping its rationalistic tendencies away that "the fire burning under the smoke" (LRB 39) can be saved and adapted to the need of an effective, *authentically philosophical* empiricism. The solution for which Sellars opts in the end – this will come up again in section 3.1.4 – is a merely linguistic, metaphysically uncommitted conception of the synthetic *a priori*[119] that reconceives Husserl's claims about the material *a priori* into a strategy palatable to empiricists: it is in this sense that Sellars "believes he can show that most of the things the responsible Platonists want to say can be reconstructed with his tools and remain *true*, even when stripped of their obnoxious ontological commitments" (DeVries 2005, p. 67).

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are directly apprehended. Thus, we cannot directly apprehend abstracta or universals, as abstracta and universals, *unless we already have*" (Sachs 2022, pp. 102-3).

[119] One that, for this reason, has not avoided criticism (see, for instance, Westphal (2018) for a critique of a merely linguistic *or* metalinguistic synthetic *a priori*). Sellars' deflationary view of the synthetic *a priori*, in a way, confirms the deep impressions that Marvin Farber had on him, since the version elaborated in the end is in line with Farber's project of a *naturalization* of phenomenology. For a different take on Sellars' relation to Husserl's material *a priori* – one that emphasizes similarities over discrepancies – see Sanguettoli (2020) (in Italian).

As we will see in chapter 3, the inferentialist account of meaning and the deflationist re-conception of the synthetic *a priori* allow Sellars both to solve the problem of the acquaintance of universals without giving in to any "intuitions of essences", *and* to make his synthetic *a priori* responsive to the challenges of then-contemporary science. Before turning to that matter, however, another piece of the puzzle must be put in place.

2.3 Predication Revisited: Particulars

In the previous section, I have shown one piece of Sellars' renewal of some core assumptions in philosophical analysis. Underlying CIL particularly is a certain ambiguity regarding the accounting of laws of nature through the structure "All F is G". In this sense, Sellars' general aim in the essay can be described as a re-thinking of the logical structure of universally quantified sentences, of which, in the end, he provides a pure pragmatic account.

The path designed by Sellars in the course of his analysis of the topic makes extensive use of a possible worlds semantics through which some important points that characterize his approach to universal-particular relation are established. Among these, we see the inclusion, in the analysis, of not only actual but of *possible* universals (as well as possible particulars), the mutual dependency (or "correlation") of universals with laws, and the introduction of the minimal unit constituted by a *family* of possible worlds, which includes correlative domains of universals and sets of material invariances.[120]

The real gain, however, can be cashed out only once the "naively realistic veil" under which Sellars had spelled out his analysis has been finally dropped – or, to say it differently, once "material mode of speech" is translated into the properly "formal mode of speech." In light of the distinctive metalinguistic treatment of pure pragmatics, which, as I have set out in PPF2,

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[120] The possible world analysis set forth in CIL is resorted at the beginning of the already mentioned unpublished manuscript OPL, where the importance of the notion of a *family of worlds* is highlighted:

> 1.132 Worlds come in families. To each family belongs a set of simple characteristics (qualities and relations), and each world of the family exhibits a set of uniformities involving these characteristics.
> 1.1321 These uniformities are the non-logical necessities (natural laws) of the family.
> […]
> 1.133 Logical necessities are *uniformities* which hold of all worlds.
> […]
> 1.1343 Just as each family of worlds is associated with a set of simple characteristics private to that family, so each world has its own private set of particulars. The worlds of a family exemplify the same characteristics, but no particular is common to two worlds.
> (OPL)

considers linguistic items with respect to their functional role, modal terms have consequently been accounted for as "rule-indicator" terms.

After undergoing such a "detoxification", the universal lexicon does not need to be expelled anymore: on the contrary, it can be retained, but only on the condition of *not* intending it in the traditional sense. Sellars' approach in this regard was anticipated in a footnote to RNWW:

> The solution of the problem of universals thus consists exactly in showing that the following statements are all true: (1) "There are universals". (2) "Some mental events mean universals". (3) "It is nonsense to speak of any psychological relationship between mental events and universals". The solution involves, as we have seen, *first* a making explicit of the ambiguities of the term "existence"; *second* a distinction between "meaning" as a term belonging to the framework of epistemological or logical analysis, and "meaning" as a descriptive term in empirical psychology relating to habits of response to and manipulation of linguistic symbols. The classical conception of mind as apprehending universals and propositions is based on a confusion of these two frames of reference. To deny that universals exist *when speaking in the logical frame*, is as mistaken as to assert that universals exist when speaking in the framework of the psychological description of thought. We must, and can, avoid both logical nominalism and ontological realism.
> (RNWW 50 fn14)[121]

Sellars' nominalism is among the oldest tenets of his epistemology. In pure pragmatics' essays, Sellars endorsed the "New Nominalism" with respect to classes and universals, which was supposed to enable the universal talk preventing it from falling into the usual "absurdities" of "logical nominalism" and "ontological realism" (RNWW 15). This view on universals does justice to the platonic insight according to which there are, indeed, universals, and that some mental events *mean* universals, but avoids factualist implications by analyzing "means" (as well

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[121] This footnote also appears one year later in the essay "Aristotelian Philosophies of Mind" (APM, 1949), with microscopic adjustments: "The solution of the problem of universals consists exactly in showing that the following statements are all true: (1) "Universals exist." (2) "Thoughts mean universals." (3) "It is nonsense to speak of any psychological relationship between thought and universals." The solution involves *first* a making explicit of the ambiguities of the term "existence," and *second* a distinction between "meaning" as a term belonging to the framework of logical analysis and criticism, and "meaning" as a descriptive term in empirical psychology relating to habits of response to and manipulation of linguistic symbols. The classical conception of mind as apprehending universals and meaning is based on a confusion of the logical with the psychological frame of reference. To deny that universals "exist" *when speaking in the framework of logical analysis* (logical nominalism) is as mistaken as to assert that universals "exist" *when speaking in the framework of the psychological description of thought* (ontological realism or Platonism)" (APM, p. 550 fn11).

as "refers", and other semantical predicates) not in terms of object-language relations between linguistic items and worldly objects, but as properly belonging to a pragmatic *metalanguage*. The inability to appreciate this fundamental insight according to which semantic predicates embody rules which structure object-language led philosophical analysis to concede more and more terrain to psychologism.

In section 1.3.2, I then better specified Sellars' conception of psychologism by distinguishing two kinds of mistake: one giving rise to "epistemologism" (basically, when epistemological content is ranked alongside facts of empirical psychology, but it is still recognized as philosophical, RNWW 15 fn3), the other to psychologism "in the narrower sense" (when epistemological content is entirely reduced to psychological content, and it is deprived of any philosophical significance, *ibid*.). This distinction allows us to appreciate the different kind of relation between psychology and philosophy as envisioned by Sellars. His distinctive anti-psychologism differs from "classic" anti-psychologism of the kind espoused by Husserl or Frege (which corresponds to the "psychologism in the narrower sense" mentioned above). Their anti-psychologism, based on laws of thought's normativity, was indeed also anti-naturalistic: logic must be not reduced to psychology. Sellars' anti-psychologism, instead, rather revolves around the discrimination between different levels of discourse, and the necessity of not conflating them: this is indeed what results from the footnote to RNWW, which distinguishes the framework of logical from psychological analysis. This peculiar kind of anti-psychologism envisions not only, as I have tried to show in chapter 1, the acceptance and exploitation of psychological devices and lexicon in the context of a philosophical analysis, but it is also compatible with Sellars' naturalism.[122]

Particularly insightful is Sellars' demystification of psychologism as lingering in the accounts of both rationalists *and* empiricists:

> Psychologism underlies both Platonism and Humean nominalism, not to mention the conceptualistic attempt to compromise. The essentially *new* feature of the New Way of Words is that it does not commit this mistake. Epistemologism leads to *ontological realism* with respect to classes and universals. Psychologism in the narrower sense leads to the absurdities of *logical nominalism*. The New Nominalism avoids both, and defends instead *logical or epistemological realism*

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[122] In appreciating how Sellars' early anti-psychologism envisions a different relationship with naturalism than classic anti-psychologism, I have benefitted from a talk given by Carl Sachs on 11/22/2022 at the university of Padua, entitled "The Cultural Politics of Cognitive Science". Some reflections on Sellars' early metaphilosophy can be found also in Sachs (2022, esp. pp. 101-2).

with respect to universals and classes. As we shall see, the New Way of Words does justice to the Platonic insight, while avoiding its supposed factual implication.

(RNWW 15)

According to Sellars, ontological realism about universals and classes lies behind one of the biggest sources of confusion concerning Western ontology's deep structure: the subject-predicate logical form. This linguistic expedient is indeed embedded in a "metaphysics of substance" to which we are so accustomed that it is almost impossible to completely discard, and its usage survives in philosophy at least for broadly "pragmatic" reasons. Consider:

(1) Fido is angry.
(2) Fido bites the cat.

If we abstract away from the details, we identify the grammatical structures of (1) and (2) with the corresponding logician's formulas:

(a) Fa
(b) Rab[123]

In the much later article "Towards a Theory of Predication" (TTP, 1983), Sellars will describe the standard theory which lie behind the grammatical structure of (1) and (2) and their subsequent translation into the logician's language through a perspicuous diagram (*ibid.*, 3):

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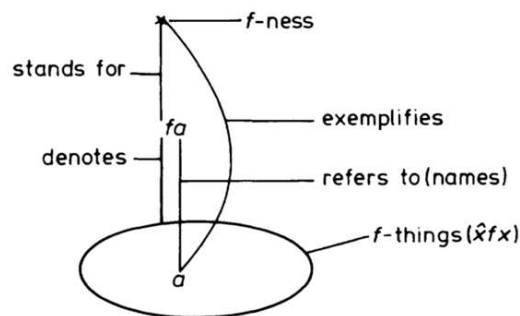
[123] Sellars deploys *Principia Mathematica*'s notation. Thus, he writes f(x) and aRb. As before, I have replaced them with the standard notation.

Formula *a* is unpacked in this way: the individual constant of the formula refers to the wordly "sensum", while the predicate stands for the universal property F-ness (in the case of 1, angryness). This view – which Sellars also calls the "perennial" view (TTP 3) – resorts to abstract entities in a way that is unacceptable to the nominalist perspective that Sellars is construing. While most of the thoughts that will be given to the topic belong to a later phase of his thought, Sellars' re-thinking of the theory of predication is anticipated in the early writings through some reflections on the notion of "particular". In what follows I will show how Sellars, as usual, does not merely provide a new solution from well-worn roads: rather he proceeds to question the whole framework of predication itself. In the course of the time span that I am considering, he accomplishes this in two essays: namely, "On the Logic of Complex Particulars" (LCP, 1949), and the slightly later "Particulars" (P, 1952).[124]

As with many of the early essays' topics, Sellars' theory of particulars is just one among the many that have been almost entirely overlooked.[125] In what follows, then, I will present the topic as it is and, consequently, I will try to see how it fit within Sellars' bigger picture as described so far (section 2.3.2). In order to collocate the topic correctly, however, I will once again start with a prequel (2.3.1).

2.3.1 Prequel: Bare Particulars or Bundles of Universals?

What makes this instance of blue a particular instance of blue? The perennial answer given to this perennial question of philosophy makes it a matter of an object "having" (in a sense to be defined) certain properties (for instance, being blue).[126] Being "blue" a property that can be exemplified in more than one object, the property of being blue is interpreted as a universal ("blueness"), through which differences and similarities between things are explained.

Universals, however, cannot be the *only* "constituents" of objects: if this were to be the case, we would not be able to distinguish, for instance, two blue spots located in different places at the

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[124] The topic of particulars will not really come up anymore in Sellars' production – at least, not in this precise shape. As has been explored in Seibt (1990), particulars so conceived have likely inspired Sellars' later conception of process ontology. Given the take that I am emphasizing here (that is, a strictly linguistic level of analysis), I am not going to delve into ontological aspects. As I see it, Sellars almost never touches ontological questions in early essays.

[125] As far as I know, the only published materials up to now are Rauzy (2009, in French), Morganti (2012) and Nunziante (2021).

[126] For a treatment of this very problem between C.I. Lewis and Roy Wood Sellars, I recommend Neuber (2022).

same time.[127] To account for the singularity of individual objects, the perennial philosopher resorts then to the postulation of a featureless, bare *substratum*, to which universals are somehow "attached". But once this classic move has been made, a whole new problem makes its entrance on the scene. In effect, once particulars have been separated from universals, the former becomes quite mysterious. What are these *substrata*? How can they be defined, separately from universals? These are just some of the problems attaining the most classic and unquestioned theory in Western ontology, which went by the name of *bare particularism*.

Sellars' reflections on the topic of particulars do not spring out of nothing. Particulars, and universal-particular relation in general, were at the center of a huge metaphysical debate in analytic philosophy during the 1950s.[128] Sellars, as usual, aims to find a "third way" between the two rival theories regarding particulars then in vogue: bare particularism and so-called "bundle theories". The dispute revolved around a central question: how are we to interpret the relation between substances and qualities?

The first thing to note is that Sellars had the chance to assist to some of the debate's developments from a privileged position during the years spent at the State University of Iowa. The topic was indeed discussed by Gustav Bergmann precisely during the years of his permanence in the same philosophy department. While bare particularism was already under attack (even though the attack, as we will see, did not get to the roots of the problem), Bergmann had the merit of attacking the other equally problematic side ("bundle theories"). Indeed, it was Sellars' conviction that "the contention that particulars are 'complexes of universals' is as unsound as the notion of bare particulars" (P, p. 288 fn1),[129] and Russell's theory, which tried to get rid of particulars with the noble aim of also getting rid of metaphysically suspicious substrata, was no less flawed than its rival.

Sellars' opening of the discussion starts by acknowledging that the dismantling work of the notion of "bare particular" has not been completed. Even though the absurdities behind it have been exposed in daylight (and indeed the doctrine of bare particulars was no longer given much credit, at least not at the time when Sellars was writing), the fundamental mistake which generated bare particulars was still in need of being traced back to its roots:

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[127] More properly, bundle theories suffer from the problem of the Identity of Indiscernibles. For more on this, see Morganti (2011).
[128] For more on this, see the essays in MacBride (2018).
[129] In this footnote, Sellars refers precisely to Bergmann (1947) and Jones (1950) for a critique of Russell's strategy.

Even should the theory be abandoned, at least as an overt article of faith, the root confusion is left untouched by this method, and, like many a versatile disease, finds other ways of making its presence felt. Indeed, to change our metaphor, philosophers can often be observed to leap from the frying-pan of one absurdity into the fire of another, and from there into the well of a third, and *da capo* as long as a fundamental confusion remains uncovered.

(P, p. 282)

The forced embracing of one or the other theory, between which philosophers were continually switching, has its origins in the subject-predicate lens through which we look at reality. This structure is accounted for as a relation in which universals are, somehow, "instantiated" in different particulars, leaving open only two options: either the particular is accounted for as the conjoining of a universal and a "bare" element, or the particular is accounted for as consisting of universals only. Theories of the former kind were referred to as theories hinging on "bare particulars", theories of the second kind as "bundle theories".

The popularity of bare particularism especially should not be surprising. Bare particularism, accounting for singularity through the conjoining of a quality (general) with a featureless, individual *substratum* that accounts for its being a *particular* instance of that quality, is likely the most intuitive and fixed picture in Western ontology.

On the opposite side, however, according to Sellars, things did not look much better. "What of Lord Russell's dogged attempts to conceive of particulars as complexes of universals?" (*ibid.*, p. 283), he asks. In his view, so-called "bundle theories" of the kind espoused by Russell are committed to a specular mistake: "bare particulars, particulars as complexes of universals and universals as sets of resembling particulars can be taken, respectively, as the frying-pan, the fire, and the well of the metaphor at the end of the preceding paragraph" (*ibid.*).

Now, according to Sellars, a common mistake lies at the base of both theories. That this mistake has not been brought to light yet, leaves philosophical debates at risk of being tarnished again by "absurd notions" like "that this colorful universe of ours contains such queer entities as featureless substrata or bare particulars" (P, p. 282), as well as the one according to which particulars are dispensable entities, as bundle theorists wanted. This mistake, in short, is that they both mistake particulars for *facts about particulars*. In Sellars' words,

To say that a blue particular consists of Blue and a particular is indeed to talk nonsense; but it is nonsense which arises not out of a dualism of particulars and universals, but out of a confusion between particulars and facts.

(P, p. 287)

Both sides, thus, are guilty of treating facts *as if* they were particulars. They both inherit the metaphysical duality between universals and particulars, which is not a problem *per se*, but it becomes one when this dualism is transformed into an ontology of substance. From this point of view, Nunziante is right in pointing out that the "third way" traced by Sellars is not really a third way, since it consists of a re-discussion of the whole framework in which bare particularism and bundle theories are both embedded (Nunziante 2021, p. 12024).

Sellars' discussion on particulars, as I will make clear, does not aim to eliminate particular-universal talk. Rather, it points out the problematic "thingifying attitude" of subject-predicate statements, mirrored by the basic logical structure of propositional function attributing predicates to an individual constant. His dismantling and rebuilding operation leverages the concept of "complex particular", which, instead of re-proposing the same old metaphysics of substance by talking about "things" and "facts", spells out a more sophisticated analysis in terms of "situations" or "episodes" (*ibid.*, p. 12029). The attempt, in this sense, is to put classic ontological categories such as "object", "property", "quality", and so on, under stress, and to show that they are not as fundamental or non-revisable as they seem to be at a first glance. To do this, means to exorcise the ghost of the Myth of the Given from ontology. In what follows, I try to spell out the details of this complex matter.

2.3.2 Complexity Matters

The declared intent of the essay "On the Logic of Complex Particulars" (LCP, 1949) is to "raise certain issues relating to the concept of predication, and having done so, to develop a schema for clarifying them" (LCP 1). While CIL has analyzed the logical structure of universally quantified statements describing physical laws (and has reached the conclusion that such statements need to be modal statements in order to bear counterfactuals, and that to modal statements, in turn, a pure pragmatic treatment shall be given), in LCP the logical structure underlying statements on thing-level is under scrutiny, that is, sentences which ascribe some

property to some object, which are construed in logic as substitutional instances of the propositional function:

1. Fx

According to Sellars, the "reification" that this function spontaneously elicits has been responsible for rather uncomfortable assumptions that, from the field of logic, have been quickly moved to metaphysics. It is these assumptions that his analysis wishes to demystify.

The problem lies in interpreting (1) as a statement attributing a property F to an individual x, which is usually read as the attribution of a *quality* F to a *thing* x. Contrarily to this standardized reading, Sellars is convinced that propositional functions like (1) mesh different kinds of logical structures, which are concealed by the usage of the same formula.

From the methodological point of view, Sellars makes it clear that he is still not "concerned with the peculiarities of the world" (*ibid.*, 13). Rather, his analysis shall be considered as "a study in the foundations of logic, and, indeed, […] a study of the characteristic features which must be present in a language about a world of fact in order for the familiar formulae of the calculus of functions to be applicable to expressions belonging to it" (*ibid.*).[130]

To disentangle the complexity underlying apparently identical propositional functions constituted by the conjoining of a subject and a predicate, Sellars starts by reflecting on the difference between statements like:

> A1. Fido is a dog.
> A2. It is a twinge.

with statements such as:

> B1. Fido is angry.
> B2. It is painful.

All these four statements are given the same formal representation as (1) above. However, if we are asked whether they really share the same logical form, there seems to be a difference. The

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[130] In reviewing LCP and P, Hempel remarks how Sellars did not succeed in precisely this aim (Hempel 1958).

difference stands out clearly by introducing the language of classes. Indeed, while Fido in A1 and the painful sensation in A2 can be said to belong to the class represented by their predicate (respectively, "Fido" belongs to the class "dog"; "it" belongs to the class "twinge"), the same strategy does not work with B1 and B2. As Sellars remarks, "[i]t strikes us as impossible to interpret the examples of B-statements as saying that their subject items *as wholes* are respectively *cases* or *instances* of Anger and Pain *without doing violence to our (unexplained) notion of what is involved in something's being a case or instance of a concept*" (LCP 10).[131] A more adequate representation of B-statements should be something like:

> B1.1. Fido ∈ Angry-thing.
> B2.1. It ∈ Painful-situation.

These two representations have the merit of singling out the addition of a peculiar suffix introduced to modify predicates in order for them to resemble the distinctive kind of subject-predicate relation present in B-statements. Since the scope of LCP is described exactly by Sellars as an investigation of the logical structure of propositional functions, the following question concerns the meaning of statements of the form "x is an F-thing".

I can now anticipate that the sense of "thing" of which Sellars is going to be talking about is precisely that of a "complex particular", which gives the name to the essay (*ibid.*, 13). In other words, according to Sellars, the variable "x" has always been given a problematic meaning: in the traditional sense, x denotes a simple particular of the kind espoused by bare particularists, that is, a *substratum* to which certain properties are attached. In the sense that Sellars is interested, x denotes *complex* particulars, for only complex particulars can be properly singled out and predicated.

Sellars' point is that all things that we are accustomed to identifying as discrete objects are, in truth, non-repeatable, *qualitative episodes* or *situations* (Nunziante 2021, p. 12024), unique in their genre. As anticipated, Sellars is questioning the framework of things and properties as a whole. In short,

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[131] The quote goes on: "We should prefer to say that anger and pain are somehow […] *present in* the subject items. Thus, our answer to the question concerning the statement about Fido must be in the negative *not, indeed, because Fido as a whole isn't the subject of the statement* […], *but because the statement does not say of Fido that he is a case or instance of Anger.* 'But', it will be urged, 'this is absurd! 'Fido is angry' is a typical subject-predicate proposition, and if it doesn't say that Fido is a case of Anger, what *does* it do?" (*ibid.*).

instead of speaking of things endowed with properties, we should rather speak of "complex particulars", whereby we should intend a non-relational way of rethinking predication. Thinking of Fido (the subject of our utterance) as a complex particular helps us to understand that we are not dealing with a particular substance that somehow instantiates multiple qualities, but rather with a complex in which multiple simple ingredients are functionally linked.

(Nunziante 2021, p. 12025)

To formally represents this new, more sophisticated kind of relationship, Sellars exploits the Leibnizian notion of "ingredience".[132] The Anger, therefore, is treated as an "ingredient" of the complex particular Fido (who is then a *specimen* of Anger),[133] and it is formalized thus:

2. $(Ey) I(y,x) \& f(y)$[134]

This account of B-statements in form of Ingredience relations is still not entirely adequate, but it could be after some strategic sharpening. For now, Sellars remarks, "it has brought insight into the topology of the terrain" (LCP 15). And the insight is that to transform universals in "ingredients" of "complex particulars" makes the dualism between particulars and universals simply fade away (Nunziante 2021, p. 12026).

Once the dismantling part is done, Sellars is ready to propose his positive account. How are particulars characterized into the new model? First of all, by considering particulars as complexes we are immediately faced by a difficulty: the lack of linguistic resources to describe them.[135] This is what explains Sellars' exploitation of invented words in the essay "Particulars" ("greem", "grom", etc.) – even though, *strictly speaking*, even naming the ingredients of complex particulars in this way risks being misleading.

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[132] For Sellars' exploitation of Leibniz's doctrine of Complete Concept and its relation to Sellars' nominalism, see Nunziante 2018.

[133] "Anger is but a moment in Fido' individual history. Fido in its entirety is a complex particular: the functional sum of an infinite collection of peculiar features. […] The notion of a complex particular therefore serves as a logical and metaphysical pivot to replace the entire framework that had hitherto supported the debate concerning the particularization of universals" (Nunziante 2021, p. 12026).

[134] "There is a y such that y is an ingredient of x [Fido, CC], and y is a specimen of *f* [anger, CC]" (LCP 15).

[135] "Provisionally, we must bear in mind that while our dictionary has sufficient resources to name complex particulars such as Fido, cabbages or kings, the simple elements of such complexes (which Sellars calls 'basic particulars') are not directly transcribable into linguistic forms, and in this sense they are not even 'known' in their immediacy— for they are rather 'sensed'. But how should we characterize them epistemically? The answer will unfold gradually. The main idea is that they should be understood as logical requisites implied by our ordinary talk, and that the relationship between complex and basic particulars implies a particular type of logical resemblance. The latter in its turn will exclude the hypothesis of an ontological constituency […], for it rather points towards a linguistic and transcendental direction" (Nunziante 2021, p. 12029).

In P, a much slimmer and more accessible article than LCP, the constructive part of Sellars' account is presented almost immediately. Sellars invites us to consider a domain of particulars "each of which is an instance of one and only one simple non-relational universal" (P, p. 286). The former are called "basic particulars", the latter "qualia" (*ibid.*).

To conceive basic particulars as exemplifying one and only one *quale* is pivotal to Sellars' argument.[136] Or, as he specifies,

> of course I admit that one and the same 'particular' can have more than one quality. I insist only that such 'particulars' are actually logical constructions out of particulars proper.
> (P, p. 287)

Complex particulars – the "particulars" of which we talk about when we talk about kings, cabbages, and so on – are not particulars *strictu sensu*. Rather, they are logical constructions out of basic particulars. It is only basic particulars that can properly be called particulars.

In using proper names to talk about particulars, there is inevitably an element of stipulation, or convention: "What apparently presents itself as a particular (as, for instance, a green leaf) is actually a *cluster* of basic particulars, each one exemplifying a single qualitative episode. A simple, factual predicate ('green') is actually a 'complex': a function of a higher order that expresses a relationship among more basic elements (*qualia*)" (Nunziante 2021, p. 12031).

Basic particulars as envisaged by Sellars have no internal complexity: of basic particular *a* it cannot even be said that it "instances" the quale Φ: rather, it *is* Φ (P pp. 286-7). To say that "*a* instances Φ" would indeed amount to stating a *fact* – which is precisely the confusion that Sellars wants to avoid. This is the sense in which basic particulars are said to have no ingredients.[137]

Entities which we refer to as "particulars" in everyday life – treated in logic as individual constants – are "particulars" (my quotation marks) only in a derivative sense. Of course, in this sense, "particulars" have more than a quality. Cabbage is green and rugged; the king is old and rich. But this way of speaking is just a convention which stems from the fact that languages have limited resources, a reductio of what otherwise would be an infinite string of conjunctions of

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[136] Cf. the fictional dialogue between Smith and Jones in LCP (LCP 18).

[137] "Let us consider a domain of particulars each of which is an instance of one and only one simple non-relational universal. Furthermore, it is not to be as a mere matter of fact that this is so, as though these particulars *could* exemplify more than one, but do not happen to do so. It is to be a defining characteristic of the conceptual frame we are elaborating that no particular belonging to it *can* exemplify more than one simple non-relational universal. Let us call these particulars *basic particulars*, and the simple non-relational universals they exemplify, *qualia*" (P, p. 286).

situations. The point is that "what is ostensibly a single particular exemplifying a number of universals, is actually a number of particulars exemplifying simple universals" (P, p. 286).

To avoid the absurdities linked to the notion of bare particulars, the only way is to think of basic particulars as instancing one and only one *quale*, and to think of complex particulars as constructions out of more basic particulars:

> [T]he price we would be paying for thinking of *a* as 'instancing' both Greenness and Kleemness would be the prohibitive one of making it an instance of neither, but rather a bare particular. On the other hand, once the confusion between particulars and facts is completely avoided, the notion that a basic particular can be an instance of two *qualia* not only loses all plausibility, but is seen to be absurd. A basic particular which is an instance of Greenness is not a bare particular standing in a relation to Greenness, it is a grum. A basic particular which is an instance of Kleemness is not a bare particular standing in a relation to Kleemness, it is a klum. Surely, however intimately related a grum and a klum may be, they cannot be identical!
> (P, pp. 288-89)

The sense of *quale* of which Sellars is talking is clearly different from C.I. Lewis' one in *Mind and the World Order*. Lewis' qualia are *said to be* ineffable, but in truth they play a fundamental role in explaining concept acquisition (this will come up again in section 3.1.4). They are indeed repeatable and recognizable among different sensory experiences (MWO, p. 60) – a characteristic that led O'Shea to maintain that Lewis' notion of qualia does indeed fall prey to Sellars' broadly conceived myth of the categorial given (O'Shea 2021).

But if Sellars' basic particulars are so ineffable, a question naturally arises: why are we able to "group" complex particulars into certain patterns, or structures? Or, more simply, on what basis are different qualia arranged into a specific complex particular? And how do similar qualia group themselves into classes?

Sellars' answer cannot be grasped immediately. To solve the problems above, he says that "we need a broader canvas" (P, p. 292). And the fundamental theme of this new canvas is something that has been already introduced: that is, "the meaning of a term lies in the rules of its usage, and […] the rules in question are rules of inference" (*ibid.*). At this point, we start to see how all the pieces that Sellars has laid on the table interact with one another and contribute to the gradual development of his functional role semantics, which recur in the end of almost every essay from those years (cf. the endings of CIL, LRB, IM).

Rules of inference, he claims right after, are of two kinds: following Carnap's *Logical Syntax*'s distinction, he distinguishes *logical* rules of inference from *material* rules of inference. The former, he says, validate inferences in which factual predicates play no role (that is, they concern only laws of logic); the latter validate inferences in which factual predicates determine their validity (that is, they concern laws of nature: they correspond to those which he used to call "conformation rules", a name given "to express the *coherence* they give to the expressions of a language", *ibid*., p. 293).[138]

What happens, then, once we apply the functional role semantics to the analysis provided in P and LCP? Here, LRB's distinction between "free, rule-regulated symbol activity" and "tied behavior" (LRB 21) comes to help. Indeed, we know that Sellars explains our linguistic activity as rule-regulated behavior in which two dimensions are meshed: the dimension of "free", normatively laden symbolic activity (which makes up our "intellectual life", from the very basic to the most sophisticated versions), and the dimension of "constrained", causally elicited stimulus-response-like behavior. In explaining these two dimensions, Sellars made clear that there must be some events that "must function as symbols in both senses, as both free and tied symbols" (*ibid*., italics removed).[139] The latter double-role can be taken on both by predicates and individual constants. In the case of color predicates, then, we first learn to associate the sound "green" with the correct situations through simple behavioristic mechanisms (which covers the tied-to-the-environment response's phase). Only once we master its usage is the word "green" no longer a simple sound, but a concept. And in that phase – the properly "human" phase – "[t]he word 'green' does not so much denote the quality of being green, nor does it refer to green-objects, but rather it encompasses a rule of use, since it summarizes the ways in which we happen to know how to spend it correctly in the different pragmatic contexts of its employment" (Nunziante 2021, p. 12033). The link existing between different *greems*, therefore, is a functional link.[140]

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[138] This distinction will be discussed at length in the first half of chapter 3.

[139] As Sachs explains, "we need to posit neurological events – or at least neurological/non-neurological biological events – that can function as both (1) belonging to a system that coordinates purposive responsiveness to the ambient environment and (2) belonging to system characterized as a syntactico-semantic structure constituted by its own logical and material rules of inference. Let us call these *hinge events*. In other words, we need to replace the single-function model of the rationalist with a dual-function model, as long as we understand that there must be hinge events: some neurological events must participate in both cognitive functions in order for them to remain coordinated (however loosely) sufficient for symbolic activity have causal bearing on the world in perception and action" (Sachs 2022, p. 105).

[140] "We are in an open-texture extensional context, in which greems are no longer defined by intension. The relationship with the universal is therefore reversed: the quality is no longer an abstract universal, but a function that classifies not so much *contents*, but rather *usage bonds*" (*ibid*.).

In the final part of the paper, Sellars resorts to the possible worlds' semantics spelled out in CIL to clarify the difference between laws of logic (those expressed by formal rules of inference) and laws of nature (those expressed by material rules of inference).[141] A key addition to the Leibnizian model of possible worlds that Sellars has already introduced in CIL is the notion of a *family of possible worlds*, which "[w]e must interpose between the notion of a possible world, and that of the totality of all possible worlds" (P, p. 195). The various families of possible worlds (of which Sellars never provides examples, but that we can assume stands for families of predicates like colors, shapes, moods, and so on) are those uniformities which are generalized material implications which are not, however, strictly logically true ("all colors are extended in space") but are "certified by the material rules of inference of the language in which they are formulated" (*ibid.*). In this sense, they may be regarded as synthetic *a priori* propositions (*ibid.*, p. 293) – a name against which Sellars claims not to hold prejudices, as long as the *a priori* is intended as something akin to C.I. Lewis' *pragmatic a priori* (again, this will come up extensively in section 3.1.4).

At the end of the essay, Sellars insists that the apparently ontological dimension alluded to by speaking about worlds, universals, and particulars, is misleading. Precisely as LCP was defined as "a study in the foundations of logic" (LCP 13), in a footnote to P, Sellars warns the reader that:

> The substantive contentions of my argument belong to logic rather than to the philosophy or epistemology of logic, and if [...] I have given them, on occasion, an overtly 'ontological' formulation, I have done so solely for the sake of simplicity and convenience.
> (P, p. 291 fn1)

From this point of view, I side with Nunziante in saying that the argument spelled out by Sellars "is more pragmatic-linguistic than ontological" (Nunziante 2021, p. 12035). Which, in a sense, is the only possible way if Sellars wants to avoid foundationalist claims about basic particulars "forming" universals on the basis of ontological resemblances. Thus, his reflections of the notion of particulars, and the non-relational account of predication linked to them, provide his account with a non-foundationalist analysis of knowledge: "[o]ur talk about complex particulars [...] do

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[141] "Now, we are all familiar with the Leibnitzian manner of explicating the laws of logic in terms of possible worlds. Can this same device be used to clarify the difference between laws of logic and laws of nature? Not only can it be done, but it is extremely helpful to do so, particularly in dealing with the problem we have in mind" (P, p. 195).

not have a direct link with the "data" they intend to express, but rather they summarize normative ties that connect different situations of usage" (*ibid.*).

In this chapter I have presented Sellars' philosophical developments which followed pure pragmatics, roughly between 1948 and 1950. In doing that, I have tried to show how the setup of pure pragmatics is far from having been abandoned: on the contrary, its basic assumptions are still in place, starting with the retainment of the same metaphilosophy. As I see it, Sellars' metaphilosophy, described in pure pragmatics as the overcoming of rationalism and empiricism, is realized in the sophisticated attempt to lay down a "sound pragmatism" envisioned at the beginning of LRB. This "sound pragmatism", as I have hopefully shown, sees the combination of Sellars' naturalism with the acknowledgement of a non-descriptivist function played by linguistic expressions and, in this sense, retains precisely the same aim of avoiding both the extremes.

On closer inspection, the inextricable link between the essays on pure pragmatics, CIL's analysis of the causal modalities, LRB's reflections on rule-regulated behavior and LCP and P's discussion of universal-particular relation is attested by the many cross-references between the essays. A footnote to Smith and Jones' conversation in LCP, for instance, warns us that "the analysis of *real connexion* [sic.] and the *causal modalities* […] is to be found in my paper, 'Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them'", and that "[a] more epistemologically oriented discussion is to be found in my 'Realism and the New Way of Words'" (LCP 18 fn6), thus arguing implicitly for their complementarity.[142] Further proof is the already mentioned unpublished manuscript "Outlines of a Philosophy of Language" (OPL), produced by Sellars in 1950 for a conference in Monterey. In OPL, Sellars retains the terminology developed in pure pragmatics, but it enriches it with the new conception of linguistic rule described in LRB. In this latter sense, it counts as a confirmation that everything that Sellars said so far, *including* in pure pragmatics, is part of the same original and ambitious project.

The resulting picture is not immune to problems. Sellars' opposition to relational theories of meaning resulted in his functional role approach to semantics. Such an approach, however, has both pros and cons. While on the one hand we are quite comfortable in thinking that our grasp of the meaning of abstract concepts, such as numbers or logical connectors, does *not* rely on a

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[142] To be sure, the very last footnote of RNWW declared: "The conformation rules of an empirically meaningful language determine the *necessary* elements in the structure of the world in which it is used. Here is the key to the concept of *causal law* and the *causal modalities*. A study of the requirements which conformation rules must fulfil in order to permit the construction of a confirmed world-story in the language of which they are the rules, as well as of the different properties of different sets of such rules, is the primary task of pure pragmatics" (RNWW 74 fn23).

direct relation of our mind with a special object, on the other hand we do not feel at home in thinking that the predicate "red" has *nothing* to do with red objects. This difficulty calls directly into question the relationship between norms (meaning) and nature.

The problem concerning the place of norms in nature begins to be addressed by Sellars a couple of years later in a series of essays in which to functional role semantics is given a comprehensive exposition. In the next chapter, I will first present functional role semantics and then discuss the above problem.

CHAPTER 3.

Empirically Meaningful Conceptual Frameworks

In chapters 1 and 2, I have designed a path across Sellars' early publications that brings to light the origins of many themes and questions that will characterize his later philosophy. In doing this, I have emphasized the continuity between Sellars' publications about pure pragmatics and post-LRB writings.

The continuity of pure pragmatics from the alleged "rupture" marked by the publication of LRB in 1949 has been argued on the basis of several points, which I am going to summarize. From a metaphilosophical point of view, in chapter 1 I have enlarged the metaphilosophical scope of pure pragmatics to include the attempt, that underlies the whole enterprise, of overcoming the limits of both rationalism and empiricism. While Sellars imagined this fusion to have the form of a translation of some "perennial" questions traditionally belonging to rationalism into the vocabulary of the empiricists, I have also brought to light the roots of Sellars' broadly conceived Kantianism as "antidote" to empiricism's reductionist tendency. In chapter 2, I have then emphasized how the metaphilosophical scope envisioned in pure pragmatics is not abandoned after the publication of LRB: on the contrary, borrowing a term that will characterize Sellars' later metaphilosophy, the "stereoscopic fusion" of rationalistic insights and empiricist methodology is realized precisely in that "sound pragmatism" described in LRB as "a true *via media* […] between rationalistic apriorism and what, for want of a better term, I shall call 'descriptivism'" (LRB 1).[143]

Leaving aside metaphilosophical considerations to look more closely to the content of Sellars' early philosophy, in chapter 1 I have argued for the continuity between pure pragmatics and his later philosophy through a definition of the formalism of pure pragmatics (PPF2) that allows one to look at it as anticipating Sellars' functional role semantics. In chapter 2, I have then

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[143] I mention on passing that a quasi-positive consideration on (Deweyan) pragmatism is contained in already in ENWW: "The notion that the primitive predicates of an empirically meaningful language must be datum-predicates, and that its basic sentences must be verified sentences, is psychologism pure and simple, and not even good psychologism at that. The psychologism which is classical pragmatism (Dewey) has sounder instincts than the sensationalistic pragmatisms which have listened to Hume, Mach, and some of the earlier tales from the Vienna Woods" (ENWW 20). On Sellars' relation to pragmatism, see the (both) excellent Sachs (2018) and O'Shea (2020). In the latter article, O'Shea gives some reason to read the famous autobiographical passage contained in NAO ("Thus it wasn't until my thought began to crystallize that I really encountered Dewey and began to study him […]. He caught me at a time when I was moving away from "the Myth of the Given" (antecedent reality?) and rediscovering the coherence theory of meaning. Thus it was Dewey's Idealistic background which intrigued me the most" (NAO 1)) as witnessing that Sellars' encounter and engagement with Dewey's pragmatism must have happened *before* 1949 (O'Shea 2020, pp. 111-112).

shown how the nominalist outlook developed as early as RNWW (see RNWW 16) informs both Sellars' reflections on universals and on particulars. As usual, Sellars' attack is bidirectional. Consider:

1. "Rot" in German means *red*.

According to the rationalist, (1) implies that there is a quality (a universal, like *redness*) to which both "rot" and "red" are referred, and thanks to which they both acquire meaning. The acquisition of the concept to which the universal is referred is then explained by supposing that "prior to learning a language, one becomes acquainted with not only concrete objects, but also abstract objects, and, in particular, the properties and relations instantiated by the objects with which one is acquainted" (Simonelli 2021, p. 1044).

The empiricist alternative on the matter is as problematic as its rationalist cousin. Indeed, he accounts for (1) hinging on the subject's ability to "abstract" universal content from sensation, and then being conditioned to respond with appropriate tokenings in the presence of extra-linguistic objects.

In Sellars' view, both the rationalists' interpretation according to which there is a quality or universal that "rot" means, *and* the empiricists' interpretation according to which "rot" is just a response elicited in German speaker by red particulars, are equally mistaken (Turbanti 2019, p. 375). The two alternatives work indeed only within the boundaries of a so-called "Augustinian" conception of language that explains language learning by matching words with entities in the world – a view famously criticized by Wittgenstein during the same years (Wittgenstein 1953). The mistake shared by both, in brief, is that they are instantiations of relational theories of meaning.

What does "red" stands for, then? Sellars' sophisticated analysis of complex particulars marks a further step in the direction of the overcoming of any form of *givenness*. To the question asking on what the various patterns of basic particulars (the ones that structure a certain complex particular as we experience it) are grounded, Sellars' answer appeals indeed to "usage bonds" through which they are classified. In other words, each specific pattern into which basic particulars are assembled corresponds to a *rule of use*. This rule is not ontologically grounded: rather, it has a pragmatic and normative value (e.g., it is embodied in uniformities of behaviors in language speakers).

To tie up all the loose ends, all the pieces of the picture that I have sketched until now converge on Sellars' functional role semantics.[144] While in the years between 1947 and 1948 we assisted to the gradual overcoming of relational theories of meaning, and in the subsequent years we saw this strategy applied to different kinds of vocabularies (for instance, modal vocabulary in CIL), it is only between 1953 and 1954 that a series of articulated essays give to functional role semantics a definite and full-fledged shape. I am talking about "Inference and Meaning" (IM, 1953), "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?" (ITSA, 1953), "A Semantical Solution of the Mind-Body Problem" (SSMB, 1953), "Some Reflections on Language Games" (SRLG, 1954), and "Empiricism and Abstract Entities" (EAE, published in 1963 but written in 1954). By only glancing at them, the publication of EPM can be seen as imminent. These essays, as I take it, are the "culminating" and deeper point of Sellars' early production, and the analysis that I am going to provide in this chapter will thus close my work.

I will proceed like this. Section 3.1 is devoted to the crucial distinction between formal and material rules of inference, which lies at the core of Sellars' semantics. In section 3.1.1, I show how the opposition between logical and extra-logical necessity is deprived by Sellars of any ontological connotation and it is dealt with as the distinction between different kinds of rules of inference in the essay "Inference and Meaning" (IM). In sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3, I delve into Sellars' criticism of Carnap as developed in IM and EAE. The two critical points are, respectively, Carnap's inadequate conception of rules (3.1.2), and his retainment of psychologistic elements in his treatment of abstract entities (3.1.3). Once it has been established that meaning depends on rules of inference, the question comes up: why one set of rules instead of another? In section 3.1.4, I show the way in which Sellars appropriates and modify C.I. Lewis' notion of the pragmatic *a priori*. The "pragmatic twist" accorded to the *a priori* allows Sellars to argue that material inferences, that play a role as synthetic *a priori* principles, are no stranger to needs, purposes and interests of the framework in which they are embedded. In this way, his revised theory of the synthetic *a priori* is also made responsive to the intrinsic "revisable" character of (now and) then-contemporary science.

Section 3.2 is devoted to the exposition of Sellars' inferentialism and to the discussion of the main difficulty faced by Sellars in this regard: that is, how to account for the relationship

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[144] I take "functional role semantics" and "inferential role semantics" to be interchangeable terms used to describe an approach to meaning that identifies it with its (functional, or inferential) *role*. Actually, to Sellars "linguistic role" and "linguistic function" are interchangeable as well (see SRLG, p. 348 fn1), so that the expression "functional role", which recurs in Sellarsian literature, is an unnecessary (though perspicuous) specification.

between norms and nature. As it is widely acknowledged, the problematic relation between the natural and the normative corresponds to *the* crux plaguing Sellars' philosophy. How are the normative structures of language related to a world naturalistically conceived? In LRB, we saw that the "contact" between the two is realized "as the attunement of the two 'natures' that characterizes the human being in relation with the environment: on the one hand the irreflective behavior constituted by […] stimulus-response patterns, on the other hand the symbolic activity governed by rules" (Turbanti 2019, p. 379). This is the so-called "double role" assigned by Sellars to linguistic phenomena. How does this attunement work? After having discussed Sellars' theory of language acquisition (section 3.2.1), I will close this work showing how he came to ease the tension between the natural and the normative through the formulation of his reducibility-*cum*-irreducibility principle (section 3.2.2).

3.1   The P-structure of Conceptual Frameworks

At the end of the essay "Particulars", Sellars wondered whether the "jargon of worlds and families" could not be made more perspicuous by simply tracing it back to the jargon of formal and material rules of inference.[145] He then associates formal and material rules of inference with, respectively, Carnap's L-rules and P-rules.[146]

Material rules of inference are in all respects the "successor concept" to the conformation rules of pure pragmatics. A passage from the manuscript OPL is especially clear in this regard:

> 1.2 A language exists as a system of norms and roles.
>
> 1.221 The norms and roles making up a language are spoken about in a metalanguage. The formulation of a linguistic norm in its metalanguage is a *rule.*
>
> 1.2211 Corresponding to logical *necessities of* Reality correspond the logical *norms* of the language,

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[145] "[A]ll this jargon of worlds and families may strike the reader as an unusually complicated way of making points which might better have been left in the idiom of […] formal and material rules of inference. Let me emphasize once again that I am not disputing this. The fact remains, however, that the 'ontological' jargon of worlds and possibilities has long been used by philosophers and logicians in their attempts to understand the structure of conceptual systems" (P, p. 296.).

[146] "Rules of inference […] are of two types: *formal* and *material.* This classification corresponds to Carnap's distinction, in his *Logical Syntax of Language*, between two types of 'transformation rule' […]: (1) Logical or L-rules, which validate inferences in which the factual predicates, to use Quine's happy phrase, occur vacuously – that is, could be systematically replaced by any others of the same type and degree without destroying the validity of the argument; (2) Physical or P-rules, which validate inferences in which the factual predicates have an essential rather than vacuous occurrence" (P, pp. 292-3). Exactly the same point, including the reference to Quine, is repeated in EAE (cf. EAE, pp. 438-439).

and L-*rules* (formation and transformation rules) in the meta-language. Corresponding to natural *necessities* we have the non-logical (physical, synthetic) *norms* of the language, and P-rules (conformation rules) in the meta-language. The non-logical norms of language implicitly define the primitive predicates of language, just as the logical norms implicitly define its logical terms and categories.

(OPL)

In pure pragmatics, conformation rules are introduced once Sellars realizes that logical rules alone are not sufficient to account for the meaningfulness of natural languages. The problem with which conformation rules are concerned is posed, of course, by empirical concepts: while the meaning of purely logical terms (e.g., logical connectors) is accountable on the basis of logical principles, the meaning of empirical concepts is instead *implicitly defined* by extra-logical rules – physical, synthetic norms of the language. In this sense, conformation rules reflect the fact that natural languages are inextricably tied to the "environment" in which they exist. This environment, that Sellars dubs *world-story* in pure pragmatics, and is described as a system of compossible states of affairs bound together by laws of nature (RNWW, *passim*), is going to be called from now on *conceptual framework*.

Contrarily to formal rules of inference, the validity of material rules depends on the empirical content of the predicates involved in the inference. Thus, they are constitutive of the meaning of empirical concepts: they determine their contribution to good inferences, licensing extra-logical inferences that would have been not justifiable on the basis of logical rules alone. As early as pure pragmatics, Sellars had anticipated conformation rules' connection to synthetic *a priori* knowledge insofar they were responsible for providing "P-restrictions" on the calculus (PPE 22). Accordingly, material rules of inference articulate the synthetic *a priori* content (in a sense to be defined) and define the P-structure of a given conceptual framework.[147] In this sense, they constrain possible experience in a Kantian sense (O'Shea 2018b, *passim*).

Sellars arrives at the distinction between formal and material rules of inference by walking, as usual, on the line between the radical empiricist, Hume-inspired denial of causally necessary connections, and the ontologically problematic, rationalist view according to which event A simply *entails* the occurrence of event B. Sellars, on his side, endorses a view according to which

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[147] As DeVries claims, "Sellars thinks that the meaning of our terms is infused with material inferences that reflect the place of the object or characteristic in nature as grasped by the framework the language embodies. Every meaningful empirical language is effectively an outline of a complete world-story. Causal laws, in this view, are material mode expressions of material rules of inference, not descriptive statements of fact" (DeVries 2005, p. 32).

"what he calls 'material inferences' […] normatively license the inferential move directly from the claim that 'x is A' to 'x is B' (e.g., from 'It's raining' to 'it's wet on the streets'), where the inference is understood as having counterfactual weight […] and so as exhibiting necessity" (*ibid.*, p. 218). I will first lay down the way in which Sellars construes the distinction, and then explain in what sense material rules of inference give shape to the synthetic *a priori* core of our conceptual framework.

3.1.1 Formal and Material Rules of Inference

Even though the distinction between formal and material rules of inference is modelled on Carnap's distinction between L-rules and P-rules in the *Logical Syntax* (Carnap 1937), this should not be taken as plain endorsement of the way in which Carnap draws the distinction. In fact, Sellars disagrees completely about P-rules' role in natural languages: as we will see shortly, the irreducibility of material rules of inference to strictly logical principles is yet another aspect that distances Sellars from logical empiricism.

A logical empiricist may question the very difference between formal (logical) and material rules of inference: why cannot material rules of inference be reduced to logical principles? According to the empiricists, there is no doubt about formal rules being all that one needs to account for language. What is material rules' specificity that would forbid their reduction to logical rules? To answering this question is devoted "Inference and Meaning" (IM), an essay published on *Mind* in 1953. Among Sellars' early writings, IM is considered particularly important as the first *locus* where the conception of meaning elaborated in pure pragmatics is tied to that of inference, counting as the first exposure of Sellars' inferentialism.[148] In IM, Sellars' theory of meaning is indeed explained for the first time in explicitly inferentialist terms, according to which "the conceptual content of an expression is determined by its contribution to the good inferences in which the expression figures". What will soon be clear is that "[t]he relevant set of inferences are not all formal inferences: every descriptive term is involved in a set of material inferences" (DeVries 2005, p. 62).

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[148] See, for instance, the importance accorded to this essay in Brandom (1994, esp. chapter 2) or in the Introduction to Beran, Kolman, and Koren (2018)'s collection on inferentialism.

In IM, the well-known dispute between rationalists and empiricists is vivaciously rehearsed as a confrontation between a figure called "Metaphysicus"[149] – avatar of the rationalists' demands – and the cohort of "empirically minded philosophers", personified by Carnap. The argument starts by pointing out that in front of inferences like:

1. It is raining, therefore the streets will be wet.

or

2. This substance turns litmus paper red, therefore it is an acid.

Metaphysicus and empirically minded philosophers hold conflicting views: whereas the former explains them by appealing to a "nonlogical or material necessity", among the latter it has been recently spreading a "dogma" (IM 1) according to which inferences like (1) and (2) are simply enthymemes – a view that allows one to reformulate them as logically valid arguments. (1) and (2), empiricists maintain, are nothing but abbreviated syllogisms, the original form of which can be reconstructed by simply adding a universal clause at the beginning:

3. Every time it rains, the streets get wet.
   It is raining now.
   Therefore, the streets will be wet.

In this way, the allegedly material principle governing the inference has been turned into a simple instantiation of *modus ponens*, and there is no need to resort to any alleged material necessity. Besides, Sellars notes, even if empiricists were ever to admit that something like material rules of inference exists, the most they would concede is either a "second-rate and/or derivative status as compared with purely formal principles" (*ibid.*, 3), or they would likely reduce them to the mere "*tendency to expect* to see wet streets when one finds it raining" (*à la* Hume) (*ibid.*, 5). In brief, the various empiricist positions listed by Sellars all convene on material rules' dispensability: "Formal rules of inference are essential to the very possibility of language; indeed, of thought. […] [G]iven these rules and given the course of our sense-experience, no other rules of inference (that is, no non-formal or material rules) are necessary conditions of

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[149] Metaphysicus, like Jones and Smith, is a recurring character in Sellars' essays. He will appear again, for instance, in SRLG, in EAE (as "Metaphysicus Platonicus"), and in much later writings like NAO. As his name evokes, he is representative of rationalists' side.

concepts though rules of inductive inference may be necessary to establish synthetic truths involving them" (*ibid.*, 3). According to the empiricists, then, formal rules of inference – with the strategic addition of inductive rules for generalizations – are sufficient to account for synthetic knowledge.

After having listed all the empiricist options, an apparently implausible possibility comes from the rationalists' side. Sellars mentions it just "for the sake of completeness":

> But might it not be possible for an empiricist to hold that material rules of inference are as essential to meaning as formal rules? [….] That the meaning of a term lies in the materially and formally valid inferences it makes possible? In spite of the fact that a position of this kind is incompatible with the so-called "empiricist" theory of concept formation, and is universally relegated to absolute idealisms and rationalisms of a bygone age, I mention it for the sake of completeness.
>
> (*ibid.*, 7)

As the reader used to Sellars' rhetoric strategy has already guessed, it is precisely this latter option that the philosopher will embrace.

Once the list has been completed, Sellars can proceed to define what material rules of inference are. He thus refers to Carnap's *Logical Syntax* (Carnap 1937) as the forerunner place where the topic has been treated: there, indeed, syntactical transformation rules (or, as they are also called, "rules of inference") are divided precisely into logical and extra-logical rules of inference. The difference between the two is condensed by Sellars in the fact that "whereas *logically* valid inferences do not, *extra-logically* valid inferences do depend for their validity on the fact that they contain a certain set of descriptive terms" (IM 12).[150]

Carnap's introduction of the topic in the *Logical Syntax* goes as follows:

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[150] At this point, the attentive reader has likely noted a discrepancy between material rules and their "sibling notion" of conformation rules, which I have introduced as the forerunner to the former. Conformation rules were indeed described in pure pragmatics' essay as a third kind of rules *beside* formation and transformation rules (see also the quote OPL), whereas material rules of inference are now treated as a special sub-kind of transformation rules. This discrepancy not only does not have to worry but can be seen as a confirmation of what have been said in the previous sections about conformation rules: that is, that they pertain to relations of consequence and incompatibilities between predicates. As a matter of fact, transformation rules are defined by Carnap precisely as determining "under what conditions a sentence is a consequence of another sentence or sentences (the *premisses*)." (Carnap 1937, p. 27). This does not rule out the undeniable: that Sellars, especially in these early years, is sometimes sloppy with his own terminology.

We may […] also construct a language with *extra-logical rules of transformation*. The first thing which suggests itself is to include amongst the primitive sentences the so-called laws of nature, i.e. universal sentences of physics ('physics' is here to be understood in the widest sense). It is possible to go even further and include not only universal but also concrete sentences – such as empirical observation-sentences. In the most extreme case we may even so extend the transformation rules of S that every sentence which is momentarily acknowledged (whether by a particular individual or by science in general) is valid in S. For the sake of brevity, we shall call all the logico-mathematical transformation rules of S logical or L-*rules*; and all the remainder, physical or P-*rules*. Whether in the construction of a language S we formulate only L-rules or include also P-rules, and, if so, to what extent, is not a logico-philosophical problem, but a matter of convention and hence, at most, a question of expedience.

(Carnap 1937, p. 180)

P-rules are introduced in paragraph 51 of the fourth section of the *Logical Syntax* as rules of inference to be applied to sentences containing empirical descriptive terms.[151] The language of reference is the *indefinite* Language II, which contains physical terms like pressure, volume, and temperature. In this sense, P-rules refers to those sentences in which descriptive vocabulary occurs, and that are *not* substitutional instances of sentences containing only non-descriptive, logical terms (like the ones characterizing Language I).

The introduction of P-rules in the *Logical Syntax* goes on pair with Carnap's introduction of his so-called "principle of tolerance", which is formulated in the second part of the quote. The principle of tolerance basically leaves open the choice of which one of the above-mentioned strategies (that is, to include general laws of nature, sub-specified empirical generalizations, or even "every sentence which is momentarily acknowledged in S") shall be adopted, and also leaves the choice open about whether or not to include P-rules at all. This possibility, Carnap claims, "is not a logico-philosophical problem, but a matter of convention and […] a question of expedience" (*ibid*.). The acceptance and inclusion of P-rules into a "P-language" would then goes hand in hand with the introduction of P-concepts, P-consequences, and the notion of P-equipollence (*ibid*.)

Sellars follows the Carnapian text associating extra-logical rules to P-rules, and logical rules to L-rules. To better illustrate the difference between the two, he considers P-rules and L-rules'

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[151] For a discussion of the puzzlement that the introduction of the tolerance principle and of P-rules in the *Logical Syntax* caused in Schlick and Coffa, see Oberdan (2004).

relation to their *negation*: only the denial of an inference expressing L-rules leads to a formal contradiction, whereas the denial of P-rules leads to simply P-contravalid arguments (*ibid.*, 13). The crux of the argument, however, concerns precisely what is mentioned by Carnap at the end of the quote, that is, material rules' dispensability in languages containing descriptive terms. Metaphysicus, at first enthusiastic about the *Logical Syntax*, is quickly disappointed to discover that P-rules are deemed dispensable:

> Let us now raise the question whether, granted that a language must have rules of inference, it must have both L-rules and P-rules. We might expect Carnap to say that whereas a language without descriptive terms need not, and, indeed, cannot have other than logical rules of inference, a language with descriptive (extra-logical) terms must have extra-logical rules. *Carnap, however, makes it clear that in his opinion a language containing descriptive terms need not be governed by extra-logical transformation rules.* Indeed, he commits himself (p. 180) to the view that for every language with P-rules, a language with L-rules only can be constructed in which everything sayable in the former can be said.
> (IM 15)

This abrasive remark may leave the reader puzzled: the *Logical Syntax* works indeed with two *artificial* language systems (Language I and Language II), and Sellars' straight comparison of them with "a language with descriptive terms" seems to be quite a big leap. The fact is, although Sellars acknowledges that Carnap "is *not* discussing the syntax of natural languages" [my emphasis, CC], what disturbs him is that, according to his reading, "he [Carnap, CC] is clearly conceiving of these artificial languages as candidates for adoption by language users" (IM 16). In fact, he "is implying that natural languages need have no P-rules, and that the presence or absence of P-rules in a natural language is a matter of some form of (presumably unconscious) social selection, determined by convenience" (*ibid.*).

What could one reply to such a position? Metaphysicus quickly realizes that, if it were possible to find a kind of linguistic activity specific to P-rules and *unaccountable in the context of a language governed by L-rules alone* – and this activity was in turn be proved essential to natural languages – we would have come out with a proof of material rules' indispensability. Is there something like this? Metaphysicus is persuaded by this possibility: according to him, there is indeed a particular linguistic activity "incapable of being authorized by L-rules alone", and it is precisely this

activity that "provides the key to an understanding of the status of the material rules of inference" (IM 20):

> What Metaphysicus has in mind, of course, are such subjunctive conditionals as
> If *I had released* this piece of chalk, *it would have fallen*, and
> If there *were to be* a flash of lightning, there *would be* thunder.
> (IM 21)

Here Sellars, through Metaphysicus, takes advantage of a particular feature of the *Logical Syntax of Language*: the languages considered by Carnap are indeed extensional and, as such, they preclude the formulation of subjunctive conditionals (IM 26).[152]

Sellars is sophisticated enough to know that there exist instances of subjunctive conditionals that actually *are* reducible to logical rules. Of course, subjunctive conditionals on which he bets are not of this kind, and he spends some time to delimitate the cases he is interested in. Compare the cases:

4. If anything were red and square, it would be red.
5. If there were to be a flash of lightning, there would be thunder.

Whereas (4) can be explained by appealing to the rule for the elimination of conjunction and be reduced to:

4a. x is red and square,
    Therefore, x is red.

the rule giving expression to inference (5), on the contrary, cannot be logically dealt with any further than:

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[152] I leave unanswered the question about whether P-rules are *really* considered dispensable by Carnap, since it is a matter belonging to Carnapian studies. André Carus, for instance, points out that Sellars' reading on this point amounts to a plain misunderstanding. In his words, Sellars' remarks on the alleged dispensability of material rules of inference "badly misconstrues Carnap's view of the relation between constructed and 'natural' languages" (Carus 2004, p. 324): he basically ignores that "his [Carnap's, CC] preference for an extensional language of science without P-rules, in the *Syntax*, is irrelevant to questions about natural language, since he does not (as Sellars assumes) envisage the adoption of his proposed languages 'as natural languages'" (*ibid.*, pp. 331-2). I also leave unanswered the question about subjunctive conditionals. On this point, Carus points out in effect that Carnap (1936), where subjunctive conditionals are addressed, is ignored by Sellars.

5a. There is lightening at time t,

Therefore, there is thunder at time t-plus-n.

Now, inference (5a) is clearly not, by any means, specification of a logical rule, and Metaphysicus seems ready to claim the prize. However, empiricists are not such easy preys, and several attempts are tried to find out whether it is possible to prove that subjunctive conditionals like the one underlying (5) owe their force to logical principles (IM 22-29). For instance, can't the enthymematic road mentioned at the beginning be tried again? In this way, the subjunctive conditional could still be treated like an abbreviated syllogism, but with the additional complication constituted by the subjunctive mood now involved.

After the failure of several strategies, however, the inevitable conclusion is that there is no way to reconvey the subjunctive mood underlying (5) to logical rules alone.[153] It is only at this point that Metaphysicus can claim that:

> Now, unless some other way can be found of interpreting such subjunctive conditionals in terms of logical principles of inference, we have established not only that they are the expression of material rules of inference, but that the authority of these rules is not derivative from formal rules. In other words, we have shown that material rules of inference are essential to the language we speak, for we make constant use of subjunctive conditionals of the type we have been examining.
> (IM 26)

By ascertaining the irreducibility of subjunctive conditionals to logical principles of inference, Metaphysicus scored not just one, but two points: not only he proved that material rules are really a kind of their own but, given the key role played in empirical sciences by subjunctive conditionals, he also proved that material rules are indispensable to any conceptual framework involving them.[154]

Material rules of inference have therefore really been proved "essential to the language we speak" (IM 26). However, nothing yet has been said about the relation between material rules

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[153] I have modified Sellars's original example, which is the subjunctive re-formulation of sentence 1: "if it were to rain, the streets would be wet" (IM 23). I am not going to go through the specificity of the procedures attempted by Sellars in trying to endow 5 with the subjunctive mood since their failure is mainly due to the limits of material implication in accounting for counterfactuals, which I have already treated in section 2.2.

[154] "Since we are all conscious of the key role played in the sciences, both formal and empirical, in detective work and in the ordinary course of living by subjunctive conditionals, this claim, if substantiated, would indeed give a distinguished status to the material rules of inference" (IM 21).

and meaning. Now that most of the alternatives listed at the beginning (IM 9) have been ruled out, we are indeed still left with two:

(1) Material rules are as *essential to meaning* (and hence to language and thought) as formal rules, contributing the architectural detail of its structure within the flying buttresses of logical form.

(2) While not essential to meaning, material rules of inference have an *original authority* not derived from formal rules, and play an *indispensable* role in our thinking on matters of fact. (IM 9)

Before determining which one of the two options will be finally embraced, Sellars points out a question still in need to be answered: that is, what rules of inference precisely are. Only once this is clarified will their relationship to meaning also become clear. It is on this subject that the quarrel with Carnap intensifies. To this topic I will therefore devote the next section.

3.1.2 *Contra* Carnap, I: Linguistic Rules Are Normative

As it has been pointed out, when one engages with Sellars' relationship to Carnap, she is immediately faced by several misunderstandings. One of them is the oversimplifying assumption, mentioned in the Introduction to this work, according to which Sellars, alongside Quine and Wittgenstein, basically dismantled logical empiricism in all its forms. In particular, Rorty's views on the matter made popular the belief "that Sellars completely dismantled Carnap's view, presumably the one from the *Aufbau* […], as a paradigmatic case of the Myth of the Given" (Breunig 2020, p. 29). However, as I have made, and I am still trying to make, clear, Sellars' relationship to logical empiricism, and to Carnap in particular, is much more complex than this.[155]

While some have focused on misunderstandings on Sellars' part (Carus 2004, Olen 2016a), one episode in particular could be regarded rather as a case of "two philosophers misunderstanding

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[155] With Seibt's words, "Sellars leaves little space for speculation about the historical lines of influence on his thought – expressly and frequently he names Kant, Hegel, Peirce, Broad, Carnap, and Wittgenstein as main sources of constructional inspiration. But Sellars' references to, and explicit interactions with, these historical resources by no means yield a sufficiently clear and complete picture to make comparative studies obsolete. The constructional similarities as well as the methodological dissimilarities between Carnap's and Sellars' philosophical programs, for example, are more profound than Sellars' discussion and integration of Carnapian ideas may suggest" (Seibt 2000, p. 254).

each other" (Breunig 2020, p. 19). It is precisely the one concerning Sellars' criticism of Carnap's account of rules of inference as set forth in both IM and in the later "Empiricism and Abstract Entities" (EAE, 1963).

Sellars' criticism of Carnap's account, in a nutshell, targets a distinctive deficiency in his account of rules. According to Sellars, the logician's account of linguistic rules is inadequate insofar it misses completely the "normative flavor" that proper rules cannot afford to lack. His focus is on the account of transformation rules as "direct consequence in S"[156] developed by Carnap in the *Logical Syntax*. In the passage mentioned by Sellars, Carnap remarks:

> In the treatment of Languages I and II we introduced the term "consequence" only at a late stage. *From the systematic standpoint, however, it is the beginning of all syntax. If for any language the term "consequence" is established, then everything that is to be said concerning the logical connections within this language is thereby determined.* In the following discussion we assume that the transformation rules of any language S, i.e. the definition of the term "direct consequence in S", are given. […] [T]he most important syntactical concepts can be defined by means of the term "direct consequence". (Carnap 1937, p. 168)

Formation and transformation rules for Languages I and II belong properly to the logical *syntax* – which, as it has been said, is taken by Carnap as the field of *formal* investigation of language that is therefore conducted in abstraction from its relation to meaning. What Sellars finds problematic is the fact that such a conception of transformation rules as "direct consequences in S" makes it a matter of mere "structural relations" between expressions, while – according to the view spelled out particularly in, and after, LRB – Sellars is convinced that (linguistic) rules are intrinsically prescriptive. Carnap's definition of transformation rules as "direct consequence in S" amounts, in Sellarsian terms, to a definition of a normative element in non-normative terms, committing itself to that "naturalistic fallacy" spelled out as early as pure pragmatics (this is indeed the reference to the "naturalization" of ethics conducted as if moral laws were formulated as simple definitions of the predicate "morally right", IM 31). In this regard, Sellars remarks that "if a definition is […] to do the work of a rule, the definiendum must have the normative flavour characteristic of 'ought', or 'ought not', or 'may', or 'may not'. But when one turns to Carnap's thesis that transformation rules may be formulated as definitions of 'direct

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[156] Sellars follows the English translation of the *Logical Syntax*, in which the S for "Sprache" has not been substituted with the L for "Language".

consequence in S, one finds no such flavour" (*ibid*., 32). That is why, he continues, he would have rather preferred something like "directly derivable", where that *-able* has a remarkable "rulish force" which the expression "is a direct consequence of" clearly lack (*ibid*.). For a sentence to be *derivable* from another one, indeed, means for it to confront with permissible or impermissible "doings". What does Sellars mean, precisely?

Syntactical rules, according to Sellars, are no different from moral prescriptions: they permit (or forbid) certain actions in certain contexts. Think about inference rules for the introduction or the elimination of logical connectors in Gentzen's natural deduction's system. Take, for instance:

Double Negation Rule (DN): Given $\neg\neg\alpha$, we can derive α.

Disjunction Introduction Rule (∨-I): Given α, we can derive $\alpha \lor \beta$ for any β. Equally, given β, we can derive $\alpha \lor \beta$ for any α.

Asserting a disjunction, or eliminating a double negation, while surely assertable on the basis of a certain language (i.e., S)'s rules, are permissible or not permissible actions based on specific conditions: I cannot derive a negation from a double negation; nor can I eliminate a disjunction in the same simple way in which I introduce it.

The point is, and this is crucial, that "a syntactical rule, like any other rule, prescribes or permits a certain kind of action in a certain kind of circumstance" (*ibid*., 35). Is Carnap's sense of "deriving" a sentence as a "direct consequence" from another an "action" in the relevant sense? Not if this "action" is conceived as a mere specification of structural relationships between the two terms of the derivation. This is what leads Sellars to state that "Carnap's claim that he is giving a definition of 'directly derivable in S' is a snare and a delusion" (*ibid*.). Any metalanguage that is capable of formulating rules even of the simplest kind (like DN or ∨-I above) must contain, Sellars concludes, expressions having the force of "*ought*" (*ibid*.). If such a normative force is lacking, we cannot formulate proper *rules* at all.

Unfortunately, Carnap was not on the same page on the matter. I am now going to show in which sense.

I have mentioned above that, while there is acknowledgment of misunderstandings of Carnap's texts on Sellars' side, this case – the one concerning linguistic rules' normativity – could be

instead considered a case of two philosophers misunderstanding each other (Breunig 2020). And this is indeed what results from Carnap' response (Carnap 1963) to Sellars' later paper "Empiricism and Abstract Entities" (EAE, 1963), which also corresponds to the only published exchange between the two.

EAE was written by Sellars in 1954 but will be published only in 1963, on the occasion of a collection devoted to Carnap's philosophy. There, Sellars remarks on a previous piece from Carnap: "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" (Carnap 1950), a supplement to Carnap (1947) devoted to the topic of abstract entities. In the brief response that followed EAE, the disagreement/misunderstanding between the two is made crystal clear. I start precisely with this response, in which Carnap starts by lamenting of not having really understood Sellars' distinction between descriptive and prescriptive components. Being the distinction as it is, one point shall be clear:

> [N]ot only pure syntax and pure semantics but also descriptive syntax and descriptive semantics, as I understand them and intend to construct them, do not contain any kind of prescriptive components. […]
> Sellars' belief that my descriptive syntax and descriptive semantics contained prescriptive conceptual components is perhaps due to the fact that I used the word 'rule' both in syntax and in semantics. Perhaps he understood this term in its everyday sense, i.e., as referring to prescriptive rules, prescriptions, prohibitions, or permissions. However, I use the word 'rule' in this field only to conform to the customary usage in logic. […] It seems to me that in the development of modern logic it has become ever more evident that logic, and likewise syntactical and semantical analyses of language, are purely theoretical; the use of terms like 'rules', 'permitted operations', 'and 'prohibited operation' is here, just as in algebra, merely a psychologically useful way of speaking which should not be understood literally.
> (Carnap 1963, pp. 923-4)

The disagreement between the two runs so deep that it almost seems as if Carnap is either intentionally ignoring, or completely missing the sense in which Sellars speaks of "rules" when commenting on his views. According to Sellars, indeed, rules always have a prescriptive component − and this is true for any kind of rules, *including* syntactical and semantical rules. Their prescriptive component manifests itself in the fact that rules, as mentioned, are always rules for *doing* something (IM 33). Both metalinguistic norms, and linguistic rules are described as having a prescriptive component. As a matter of fact, according to Sellars even formation

and transformation rules defining a calculus are intrinsically normative, while to Carnap they simply are not.[157] On Carnap' part, rules of formation and transformation concern structural relations between expressions and, in this sense, he nowhere sees prescriptive components.

The profound reason of their disagreement can be seen in Sellars' pragmatic attention for language as used. As Westphal points out, the Kantian vein imported by Sellars into Carnap's conception of language as calculus involves the fact that "[m]eaning consists in functional […] roles; *understanding* meaning consists in intelligent, reasoned use of those roles (and their markers) in thought and action" (Westphal 2015, p. 39). The point is that even though Carnap's conception of meaning is far less naïve than is usually represented, it still neglects the fact that *understanding* meaning properly requires the ability to recognize, for instance, in which circumstance inferences are or are not relevant: "This is Sellars' insight into the fundamental, irreducibly *normative* character of rational judgement, constituted by assessing the *which* judgement (if any) it is *proper* to make in view of the available information and relevant considerations" (*ibid.*, p. 40). In Sellars' terms, the ability to compare functional roles entails the ability to generate rule-regulated but *free* inferential routes. Borrowing a later expression, the successful employment and understanding of meanings requires one' ability to navigate the *space of reasons*.

Once all this is stated, the question is still open: what happens once we improve Carnap's account of rules of inference by incorporating the prescriptive, "rulish" nature of linguistic rules envisioned by Sellars?

3.1.3 *Contra* Carnap, II: Abstract Entities

I have already put enough emphasis on the fact that one of Sellars' most appreciated aspects of Carnap's *oeuvre* was the distinction of metalinguistic from object-level kinds of analyses (chapter 1, *passim*). The distinction is spelled out in the fifth section of the *Logical Syntax* as the difference between formal and material mode of speech, and it is described as part and parcel of that "purification" of philosophy "of all unscientific elements" (Carnap 1937, p. 279). In order to do this, the first step consists in acknowledging that many of the sentences animating philosophy

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[157] This point is excellently dealt with in Westphal (2015, pp. 37ff).

[a]re only pseudo-object questions – i.e. question which, because of a misleading formulation, appear to refer to objects while actually they refer to sentences, terms, theories, and the like – and are, accordingly, in reality, logical questions. And secondly, it must be shown that all logical questions are capable of formal presentation, and can, consequently, be formulated as syntactical questions.

(Carnap 1937, p. 281)

In the transition from "material" to "formal" mode of speech, statements apparently referred to things, objects, persons, events, and so on, are "translated" into statements whose validity can be ascertained through logical analysis. The terminology exploited by Carnap involves a (quasi-syntactical) sentence attributing properties to an object transform into a (properly syntactical) sentence attributing a property to the expression's *designatum*. The simplest example is with sentences like:

1. Five is a number.
2. Red is a quality.

These kinds of sentences, Sellars argues following Carnap, are quasi-syntactical sentences (respectively, from object-language sentences "5 is a prime number" and "Red is a property of things") in that they convey[158] the same information as the following syntactical sentences:

1a. 'Five' is a number-word.
2a. 'Red' is a one-place predicate.

Sellars is especially fascinated by this distinction's ability to demystify sentences resorting to universals ("triangularity", "redness", and so on) as pseudo-object sentences (Carnap 1937, pp. 284-5). In this sense, Sellars' nominalism and Carnap's empiricism share a certain affinity (Gabbani 2018, p. 201). As Carnap himself states at the very beginning of "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology" (Carnap 1950):

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[158] The distinction between "conveying" and "asserting" was discussed in IM. There, the relation between modal claims and the linguistic rules that they "incorporate" was specified as a way in which some claims (like modal, normative, or logical claims) can be said to *convey* (as opposed to *assert*) certain insights on the structure of language, *ibid.*, 41-2 (in that case, logically necessary statements convey formal rules of inference, causally necessary statements convey material rules of inference).

> Empiricists are in general rather suspicious with respect to any kind of abstract entities like properties, classes, relations, numbers, propositions, etc. They usually feel much more in sympathy with nominalists than with realists (in the medieval sense). As far as possible they try to avoid any reference to abstract entities and to restrict themselves to what is sometimes called a nominalistic language, i.e., one not containing such references.
> (Carnap 1950, p. 205)

However, even though the distinction between formal and material mode of speech is key to Sellars' strategy in "domesticating" the platonistic talk about abstract entities, his and Carnap's perspectives differ. In the following, I am going to show how.

In the text considered by Sellars, Carnap deals with the problem of the introduction of classes of abstract entities in semantics.[159] Many empiricists were indeed showing some grievances in treating abstract entities as designata of statements such as:

1. The word 'red' designates a property of things.
2. The word 'five' designates a number.
3. The sentence 'Chicago is large' designates a proposition.

While the general mood was to look at things, numbers, and propositions with suspicion, Carnap saw no such problem. According to him, there was no need to worry about a sneaky re-introduction of metaphysical entities, simply because two dimensions were perfectly separable: the "pragmatic" dimension of introducing abstract entities for expediency-related reasons, and the ontological side, which has no place in Carnap's picture. From his point of view, to exploit the lexicon of abstract entities by no means "imply embracing a Platonic ontology". On the contrary, Carnap thought such a lexicon to be "perfectly compatible with empiricism and strictly scientific thinking" (Carnap 1950, p. 206).

On the face of the acceptance of a new kind of entity, Carnap' radical conventionalism detaches questions about abstract entities' "reality" (*ibid*., p. 214) from questions about their usefulness. The only question that matters has to do with the enrichment of the linguistic framework in use

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[159] "Recently the problem of abstract entities has arisen again in connection with semantics, the theory of meaning and truth. Some semanticists say that certain expressions designate certain entities, and among these designated entities they include not only concrete material things but also abstract entities" (Carnap 1950, pp. 205-6).

– recall here his principle of tolerance mentioned before – on the basis of how fruitful, or useful, the new kind of entity is going to be. In Seibt's words, "[t]raditional ontological questions about the existence of certain type of entities thus are reduced to questions about the preferability of linguistic frameworks with different linguistic resources" (Seibt 2000, p. 255). And Carnap is clear in considering such a question as "a practical, not a theoretical question […]. The acceptance cannot be judged as being either true or false because it is not an assertion. It can only be judged as being more or less expedient, fruitful, conducive to the aim for which the language is intended" (Carnap 1950, p. 214).

Consequence of this view is that, according to Carnap, ontological questions about the "reality" of abstract entities are completely meaningless. His approach to philosophy involves indeed a general reorientation of it from a dusty, metaphysically infected field to a properly "scientific philosophy" in form of a *Wissenschaftslogik*, in the context of which only *meaningful* questions can be assessed and solved. It is precisely on this level that lies a further important difference between Carnap and Sellars. This difference comes out clearly by asking: what are meaningful questions for Carnap?

In "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology" (Carnap 1950), Carnap distinguishes between questions *internal* or *external* with respect to linguistic frameworks (*ibid.*, p. 206). The formers ask about the existence of entities within the framework. They can also be, in a sense, meta-questions *about* the framework (e.g., they can ask about the resources of a linguistic framework – for instance, whether it contains predicate constants, Seibt 2000, p. 256), but they are still internal and they can be empirically ascertained. On the contrary, external questions concern "the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole" (Carnap 1950, italics removed) and, as Carnap caustically remarks, are raised "neither by the man in the street nor by scientists, but only by philosophers" (*ibid.*, p. 207). They are typically questions about the "reality" or "non-reality" of physical objects, numbers, etc. The "implicit" of this particular kind of questions is that what they really ask are unanswerable queries about the correspondence of the framework to "reality in itself", which classifies them as meaningless pseudo-questions (that is, questions that simply cannot be answered).

The way in which Carnap separates internal from external questions has highlighted a crucial difference between his and Sellars accounts. To restrict meaningful questions to internal questions only, implies indeed to consider meaningless all the questions pertaining to the knowledge of reality "in itself". From this point of view, Carnap and Sellars' views on the

relation between science and reality are at the opposite ends: while Sellars' naturalism endorses a robust scientific realism according to which science has a privileged access to the *ontological* structure of reality, according to Carnap's radical conventionalism, science has nothing of this privilege. As Gabbani remarks, "to say […] that science is 'the measure of all things' (that is, that one accepts all and only the entities that belong to its framework) for Carnap does *not* imply recognizing the overall reality of the scientific image in relation to the world *in itself*" (Gabbani 2018, p. 205). According to Carnap, questions about the "inner structure" of reality are metaphysical pseudo-questions. The only way through which we can answer to this kind of questions is by re-conceiving them as questions internal to the framework, whose adoption is accountable only on pragmatic decisions concerning the framework's overall efficiency, simplicity, etc. The attention to this pragmatic dimension, however, does not bear any metaphysical significance.[160]

In later essays, Sellars will contrast empiricist's instrumentalism in science with his robust scientific realism. Even though his reflections on science, induction, and scientific models will come only later in his production, it is already clear that his nominalism is part of a strategy which aims to avoid incurring in old metaphysical *impasses* (especially of the rationalistic kind), but that it does not imply renouncing to metaphysics. On the contrary, "Sellars' philosophical work […] aims at giving a better answer and reaching a deeper understanding of the same, old but not meaningless, metaphysical issues" (Gabbani 2018, p. 208).[161]

Sellars' metalinguistic treatment of abstract entities convenes on much of Carnap's. On the face of it, they both provide a metalinguistic, nominalist account of abstract entities. By looking at things more closely, however, the kind of nominalism embraced by the two differs. While denying their role in *causal* explanations, Carnap concedes that psychological relations between a person and an abstract entity do exist (Carnap 1950, pp. 924-5). In effect, "Carnap sees no point in rejecting a merely *logical* relation between a physical object or person and an abstract object" (Carus 2004, p. 333). If we now recall the first formulation of nominalism provided by Sellars in RNWW, the difference with Carnap stands out clearly: Sellars' "New Nominalism" was part and parcel of a radical non-relational theory of meaning. The *linguistic* nominalism

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[160] To the extent that Seibt refers to the aspect that I have labelled "pragmatic" as a "principle of anti-pragmatism: "the utility of a framework must not be taken as an indication of its adequacy or, more generally, its philosophical significance" (Seibt 2000, p. 257).

[161] With Seibt's words: "Whereas Carnap propagates the conventionalist elimination of metaphysical questions in general and the dispute between nominalists and platonists in particular, Sellars upholds the possibility of metaphysical category theory and uses the Carnapian metalinguistic reduction strategy merely to "pour nominalistic wine into platonistic bottles" (Seibt 2000, p. 254).

about meaning and abstract entities, according to which the latter are ultimately linguistic types or roles explained in terms of rule-governed linguistic tokenings, is now resorted and specified as *psychological* nominalism about what is (or what is not) involved in the mind's capacity to grasp meanings (O'Shea 2007, p. 69). Psychological nominalism, thus, goes against the idea that there is any psychological relation between minds and universals, or, in general, that abstract entities play a role in mental activities:

> I shall use the term 'Psychological Nominalism' to stand for the denial of the claim, characteristic of the realistic tradition, that a 'perception' or 'awareness' of abstract entities is the root mental ingredient of mental acts and dispositions.
> (EAE, p. 445)

As DeVries and Triplett explain in their commentary to EPM (De Vries & Triplett 2000), this view is nominalist because it denies that cognitive phenomena involve any kind of direct relation to abstract entities (that are replaced by linguistic entities), and it is psychological because it does not actively deny their existence (ontologically), but it denies that they are involved directly in psychological or cognitive phenomena (*ibid.*, p. 193).

The complete denial of any kind of relation between minds and abstract entities, if compared with the view endorsed by Carnap, makes "Sellars's flight from Platonism […] more radical" (Gabbani 2018, p. 202).[162] Unlike Sellars, Carnap' account does not satisfy psychological nominalism's criterion of being *non*-relational. Carnap denies causal relations between persons and abstract entities, but he does admit psychological relations between them.[163] Being flawed in this sense, the result is that Sellars finds Carnap's account of meaning compromised, especially in explaining designation as a relation between words and extralinguistic entities − a criticism moved to Carnap's *Introduction to Semantics* (Carnap 1942) since pure pragmatics' era.

Sellars' criticism of Carnap does not prevent him to express a major debt towards him. EAE ends indeed with the following remark:

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[162] "From a Sellarsian point of view, Carnap's treatment of universals proves to be too 'contaminated' by Platonism and far from 'psychological nominalism' no less than many forms of realism, as Carnap is apt to explain concepts and references in terms of a relation between persons and abstract entities" (*ibid.*).

[163] In his response to Sellars' EAE, Carnap says that "I would not reject, as Sellars seems to do, all factual or descriptive relations between material objects and abstract entities" (Carnap 1963, p. 924), and, again, "it seems to me that some psychological concepts may be regarded or reconstructed as relations (in the wide sense of the logical terminology, not in the causal sense) between a person and an abstract entity" (*ibid.*, p. 925).

The linguistic framework of abstract entities, which is such an indispensable part of human discourse, not only semantical discourse, but mentalistic discourse and scientific discourse generally, as well, does not involve a commitment to Platonism. It is a misinterpretation of semantical sentences, a 'category mistake,' which has generated the contrary supposition. […] Today, for the first time, the naturalistic-empiricist tradition has the fundamentals of an adequate philosophy of mind. To the creation of this truly revolutionary situation, which is just beginning to make itself felt, Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language* and *Introduction to Semantics* have contributed at least as much as any other single source.

(EAE, p. 282)

What are the tenets of the adequate philosophy of mind that Sellars mentions at the end of the quote? O'Shea (2017a) notices that the psychological nominalism described in EAE involves two separate claims: on the one hand, it claims the irreducibility of semantical words in terms of non-semantical roles (EAE, p. 459). On the other hand, it supports the thesis that "linguistic phenomena can, in principle, be described and accounted for without using semantical or prescriptive expressions" (*ibid.*, p. 465). To sum it up, "[p]sychological nominalism, for Sellars, is thus the thesis that the same conceptual roles that are described (indeed, constituted) normatively using semantic and mentalistic vocabulary can also be (sufficiently?) "described and causally accounted for" using non-normative, scientific naturalist vocabulary (O'Shea 2017a, p. 34).[164] The conjoining of these two claims in one single position is puzzling at least. Before turning to this problem, which lies at the core of Sellars' "naturalistic nominalism", let me look at the subject from another angle.

3.1.4 Synthetic *a Priori* Revisited

Before the digression that led me to the "second act" of the Sellars-Carnap's dispute, a question was still hanging. At the end of "Inference and Meaning", Sellars described material rules of inference as determining "the descriptive meaning of the expressions of a language within the

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[164] With an elegant phrasing from O'Shea, "[w]hat we thus run up against in Sellars' *own* definitions of the thesis of 'psychological nominalism' is what I have elsewhere characterized as Sellars' *naturalism with a normative turn* (O'Shea 2007; 2009). The 'program of psychological nominalism' (EAE, p. 448) is an explicit statement of Sellars' ambitious aspiration to provide a 'conceptual role' theory of mind, meaning, and knowledge that would at one and the same time preserve the conceptual or normative-pragmatic *irreducibility* of our rationality and intentionality – and hence, the irreducibility of *persons* themselves – while simultaneously […] enabling the complete and exhaustive natural-scientific causal *explanation* of those very same phenomena" (O'Shea 2017a, p. 33).

framework established by its logical transformation rules" (IM 47). The contribution of material rules to meaning is mediated by a process, began in pure pragmatics, at the end of which "'means' of semantical statements (idealized as 'Designates' in the Pure Semantics of Carnap and Tarski) is no more a *psychological* word, than, is the 'ought' of ethical statements or the 'must' of modal statements" (IM 46). By 1953, in short, Sellars had already spelled down the main outlines of his functional role semantics, according to which conceptual meaning is entirely dependent on linguistic rules regulating the linguistic expressions usage within a certain conceptual framework.

By ruling out IM's second alternative (according to which material rules have an original authority but are not essential to meaning – here on page 156), Sellars proved the truth of the first one, that is, that "[m]aterial rules are as *essential to meaning* […] as formal rules" (IM 9). This alternative, however, was presented at the beginning of the essay as the "rationalistic" thesis and was indeed embraced by Metaphysicus.

Does Sellars really side with rationalists, then? Not really:

> Our thesis, in short, turns out, as we have developed it, to be quite unlike the dogmatic rationalism of Metaphysicus. For whereas he speaks of *the* conceptual, *the* system of formal and material rules of inference, we recognize that there are an indefinite number of possible conceptual structures (languages) or systems of formal and material rules, each one of which can be regarded as a candidate for adoption by the animal which recognizes rules, and no one of which has an intuitable hallmark of royalty. They must compete in the market place of practice for employment by language users, and be content to be adopted haltingly and schematically. In short, we have come out with C. I. Lewis at a "pragmatic conception of the *a priori*".
> (IM 48)

By admitting a plurality of competing, alternative conceptual frameworks, Sellars endorses C.I. Lewis' pragmatic conception of the *a priori*. In a nutshell, Sellars exploits it to explain that on the one hand material rules of inference specify basic features (and, from this point of view, are constitutive) of our conceptual framework while, on the other hand, they remain inherently revisable: they can be replaced, for instance, on the occasion of the adoption of an alternative world-story, that is, an alternative linguistic (and, therefore, conceptual) framework. The appreciation for Lewis' pragmatic *a priori* at the end of IM, however, is immediately followed by a complaint:

Indeed, my only major complaint concerning his brilliant analysis in *Mind and the World Order* is that he speaks of the a priori as *analytic*, and tends to limit it to propositions involving only the more generic elements of a conceptual structure (his "categories"). As far as I can gather, Lewis uses the term 'analytic' as equivalent to 'depending only on the meaning of the terms involved'. In this sense, of course, our *a priori* is also analytic. But this terminology is most unfortunate, since in a perfectly familiar sense of 'synthetic', some *a priori* propositions (including many that Lewis recognizes) are synthetic and hence *not* analytic (in the corresponding sense of 'analytic').
(IM 48)

To the terminological disagreement over the meaning of the synthetic *a priori* Sellars devotes the essay "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?" (ITSA), published in 1953 but first delivered as a speech in 1951.[165] In extreme synthesis, this essay questions the basis for Lewis' contrast between analytic *a priori* and synthetic *a posteriori* domain and proposes a new "taxonomy" articulating the internal differences between the two – something precluded to Lewis' (too) neat dichotomy. Before turning to the essay, it is useful to present at least the core of Lewis' arguments in *Mind and the World Order* (MWO, 1929) – a text that left a deep impression on Sellars (AR p. 287).

a. The Conceptual Pragmatism of C.I. Lewis

Fundamental to understand MWO is Lewis' acquaintance and vigorous interest in logic and mathematics,[166] of which something has already been said in section 2.2.1. Background to his reflections was the ongoing process of *relativization* of the *a priori* which followed nineteenth century scientific advancements: in this regard, strong was his belief that "every major discovery of theoretical mathematics, and every fundamental change in the manner in which this subject is conceived, is sure to find its sequel, sooner or later, in epistemology" (MWO, vii). According to Lewis, groundbreaking advancements in mathematical theory or logical analysis (like the emergence of alternative systems of logic and of non-Euclidean geometries, the birth of quantum mechanics, theory of relativity, etc.) were sooner or later going to be mirrored in

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[165] It can't go unnoticed that Sellars' essay was produced the same year as Quine's famous attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction (Quine 1951). However, as noted by DeVries, "[w]hile Quine's discussion has coloured almost all treatments of the analytic or the synthetic since, it seems to have had no impact on Sellars's discussion" (DeVries 2005, p. 61).

[166] MWO's incipit declares indeed that "[t]he conceptions presented in this book have grown out of investigations which began in the field of exact logic and its application to mathematics" (MWO, vii).

epistemology, and they would likely bring transformations as far-reaching as the above-mentioned scientific revolutions were. This, however, had an unwelcomed "side effect": the over-expanding gulf between conceptual and empirical domains. When mathematical tools are applied to "the presentations of our sense-experience", it is indeed inevitable to come up with nothing but an "empirical truth which may be no more than probable" (*ibid.*, ix).

From Lewis' perspective, the gulf between the conceptual and the empirical realm has been recently stretched to the point that "it becomes a matter of doubt whether the structure science builds is solidly based upon the earth, or is a mansion in some Platonic heaven, or is only a kind of castle in the air" (*ibid.*, ix). Therefore, since "[t]raditional grounds of a priori truth have been, perforce, abandoned", Lewis' enterprise in MWO is to investigate "[w]hat other grounds there may be; or whether without the a priori there can be any truth at all" (MWO, ix).[167] The whole book is thus a presentation and discussion of Lewis' *conceptual pragmatism*, whose three main theses are sketched in the *Preface*:

- The coextensionality of the classes of analytic and *a priori* truths ("*A priori* truth is definitive in nature and rises exclusively from the analyses of concepts", *ibid.*, x, p. 37), which rules out the question of synthetic a priori knowledge as a "dead, or nearly dead issue" (*ibid.*, p. 158).

- The application of any particular concept to particular given experiences as inevitably *a posteriori*, hence, merely hypothetical.

- The conformity of experience to the mind and its categories: "experience in general is such as to be capable of conceptual interpretation", because simply "it could not conceivably be otherwise" (*ibid.*, x).

Whereas the analytic *a priori* account of logic and mathematics was no novelty between logical empiricists, peculiar to Lewis' proposal was the inclusion of empirical concepts in the analytic domain. In other words, Lewis rejected the notion of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, but at the same time enlarged the notion of analyticity to cover for a much wider range of cases. The

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[167] "[T]raditional conceptions of the *a priori* have proved untenable. That the mind approaches the flux of immediacy with some godlike foreknowledge of principles which are legislative for experience, that there is any natural light or any innate ideas, it is no longer possible to believe" (Lewis 1923, p. 169).

conceptual categories through which we interpret reality (Lewis calls them "criteria of reality" or "criteria of interpretation", *ibid*., p. 14) are on the one hand *a priori* (since their ground or warrant is independent of any particular *a posteriori* experience) and on the other hand analytic (insofar as they are "implicit" in human experience and have been "brought to experience by the mind itself", *ibid*., p. 36). The distinction between analytic *a priori* and empirical *a posteriori* is tailored by Lewis on a clear-cut separation between conceptual and sensible realms, making empirical knowledge resulting from the combination of mind's analytic criteria with the sensuously given we encounter in experience.[168]

Especially relevant to this last section's scope is Lewis' notion of the *pragmatic a priori* underlining his conceptual pragmatism. This distinctive view origins in Lewis' suspicion towards inalterable or fundamental categories, which he deems a mere "rationalistic prejudice without foundation" (*ibid*., p. 22):

> There is much which is profound and true in traditional conceptions of the a priori. But equally it should be clear that there is much in such conceptions which smacks of magic ad superstitious nonsense. Particularly it is implausible that what is a priori can be rooted in a "rational nature of man" which is something miraculous and beyond the bounds of psychological analysis and genetic explanation.
> (MWO, p. 22)

Categories are indeed "almost as much a social product as it is our language" (*ibid*., p. 21) and human mind itself is "a distinctly a social product, and our categories will reflect that fact" (*ibid*., pp. 238-9).[169] This means that the criterion of necessity traditionally bounded to the *a priori* is not to be intended as something that admits of no alternatives: rather, we endorse or abandon *a priori* conceptual frameworks on pragmatic grounds.[170]

Among the many topics recollected in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (Feigl & Sellars 1949), a section was devoted to the synthetic *a priori*. Under the heading "Is There Synthetic *a Priori* Knowledge?", besides Schlick's article (Schlick 1949) was Lewis' "The Pragmatic Conception

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[168] That empirical knowledge is described by Lewis as product of the *conjoining* of a sensuous and a conceptual element is at the origin of scholars' disagreement on his falling afoul of the Myth of the Given or not. More on this will be said in what follows.

[169] "Our categorical modes of interpretation may be subject to gradual transition and even to fairly abrupt alteration [...]. [S]uch alteration in categorial interpretations is a fact of social history" (MWO, p. 228).

[170] To Lewis, this holds also for laws of logic. See Lewis 1923, p. 170ff and MWO, *passim*. For more on how the pragmatic *a priori* sprung out of Lewis' reflections on logic, I recommend Floyd (2021) and Shieh (2021).

of the a Priori", which summed up a presentation gave to the 1922 meeting of the American Philosophical Association (APA) and published the following year in the *Journal of Philosophy* (Lewis 1923). There, Lewis detects two mistakes behind the two traditional hallmarks associated with the *a priori*, namely its necessity and its independence from experience:

> What is *a priori* is necessary truth not because it compels the mind's acceptance, but precisely because it does not. It is given experience, brute fact, the *a posteriori* element in knowledge which the mind must accept willy-nilly. The *a priori* represents an attitude in some sense freely taken, a stipulation of the mind itself, and a stipulation which might be made in some other way if it suited our bent or need. Such truth is necessary as opposed to contingent, not as opposed to voluntary. And the *a priori* is independent of experience not because it prescribes a form which the data of sense must fit, or anticipates some preëstablished [sic] harmony of experience with the mind, but precisely because it prescribes nothing to experience. That is *a priori* which is true, *no matter what*. What it anticipates is not the given, but our attitude toward it: it concerns the uncompelled initiative of mind or, as Josiah Royce would say, our categorical ways of acting. (Lewis 1923, p. 169)[171]

In this quote, innovative aspects of Lewisian conception of the *a priori* are effectively summed up: to say it with Olen and Sachs, "[w]hereas the orthodox Kantian *a priori* is the fixed and inalterable constraints that the mind imposes on experience, the Lewisian *a priori* is the freely invented or conjectured interpretation of experience. It is the given – the world as disclosed to us – which constrains how we can interpret it. The *a priori* is therefore de-transcendentalized, historicized, relativized, and above all pragmatized" (Olen and Sachs 2017, p. 8).

Now, given that criteria of interpretation are necessarily analytic, how does a "change of framework" work in such a picture? How are those principles supposed to be modified in the event of accommodating conceptual change? This is the problem that captures Sellars' attention and, as it has been noted, "[w]hether Lewis successfully accommodates both the unfalsifiability of any a priori conceptual scheme of laws, kinds, and realities in one sense (in virtue of their being *analytically* true by definition), but also in another sense the falsifiability of those empirical generalizations on which our knowledge of nature depends, is open to question" (O'Shea 2018b, p. 209).

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[171] From a similar train of thought, cf. MWO, pp. 196-7: "[t]he *a priori* represents the activity of the mind itself; it represents an attitude in some sense freely taken [...]. The necessity of the *a priori* is its character as legislative act. It represents a constraint imposed by the mind, not a constraint imposed upon the mind by something else".

b. "Is There a Synthetic *a Priori*?"

The essay ITSA tries precisely to articulate an answer to this problem. It is a dense essay, since almost each question addressed by Sellars in the preceding articles is now collected and re-assessed in light of the search for an answer to the question that gives the title to the essay.

The essay begins with some remarks on the recent literature on the synthetic *a priori*. According to Sellars, the urge is to disambiguate between a "narrow" and a "broad" sense according to which a proposition can be said analytic: Sellars' proposal is to abandon the ambiguous, broader sense according to which "analytic" stands for propositions "*true by virtue of the meanings of the terms involved*" (ITSA, pp. 298-9, cf. EAE, pp. 438-9), and to adopt instead the narrower definition according to which the term "analytic" applies only to *logically true sentences* (e.g., truths of logic or their reformulations, like (A) and (B) in section 2.1). Sellars' remarks clearly stem from the acknowledgement that not every proposition which is true by virtue of the meaning of the terms involved is also *logically* true, and that the former domain is indeed broader and, in a way that will be specified, has blurred boundaries.

If that's the case with the definition of "analytic", what about the "*a priori*"? Sellars lists different options. Of the four alternatives listed (ITSA, pp. 299-300), he chooses to go with the fourth: "*a priori* truth is truth *ex vi terminorum*" (*ibid.*), that is, it depends solely on the (correct) understanding of the meanings of the terms involved. "Synthetic", instead, is used simply to indicate neither logically true, nor logically false, so that the essay's title can be reformulated in "Are there any universal propositions which, though they are not logically true, are true by virtue of the meanings of their terms"? (*ibid.*).

Lewis' usages of the terms "analytic" and "*a priori*" diverges significantly from Sellars': he indeed intends "analytic" as "true *ex vi terminorum*" (that Sellars ascribed to the "*a priori*"), and he intends "a priori" as "*holding of all possible objects of experience*" (*ibid.*).[172] This mismatch gives rise to a peculiar situation: Lewis would answer affirmatively to Sellars' questions whether there are universally quantified propositions true by virtue of the meanings of their terms, but the same would not go for his own reformulation of the question (that is, whether there are universally

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[172] "Definitions and their immediate consequences, analytic propositions generally, are necessarily true, true under all possible circumstances" (Lewis 1923, p. 171).

quantified propositions which, though *not* true *ex vi terminorum*, hold of all possible objects of experience).

In the attempt to clear the air of a confused debate, Sellars proposes to merge his sense of *a priori* with "true by definition" (*ibid.*, p. 301). In particular, the kind of definition of which Sellars is thinking when concerned with synthetic propositions are Schlick's *implicit* definitions (explicit definitions would indeed give rise to analytic truths).[173] If a defense of synthetic *a priori* propositions is to be set out, then, the first thing to be done is to remove objections classically moved to implicit definitions.[174]

The objection by which Sellars is mostly concerned has two prongs, both of which must be excluded to leave room to synthetic *a priori* propositions. The first prong concerns the alleged distinction between "linguistic meanings" and "real meanings", and the belief that the *truth* of what we assert depends solely on the relation between "real meanings" of linguistic predicates and the world. This objection states that, whenever we really are authorized (syntactically) to derive a certain statement, the latter could still be falsified by some circumstance in the "real" world: "even should there be a syntactical rule (implicit definition) authorizing us to assert 'All A is B' unconditionally (and therefore to derive 'x is B' from 'x is A') might there not be an object which conforms to the real meaning of 'A' without conforming to the real meaning of 'B'?" (*ibid.*). To this objection, the classic counter-objection is one that we are now familiar with: the one resorting to real (or "synthetic") connections between universals or predicates:

> It is here that the defence [*sic*.], clothed in the dignity of *philosophia perennis*, quietly adds that for 'All A is B' to be synthetic yet true *ex vi terminorum*, it is not sufficient that 'x is B' is syntactically derivable from 'x is A'; there must also be an *extra-linguistic* or *real connection* between the real meaning of 'A' and the real meaning of 'B'. In other words, […] to the syntactical derivations authorized by the definition, there corresponds *synthetic necessary connections* between the properties which are the real meanings of these predicates.
>
> (ITSA, p. 306)

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[173] "Now it is at once clear that the 'definition' […] by virtue of which a synthetic *a priori* proposition would be true *ex vi terminorum* cannot be *explicit* definition; for the *a priori* truth to which these give rise is analytic. If anything that has been called definition can serve this purpose, it is what, following Schlick, we shall call *implicit* definition" (ITSA, pp. 302-3).

[174] Implicit definitions "specify that certain sentences containing these predicates are unconditionally assertable or, in other words, that we are authorized by the rules of the language to assert these sentences without either deriving them from other sentences or establishing probability relations between them and observation sentences" (*ibid.*, p. 305).

This move, however, does not achieve much. In fact, it only elicits the second prong of the objection to implicit definitions. It cannot be but an empiricist objection: "this notion [of real connection, CC] is incompatible with the most elementary principles of the empiricist tradition" (*ibid.*, p. 307). The most elementary principle that contrasts the alleged apprehensions of those necessary connections envisioned by rationalists is concept empiricism – the view according to which conceptual content is derived from sense experience.[175] To dismantle concept empiricism, Sellars attacks the weakest presupposition that characterizes it: the "distinction between the pure awareness of an abstract entity on the one hand, and the linguistic or, in general, symbolic expression of this pure awareness on the other" (*ibid.*, p. 310). That Sellars regards this distinction as a mistake should not come as a surprise. The abandonment of the "metaphor of the mental eye" that will be spelled down in what follows includes indeed both a resumé of pure pragmatics' conclusions, and the anticipation of what a couple of years later will be called the Myth of the Given.

The argument crafted by Sellars impinges on the main *impasse* concept empiricism must face: its inability to properly explain concept acquisition without falling into circularity.[176] According to Sellars, concept empiricism simply falls prey to the Myth of the given – something that Lewis seems to share:

> If we put this implication in a slightly different way, we immediately establish contact with a characteristic contention of Professor Lewis. All classification of objects, however confident and pre-emptory, is a venture, a venture which at no point finds its justification in a presymbolic vision of generic and specific hearts on the sleeves of the objects of experience. Classification resembles the grasping tentacles of an octopus, now tentative, now confident, rather than a salesman's selection of a suit for a customer after a glance at his build.
> (ITSA, p. 310)

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[175] "[O]nly if concept empiricism is rejected is it possible to hold that there are non-logically true propositions which are true *ex vi terminorum*" (*ibid.*, p. 308). With a hint of humor, Sellars notes that "unqualified concept empiricism equally entails that we have no concept of *logical* necessity, not to mention conjunction, disjunction, negation, and class-membership, though concept empiricists have not been quite as assiduous in pointing this out as they have been in scoffing at real connection" (*ibid.*). Slightly later, Sellars confesses his rough past: "Indeed, there was a time, not too long ago, when I myself was a convinced concept empiricist – though I was not as aware of its implications and presuppositions as I should have been. For a number of years, however, I have been a renegade, and in the following pages I shall indicate some of the considerations which led me to abandon concept empiricism, as well as the resulting changes in my interpretation of the synthetic *a priori*" (*ibid.*).

[176] For a reconstruction of the "circularity objection" moved by Sellars to concept empiricism, see Sachs 2015 pp. 57 ss. In short, "the concept empiricist must hold that one's awareness of universals is prior to, and necessary for, learning how to use a symbol. But if learning how to use a symbol just *is* becoming aware of a universal, then the latter cannot explain the former" (Sachs 2014, pp. 58-9).

However, although the epistemology described by Lewis in MWO looks very promising, Sellars sees an inconsistency between so to say, theory and practice. He continues indeed:

> I am afraid, however, that our agreement with Lewis is more shadow than substance. For while he writes in this manner of the interpretation of the given by means of concepts whose implications transcend the given, he also holds that the sensible appearances of things *do* wear their hearts on their sleeves, and that we do have a cognitive vision of these hearts which is direct, unlearned and incapable of error […]. In other words, the assumption to which we are committed requires us to extend to all classificatory consciousness whatever, the striking language in which Lewis describes our consciousness of objects.
> (ITSA, p. 310)

In other words, Lewis' himself falls prey of that same "metaphor of the mental eye" mentioned above, and the fatal flaw to his epistemology consists precisely in its inability to explain the acquisition of a conceptual framework by someone who does not already possess one.

To find out whether Sellars' critique is well grounded it is useful to take a look at MWO's second chapter, which is entirely devoted to *the given element in experience*.

c. Lewis and Sellars on the Given

Lewis describes experience as constituted by two elements, the concept and the given. In order to have proper knowledge, we need them both: "Empirical truth, or knowledge of the objective, arises trough conceptual interpretation of the given" (MWO, p. 37). Now, the sharp contrast between the conceptual and the given is at the origin of Lewis' infamous aura of being a promoter of "the" foundationalist epistemology itself. More recent literature has tempered (when not dismantled) this criticism by emphasizing the non-cognitive nature of Lewis' given: for instance, it has been pointed out that "in Lewis the given does not play a directly justificatory role in the acquiring of empirical knowledge, and as such it does not enter the epistemic sphere. Instead, what plays such a justificatory role is our interpretation of the given" (Zarębski 2017, p. 207). In other cases, it has been remarked that the given is posited by Lewis through a transcendental kind of reflection, and that the philosopher himself arrives at the distinction between concept and given only by way of abstraction. In this sense, "'[t]hick experience is by

the same token the starting point for Lewis' reflections and the object that such reflection is supposed to account for" (Corti 2019, p. 426).[177]

However, the caution with which Lewis talks about the given does not shelter him from Sellars' already sophisticated enucleation of the Myth. Let me quote directly from MWO to show how Lewis himself characterizes the given. With a formulation that recalls of a much well-known passage from KrV, Lewis says that:

> If there be no datum given to the mind, then knowledge must be contentless and arbitrary; there would be nothing which must be true to. And if there be no interpretation or construction which the mind self imposes, then thought is rendered superfluous, the possibility of error becomes inexplicable and the distinction between true and false is in danger of becoming meaningless.
> (MWO, p. 39)

The given is described by Lewis as the sensuous element in experience characterized by independency from our thought ("that element which we are aware that we do not create by thinking", MWO p. 48) and unalterability ("and cannot, in general, displace or alter", *ibid*.). Do we ever see, hear, or even get a glance at the "given"? Absolutely not: the given is always necessarily experienced as already interpreted, or supplemented with meaning (*ibid*., p. 50ff).[178] This implies that the given cannot even be properly described:

> While we can thus isolate the element of the given by these criteria of its unalterability and its character as sensuous feel or quality, we cannot describe any particular given *as such*, because in describing it […] we qualify it by bringing it under some category or other […]. If there be states of pure esthesis, in violent emotion or in the presence of great art, which are unqualified by thought, even these can be conveyed […] only when they have been rendered articulate by thought.
> (MWO, pp. 52-3)

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[177] Prevalent in literature is the opinion that Lewis' given does *not* fall prey to Sellars' Myth of the Given: Sachs (2014), Zarębski (2017), Westphal (2017), Corti (2019) all convene on that. O'Shea, on the contrary, has more than once emphasized Lewisian *qualia's* phenomenalistic tendencies, thus "siding" with Sellars himself (O'Shea 2018b, 2020).

[178] With Lewis' words, "[w]e do not see patches of color, but trees and houses; we hear, not indescribable sound, but voices and violins. What we most certainly know are objects and full-bodied facts about them which could be stated in propositions" (*ibid.*, p. 54).

Even such a sketchy picture allows us to see that Lewis was no naïve foundationalist. The problem, however, is just right behind the corner. Indeed, despite declaring their ineffability on paper,[179] Lewis also describes *qualia* – this is the name with which he refers to the given element in experience – as "recognizable from one to another experience" (MWO, p. 60). Moreover, he explicitly states that, although the *presentation* through which the sensuous element is given to us "is, of course, unique, […] the qualia which make it up are not" and the examples he gives are, accordingly, "the immediacy of redness or loudness" (*ibid.*). So, if on one side Lewis underlines that picking up a red sense-*quale* does not grant us any kind of *knowledge* (and he accordingly insists on qualia's non-epistemic character), on the other side he concedes that qualia *can* be recognized as bare properties in experience, which clearly makes them *not* entirely ineffable. This is the sense in which Lewis' notion of *qualia* is said to wear some kind of hearts on its sleeves: because it admits the possibility of recognizing sensory "repeatables" of which we are aware for the simple fact of being presented with them.[180]

Once done with the *pars destruens*, Sellars is ready to spell down his own proposal. Given concept empiricism' failure on this front, how does Sellars himself account for concept acquisition?

In what remains I am going to provide only a quick resumé of the matter, since this topic will be spelled out in detail in the next section. In a nutshell, Sellars' theory of concept acquisition combines a "language-entry transitions" phase (modelled on behavioristic psychology, according to which thing-word connections are *conditioned* responses of verbal patterns acquired through a training process) with an "intra-linguistic moves" phase (which concerns "[t]he acquisition of habits pertaining to the arranging of sounds and visible marks into patterns and sequences of patterns", *ibid.* p. 313). The formulation of such an approach allows Sellars to

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[179] "While we can thus isolate the element of the given by these criteria of its unalterability and its character as sensuous feel or quality, we cannot describe any particular given *as such*, because in describing it […] we qualify it by bringing it under some category or other […]. If there be states of pure esthesis, in violent emotion or in the presence of great art, which are unqualified by thought, even these can be conveyed […] only when they have been rendered articulate by thought" (MWO, pp. 52-3). Or, again, "they [qualia, CC] are ineffable, since they might be different in two minds with no possibility of discovering that fact and no necessary inconvenience to our knowledge of objects or their properties" (*ibid.*, p. 124).

[180] To be fair, Lewis' theory of qualia is not as naïve as it could seem based on my reconstruction. His qualia, although immediately recognized, remain non-epistemic in character. This is what leads Carl Sachs to distinguish two forms of the myth of the given, semantic and epistemic, of which only the former is the one that can be properly applied to Lewis: "While Lewis does insist that our 'cognitive vision' of qualia is 'incapable of error', he also insists that their immunity to doubt entails that they have no epistemic status. If we were to interpret Sellars as accusing Lewis of accepting the Myth of the epistemic Given, then we ought to conclude that Sellars is mistaken. However, if we bear in mind the distinction between the Myth of the epistemic Given and the Myth of the semantic Given, we can see that it actually the Myth of the semantic Given that Sellars is focused upon" (Sachs 2014, p. 59).

overcome relational or so-called "matrimonial" theories which account for meaning in terms of association with classes of objects:

> [T]hat these sentences *entail* no such consequences becomes obvious once we reflect that it is just as legitimate and, indeed, true to say 'The German word "*und*" means "*and*"' as it is to say 'The German word "*rot*" means "*red*"'; where it is clear that 'und' gains its meaning not by a process of association with Conjunction or a class of conjoined objects, but rather by coming to be used with other symbols in accordance with familiar syntactical rules.
> (ITSA, p. 314)

By overcoming traditional relational approaches to meaning, Sellars aims at highlighting the shortcomings of the otherwise perfectly sound idea according to which reference can be explained as some kind of relation between linguistic and extra-linguistic entities. In this sense, of course there is a sense in which Sellars agrees that the utterance of "red" in presence of red objects usually expresses a certain reliable causal relation. The mistake, though, is to interpret semantical relations as themselves functioning in the same way, that is, establishing a relation between "redness" and red things. So, although it makes perfectly sense to claim, "that there must *be* certain kinds of empirical-causal relations established between persons' utterances (and thoughts) and various entities", this does not imply "any such thing in the world as a philosophically problematic *meaning relation* holding between those utterances (and thoughts) and those entities" (O'Shea 2007, p. 56).

Once matrimonial theories of meaning are abandoned in favor of functional role semantics, "we need no longer to be hypnotized by the facile contrast between the 'linguistic meaning' and the 'real meaning'" (ITSA, p. 316). This is a valuable profit. Indeed, if we recall the first "prong" of the objection to implicit definitions, it claimed "the *truth* of what we assert as depending solely on the relation of the *real* meanings of these predicates to the world" (*ibid.*, p. 305): that is why, even if granted by syntactical rules, the possibility of B *not* being associated with A was considered at least *conceivable*. But now we see how this is simply non-sense, since there is no "real meaning" out there. Meaning is indeed defined by the very linguistic rules to which the term conforms:

> Let me now put my thesis by saying that the conceptual meaning of a descriptive term is constituted by what can be inferred from it in accordance with the logical and extra-logical rules

of inference of the language (conceptual frame) to which it belongs (a technically more adequate formulation would put this in terms of the inferences that can be drawn from sentences in which the term appears). […] [W]here 'x is B' can be validly inferred from 'x is A', the proposition 'All A is B' is unconditionally assertable on the basis of the rules of the language. Our thesis, then, implies that every primitive descriptive predicate occurs in one or more logically synthetic propositions which are unconditionally assertable – in short, true *ex vi terminorum*. But a logically synthetic proposition which is true *ex vi terminorum* is, by the conventions adopted at the opening of the chapter, a synthetic a priori proposition.

(ITSA, p. 317)

At the beginning of this section (here on page 166-7), I mentioned IM's ending where Sellars was complaining about Lewis' conflating entirely the "analytic" with the "*a priori*". The terminology chosen by Lewis, Sellars claims, "is most unfortunate, since in a perfectly familiar sense of 'synthetic', some *a priori* propositions (including many that Lewis recognizes) are synthetic and hence *not* analytic (in the corresponding sense of 'analytic')" (IM 48). Sellars is convinced indeed that Lewis' conception of the analytic on one side includes, and on the other excludes too much.

As for the inclusion, I have mentioned before Lewis' peculiarity of including categorial conceptual principles determining empirical concepts into the domain of the analytic. By impinging on a Kantian idea, Lewis maintains that "insofar as any such knowledge of empirical objects is to be possible, […] some analytic categories of interpretation or other must always be presupposed as legislating a priori those laws that any real object of a given kind must obey in order to be a reality of that particular kind".[181] In other words, Lewis considered analytic *a priori* those principles defining what it is to be an object of a certain kind at all: he talks, for example, of principles of persistence of physical objects; or biological laws defining living beings (MWO p. 261) – all sharing the fact of being principles brought to experience by the mind itself.

Lewis is right in pointing out those principles' different "status" from that of empirical or inductive generalizations, since they seem to be "condition of possibility" of those very generalizations. However, such a setup is the one that led O'Shea to question Lewis' ability in accommodating conceptual change: how is an analytic *a priori* law supposed to be *falsified*? Lewis tries to get off the hook by stressing that, instead of being strictly falsified, certain analytic *a priori*

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[181] I recommend O'Shea (2016) for an analysis of how concepts "prescribe laws" in Kant, Lewis, and Sellars. Sellars' relation to Lewis' modified Kantianism is dealt also in O'Shea (2020).

principles are replaced. Still, Sellars is concerned with those principles including "connections" hardly justifiable in virtue of their meaning alone (hence, analytic).

Take biological laws, which Lewis conceives as definitive for our classifications (think, for instance, to the criteria defining being a mammal). To squeeze such principles in the same category of logically analytic truths is truly to force one's conception of what count as "analytic". On the other hand, Lewis' "analytic" *excludes* a whole lot of other principles that Sellars would rather consider synthetic. At the end of 1954 essay "Physical Realism" (PR), an essay contemporary to ITSA where Sellars discussed both his father and C.I. Lewis' positions, he writes indeed:

> I think that he [Lewis, CC] is overly hasty in assuming that "analytic" *as he uses the term* excludes "causal". […] Lewis insists that statements about the past must *imply* statements about future conditional experiences. He also insists that the implication must be *analytic*. He points out that the fact that "Yesterday was Monday" analytically implies "Tomorrow will be Wednesday" does not require that the time slab which is yesterday be a part of the time slab which is tomorrow. He concludes that "Caesar died" can *analytically* imply certain conditional future experiences without being itself in the future. Very good. But whereas the relation between "Yesterday was Monday" and "Tomorrow will be Wednesday" obviously holds by virtue of the meanings involved, surely "Caesar died" implies conditional future experiences only in conjunction with auxiliary historical propositions *and a framework of laws of nature*. Is Lewis willing to hold that the relevant laws of nature are analytic? Certainly they are not tautological, but for Lewis the 'analytic' is broader than the 'tautological'.
>
> (PR, p. 31)

On Sellars' view, causal laws are synthetic *a priori* propositions of a special kind. Indeed, they are partly provisional, and partly constitutive. Surely they are, in a sense, constitutive of the conceptual framework in which we inhabit. However, they are also inherently provisional, and that is the reason why Sellars is aware that his "revised theory" of synthetic *a priori* propositions may not satisfy its most strenuous defenders: "Is the synthetic *a priori* described above a *real* synthetic *a priori*? Would those who have fought and suffered for the cause of the synthetic a priori […] welcome me to their ranks?" (ITSA, p. 317). Sellars is inclined to think they wouldn't. The reason is straightforward. Even though constitutive of this conceptual framework, Sellars' synthetic *a priori* principles are revisable in two relevant senses: not only they can be replaced into this very conceptual framework, but the conceptual framework could itself be discarded

and replaced. It is this latter remark that annoy most the strenuous defender of the synthetic *a priori* and makes her feel like "our synthetic *a priori* is a peculiar kind of *a posteriori*" (*ibid.*, p. 318). This is where Sellars agrees with Lewis: in the acknowledgment that "our conceptual frame is only one among many possible conceptual frames" (*ibid.*). Thus, not only we can, in a sense, carve out a space for synthetic *a priori* principles in forms of material principles of inference. And not only these principles must be conceived as ultimately answerable to experience and, eventually, subject to abandonment: *the conceptual framework itself must also be conceived in this way*. The paper can thus end, in the usual Sellarsian prosaic style, claiming that:

> While every conceptual frame involves propositions which, though synthetic, are true *ex vi terminorum*, every conceptual frame is also but one among many which compete for adoption in the market-place of experience.
> (*ibid.*, p. 320)

3.2   Reconciling Norms and Nature

In "Inference and Meaning", Sellars said that modal claims can be interpreted "as a 'transposed' language of norms" (IM 39).[182] I have clarified enough how such a claim shall be interpreted. Once Carnap's notion has been enriched with Sellars' emphasis on the normative, *rulishness* character of linguistic rules (IM 36) – and Carnap's distinction between "formal" and "material" mode of speech is correctly applied – modal sentences are disguised as "material mode" counterparts to statements properly belonging to metalanguage. Lawlike statements, such as the ones used to talk about laws of nature, are not mere descriptive statements of regularities: they are instead normative, metalinguistic claims that license particular inferences. With a nice expression that I have already mentioned, Sellars says of real connections that they are "shadows of rules" (LRB 40). In other words, although lawlike expressions *seem* to talk about the world, they are instead metalinguistic claims about object-languages. Modal claims are thus reflections, in object-language, of linguistic rules whose place is the metalanguage. This is the sense in which, in the final paragraphs of the essay, Sellars writes that the meaning of modal vocabulary consists of its "logical grammar" (IM 44).

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[182] The relation between modal claims and the linguistic rules that they "incorporate" is specified in IM as a way in which some claims (like modal, normative, or logical claims) can be said to *convey* (as opposed to *assert*) certain insights on the structure of language (*ibid.*, 41-2): specifically, logically necessary statements convey formal rules of inference, causally necessary statements convey material rules of inference.

If that's the story with modal vocabulary, how does things stand with respect to ordinary, descriptive words? Surely there must be a different story to tell. As acknowledged by Peregrin in discussing classic objections to inferentialism (Peregrin 2014), the real challenge that inferential role semantics must face is not constituted by modal vocabulary or abstract entities. While many would submit that inferentialism is appealing with respect to logical or modal vocabulary, it is much less appealing when it comes to accounting for terms composing our ordinary perceptual experience, and thus to justify simple assertions such as "this apple is red". In other words, while we are not uncomfortable in thinking about the meaning of special kinds of vocabularies as constituted by their "logical grammar", descriptive words with empirical impact and content ("red", "apple", and so on) are usually accounted for differently. In effect, we easily convene that modal or logical vocabularies are likely *not* acquired as patterns of elicited responses to classes of extra-linguistic particulars. On the contrary, we do not have any difficulty in imagining a child learning the meaning of "red" through ostensive definition and subsequent selective reinforcement. To put it differently, names and descriptive predicates seem to involve word/world relations much more directly than connectives and classes.

Pace the intuitive character of the latter stance, Sellars' functional role semantics shows that this difference is an illusion, and that meaning – of normative, logical, modal, *or* descriptive words – is never accountable in terms of its association with this or that entity, neither abstract, nor physical. Sticking with the same example, the irreducibility of the meaning of the word "red" to the association with this or that entity is testified by the fact that, as I have explained at length, to use the predicate "red", one needs to have a whole package of other information: for instance, knowledge about relations of incompatibility between different color qualities, or about the simple fact that red is a color. Mastering the meaning of the word "red" implies knowing how to *use* it, and to know how to use it implies that the subject acknowledges it as part of a larger system of inferentially related expressions.[183]

By conceiving meaning in these terms, Sellars is not saying that the meaning of "red" has nothing to do with red objects. In O'Shea's words, "[i]t is true that for the word 'red' to mean what it does certain naturalistically specifiable and reliable language/world relations must

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[183] "Sellars believes that concepts have meaning in light of how they relate or fail to relate to other concepts. Thus, characterizations, which are judgments that assert/attribute conceptual content to some entity, are meaningful only insofar as one understands how they relate to a whole web of compatible and incompatible concepts. The 'great deal more' that is needed over and above concepts is (1) a logical space of reasoning, which permits one to functionally navigate a 'battery of concepts' and (2) the 'know how' of knowing when and in what manner one *should* employ them" (Reider 2017, pp. 7-8). The distinction between knowing that and knowing how, that Sellars draws from Ryle, had not been put into use by Sellars yet.

obtain between, say, utterances of 'red' and red objects [...]. However, the word/world relations that are involved in the transitions or uniformities that are thus *prescribed* by the language entry and exit rules [...] are ordinary empirical-causal natural relations, not basic semantic or intentional relations" (O'Shea 2007, p. 61).

To put it simply, normative principles shape non-normative, behavioral uniformities describable in purely naturalistic terms.[184] The dichotomy between the real of the normative and the "space of causes" shape Sellars' philosophy all the way down, and it results in the so-called "double-life of linguistic items as both causal and normative, which derives from the fact that function need material embodiment and that norm-governed behavior is reflected in causal uniformities" (Seibt 2000, p. 248).

In the final section of this work, I will show how Sellars' complex approach to meaning tries to preserve both sides. I will proceed like this. First, I will present the way in which Sellars accounts for empirical, descriptive vocabulary by laying down his theory of concept acquisition (section 3.2.1). I present this theory, which meshes insights from behaviorism with the normatively laden side of human linguistic activity, with main reference to "Some Reflections on Language Games" (SRLG),

Afterwards, I will present Sellars' formulation of the so-called reducibility-*cum*-irreducibility principle in the essay "A Semantical Solution of the Mind-Body Problem" (SSMB) as the first explicit attempt to ease the above-mentioned dichotomy.

The result will be that Sellars' non-reductivist naturalism holds something like a bifocal view on linguistic activity: *sub specie norma*, language is an activity subjected to normative constraints, *sub specie causa*, the very same activity shall be considered as a natural phenomenon requiring causal explanation.

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[184] O'Shea refers to this principle as the *norm/nature metaprinciple* (O'Shea 2007, p. 50). This principle dictates that "[w]hile meaning, reference, intentionality, knowledge, and even truth itself are not *themselves* problematic relations between mind or language and the world, for Sellars, such phenomena do 'presuppose' or 'convey the information' (as he puts it) that various highly complex but unproblematic empirical-causal relations and natural uniformities have come to characterize our linguistic behavior both in its own internal patterns and in its relationship to entities in the world. That this is so will itself be a result of the social-normative guidance that is involved in learning a language, and in particular as governed by what I call Sellars' *norm/nature meta-principle*". The original formulation of this principle in Sellars' words is to be found in TC: "Espousal of principles is reflected in uniformities of performance. [...] I am not claiming that to *follow* a principle, i.e. act on principle, is identical with exhibiting a uniformity of performance that accords with the principle. I think that any such idea is radically mistaken. I am merely saying that the espousal of a principle or standard, *whatever else it involves*, is characterized by a uniformity of performance. And let it be emphasized that this uniformity, though not the principle is the manifestation, is describable in matter-of-factual terms" (TC, p. 214).

3.2.1 Moves in the Game

The starting point of "Some Reflections on Language Games" (SRLG), an essay originally appeared in *Philosophy of Science* in 1954, tackles a notorious paradox concerning rules: how can we be aware of a rule for the usage of a linguistic item, being rules formulated in language themselves? The problem is formulated from the outset in this way:

> It seems plausible to say that a language is a system of expressions whose use is subject to certain rules. It would seem, therefore, that learning to use a language means learning to abide by rules for the use of its expressions. However, as it stands, this thesis is subject to an obvious and devastating refutation.
>
> (SRLG, p. 321)

The refutation that Sellars is referring to is the well-known Wittgensteinian paradox.[185] Sellars reformulates it in terms of the relationship between object-language and metalanguage. In his formulation, it goes like this: if we consider the process of learning to use a certain language L as one that requires the learning to obey to its rules, and we consider a rule to be a sentence in the metalanguage ML, learning to use L would presuppose the ability to use ML. However, in turn, learning to use ML would presuppose the ability to use a meta-metalanguage MML. We thus find ourselves facing a "vicious regress", which makes the thesis "absurd" and in need of being rejected (*ibid.*).

Given that learning a first language is clearly *not* impossible, there must be a way out of the paradox. The solution sketched by Sellars consists of recognizing that there is a sense in which it is possible, for an agent, to *conform* to rules "even though the idea that he was to do A in C had never occurred to him, and even though he had no language for referring to either A or C" (*ibid.*, p. 322). This is a crucial point that concerns, with a nice expression, "the mystery of how words become flesh" (Rey 2020, p. 490). As virtually any issue analyzed by Sellars, it is a difficult one, that needs to be analyzed carefully.[186]

The topic of rules has already been introduced in the essay "Language, Rules and Behavior" at the end of chapter 1 (section 1.3.1). There, I have emphasized Sellars' distinction between "free,

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[185] Wittgenstein (1953), 201.

[186] "Because the topic of rules raises the question of the being of the normative, it goes to the very heart of Sellars's philosophy. Indeed, the question of the being of the normative is, I believe, the fundamental question within Sellars's philosophy" (DeVries 2005, p. 40).

rule regulated behavior" and "tied behavior", which corresponds to two different "modes of being" of language: on the one hand, linguistic activity belongs to the realm of the normative. On the other hand, it belongs to the causal order. Through this distinction, which anticipates his view about the "double life" of linguistic items, Sellars brings to the fore the topic: what is, then, a rule? Sellars says that "a rule, properly speaking, isn't a rule unless it *lives* in behavior, rule-regulated behavior – even rule violating behavior" (LRB 43).

In light of this, the gist of Sellars' conception of rules revolves around what could be seen as the rejection of both a "platonistic" conception which consider them abstract, detached from reality principles which require a full "intellectual" grasp in order to be followed, and an account of rules in terms of mere recurring empirical regularities. On the one hand, to avoid the latter, Sellars distinguishes between rules and mere generalizations. Even though rules manifest themselves through observable regularities in behavior – and are thus similar to generalizations – the occurrence, in their formulation, of normative terms, go on a pair with the fact that a rule "tends to make itself true" (LRB 17). On the other hand, to avoid an overtly intellectualistic conception of rules, SRLG introduces a sophisticated distinction that was not so clear before: that between *conforming* to rules and *obeying* to rules.[187] With this distinction, Sellars is underscoring a fundamental point: that not all rule-governed behavior is rule-*obedient* behavior. Indeed,

> [w]hereas *obeying* rules involves using the language in which the rules are formulated, *conforming* to rules does not, so that whereas the thesis put in terms of *obeying* rules leads to a vicious regress, it ceases to do so once the above substitution is made.
> (SLRG, p. 322)

To make this distinction clear, in SRLG Sellars traces the famous analogy between linguistic activity and games.[188] The point that he is willing to make by highlighting the analogy between the two is that there is a sense according to which one can surely be said to "play a game", even without being able to perfectly formulate its rules. The inspiration for conceiving such an

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[187] This distinction will be addressed again by Sellars in later writings as the distinction between *rules of action* (also called *ought-to-do*, which presuppose recognition of both the appropriate circumstance and the rule) and *rules of criticism* (also called *ought-to-be*, which do not).

[188] Before, Sellars had already introduced the parallel between linguistic activity and the game of chess as early as ILE (1950). A long line of linguists and philosophers have employed this metaphor before Sellars, such as de Saussure, Wittgenstein, Frege and Husserl.

activity comes to Sellars from evolutionary phenomena. His famous example is that of a bee returning from a clover field. To account for such a phenomenon, our head is usually torn between two options: on the one hand, is seems inappropriate to judge the wiggling of the bee as merely accidental. On the other hand, it is highly problematic to ascribe an intention to the bee, which would entail for it having rational agency. With respect to these two alternatives, Sellars steers a middle course by introducing the notion of *pattern-governed behavior*. Looking at evolutionary phenomena, we find indeed examples attesting complex pattern-governed behaviors, without the subject having the *intention* of accomplishing a fixed sequence of moves. In front of a phenomenon like the bee's dance, Sellars says that:

> [i]t is open to us to give an evolutionary account of the phenomena of the dance, and hence to interpret the statement that *this* wiggle occurred because of the complex dance to which it belongs – which appears […] to attribute causal force to an abstraction, and hence *tempts us* [my emphasis, CC] to draw upon the mentalistic language of intention and purpose – in terms of the survival value to groups of bees of these forms of behaviour. In this interpretation, the dance pattern comes in not as an abstraction, but as exemplified by the behaviour of particular bees. (SRLG, p. 326)

If one was asked for an explanation for the behavior of the bee, it would not make any sense for her to respond that the wigglings happen *because* of a rule followed by the bee. And yet, Sellars recognizes that there is a sense in which she could say that the wigglings happens *because* they are part of a complex dance. Here, two different senses of "because" are at play: in the latter sense (according to which the wigglings happens *because* they are part of a pattern), no intention must be interposed to explain the behavior of the bee. The bee's dance flows indeed according to a principle of, so to say, "practical" regularity with a precise survival value, which is then "fixed" in the species through the rules of natural selection.[189]

If we compare two very different kinds of activities (like the bee's behavior and human linguistic activity) we see that, unlike the behavior shown by the bee returning to the beehive, which can be accounted for as pattern-governed behavior, only linguistic activity counts properly as rule-

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[189] In NAO, Sellars will write that "[t]he key to the concept of a linguistic rule is its complex relation to pattern-governed linguistic behavior. The general concept of pattern-governed behavior […] is the concept of behavior which exhibits a pattern, not because it is brought about by the intention that it exhibit this pattern, but because the propensity to emit behavior of the pattern has been selectively reinforced, and the propensity to emit behavior which does not conform to this pattern selectively extinguished. A useful analogy is the natural selection which results in the patterns of behavior which constitutes the so-called language of bees" (NAO 4, 27).

obeying behavior. It is indeed only explicitly rule-obeying behavior that contains "both a game and a metagame, the latter being the game in which belong the rules obeyed in playing the former game belong as a piece of rule obeying behavior" (*ibid.*, p. 327). Pattern-governed behavior, on the contrary, is perfectly accountable in terms of behavioristic S-R reinforcement (*ibid.*).[190]

This, however, does not throw the slightest light in explaining Sellars' initial problem of explaining language learning avoiding the aforementioned paradox. If organisms' behavior is accounted as pattern-governed, and linguistic behavior is accounted as rule-obeying, how could one learn a first language? Should we suppose that the child learns to speak with the explicit intention of doing so? The example of the bee's dance also proves illuminating with regard to language learning. Sellars remarks that learning a language has indeed some "interesting analogies" to phenomena of evolution. If we look at the process of language acquisition with the schema used to explain the bees' dance on the background,

> [w]e readily see the general lines of an account which permits us to say that learning to use a language is coming to do A in C, A' in C', etc., *because* of a system of 'moves' to which these acts belong, while yet denying that learning to use a language is coming to do A in C, A' in C', etc., *with the intention of realizing* a system of moves. In short, what we need is a distinction between 'pattern governed' and 'rule obeying' behaviour, the latter being a more complex phenomenon *which involves, but is not to be identified with, the former* [my emphasis, CC].
> (SRLG, p. 327)

What is relevant to the solution of the paradox is the complex dialectical relationship between pattern-governed behavior and rule-obeying behavior. The argument that Sellars is building is that, despite initial appearances, linguistic rules are not *in the first place* explicitly rule-obeying behavior. In fact, Sellars realizes that explicit *obedience* to a rule almost never occurs in our everyday use of language.[191] Most of the linguistic moves we make are not only *acquired* as pattern-governed activities but remain such.

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[190] For Sellars' complex relationship with behaviorism, I recommend Olen (2018) and Sachs (2022).

[191] The paradigmatic case of rule-obeying behavior is the driver who stops for the red traffic light late at night at a deserted intersection because the rule says so (DeVries 2005, p. 40). In this case, the subject is aware both of the rule (that one must stop for red traffic light) and of the circumstances, which makes her action of remarkable complexity.

The clearest example is provided by our perceptual responses to the world. If we were indeed to interpret a simple observation sentence such as "this is red" as being exclusively about following the rules for the words of which the sentence is compounded, we would quickly fall again into the Wittgensteinian paradox mentioned at the beginning. A moment of reflection is enough to realize that linguistic behavior cannot be *all* accounted as rule-obeying behavior. As Sellars notices,

> it is obvious that acquiring the concept of red cannot be equated with coming to *obey* a semantical rule. […] [t]he application of the concept *red* to an object in the process of *observing* that something is red, cannot be construed as *obeying* a semantic rule, for a rule is always a rule for doing something in some circumstances, and *obeying* a rule presupposes the recognition that the circumstances are of a kind to which the rule applies. If there were a semantical rule by learning to *obey* which we would come to have the concept of red, it would presumably be of the form *Red objects are to be called 'red'* – a rule to which we could clearly give linguistic expression only *ex post facto*. But, to recognize the circumstances to which the rule applies, one must already have the concept of red – not to mention all the other concepts constitutive of the rule. One would have to have the concept of red before one having it, and to apply it before one could apply it. (SRLG, pp. 333-4)[192]

In this sense, the notion of pattern-governed-behavior is introduced by Sellars to mediate between the mere *conformity* to a rule, and the action that happens *because* of a rule. By combining the concept of pattern governed behavior with that of rule obeying behavior to the process of language learning, Sellars is able to account for it as a process in which pattern-governed behavior gradually outgrows from mere conformity to true compliance to rules thanks to training and education. Accordingly, a "beginner" language user (i.e., a child) will initially show pattern governed behavior without the explicit intention to do so, in a way similar to LRB's tied behavior. As the time goes by, thanks to the trainer's reinforcement of correct usage through rewards, and inhibition of incorrect usage through sanctions, the language user is conditioned to act according to correct patterns of usage, until he will finally become a competent user herself.

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[192] Cf. a similar passage in ITSA, p. 312. It shall be clear enough to the reader that here the critique of the Myth of the Given is already operative.

Now, to reconnect with the metaphor of game introduced above, linguistic patterns of behavior include, according to Sellars, "positions" (thoughts, assertions) and "moves" or, with the term that he will prefer in later writings, "transitions" (inferences) from one position to another. In laying down the main moves, Sellars spells down the theory of language acquisition which appears throughout many of his writings (cf. SRLG, p. 329, ITSA, pp. 313-4, NAO 4, 31) and which I am going to summarize. The three main roles[193] that Sellars ascribes to linguistic expressions are:

- Language entry transitions, which go from observations to observation sentences (i.e., a language user responds to perceptible objects with the appropriate linguistic activity, such as "this is red" in front of a red brick).

- Intra-linguistic transitions, in which the language user's linguistic activity occurs in accordance with patterns of valid (formal and material) inferences (such as "this brick is red, therefore, it is colored").

- Language departure (or "exit") transitions, which go from language to the world. Here, the language user responds to linguistic activity with the proper action (such as responding with the appropriate movement to "I will now grab this red brick").

Sellars distinguishes then "auxiliary positions" (SRLG, p. 330) that play the role of unconditionally assertable sentences into a certain game and are thus responsible for "permitted" moves. We have already met them: Sellars says that these positions can be "either *analytic* or *synthetic*, or, as I prefer, in view of the ambiguity of these terms in contemporary philosophical discussion, either *formal* or *material*" (*ibid*., p. 331).[194] In the picture that Sellars is providing, meaning is thus constituted by the role that a certain expression has in a network of formal and material moves. In this sense, the expression:

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[193] I say "main roles" because nowhere Sellars says that the list is exhaustive.

[194] "This distinction is that which appears at the level of logical criticism as that between arguments and primitive sentences whose validity does not depend on the particular predicates they contain (thus, perhaps, 'This is red, therefore it is not non-red' and 'All men are men') on the one hand, and arguments and primitive sentences the validity of which does so depend (thus, perhaps, 'Here is smoke, therefore here is fire' and 'All colours are extended') on the other" (*ibid*.). I have said enough about this distinction in the previous section.

"…" means –

does not describe a relation and, more precisely, it does not describe at all. The example provided by Sellars is:

1. "Rot" in German means *red*.[195]

Instead of accounting for semantical statements as describing relations between linguistic and extra-linguistic objects, Sellars analyzes (1) as a statement expressing the identity between functional roles – specifically, between the functional role of the expression at the left-hand side of the sentence, and the functional role of the expression at the right-hand side. Meaning statements are metalinguistic, functional classifications of given linguistic items according to the role they play: in this case, the German word "*rot*" is identified with the role played by the word "*red*" in English.

As early as year 1950, Sellars had started to elaborate the technical apparatus of stars and dots (QSMP, ILE) that he will use for his semantical analyses. In the essay "The Identity of Linguistic Expressions and the Paradox of Analysis" (ILE, 1950), Sellars introduced the definition of "linguistic role" to better specify the type-token distinction. Given that token-words are, definitionally, non-repeatable occurrences of a certain word, in what sense can it be said that two token-words belong to the same token-class? That is, how can two token-words be, in the common sense of the phrase, *the same word*? To answer this question, Sellars says that:

> [e]ven though there is often either either a very abstract qualitative resemblance between the written and spoken versions of the "same" word, or a conventional correlation between the elementary shapes and sounds of the written and spoken languages, neither of these similarities is essential to a shape and a sound being called "the same word". *Over and above these modes of resemblance there is the similarity of the roles played in the linguistic economy by the visual token-class and the auditory token-class for the "same" word. In short, that which is common to a word as written and the same word as spoken is a linguistic role, a role which can be performed by the members of more than one token-class.*
> (ILE, p. 25 – italics mine)

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[195] Here on page 145.

What is, precisely, a linguistic role? To explain it, Sellars introduces his famous chess analogy, which occurs in both ILE (p. 27) and SRLG (pp. 342ff). The sense according to which Sellars speaks of linguistic roles (or "functions", cf. QSMP) is the same sense in which "any object could be a knight provided that it could assume relations having a certain logically characterizable structure with other objects" (ILE, p. 27). Playing a linguistic role, thus, is just being governed by rules: "[j]ust as chessmen are roles specified by rules, so the words of a language are roles specified by rules" (*ibid.*).

To distinguish two different macro meta-roles – that is, the occurrence of a word as *token* or *type*, Sellars replaces the standard quotation marks with stars and dots. Sentence (1) is thus transformed into:

2. *Rot* in German are •red•s.

While stars classify tokens in virtue of their mere shapes and/or sounds, or, as Sellars says, "design features" (such that "𝔯𝔬𝔱", "ROT", and "*rot*" are all token-variants of the same token-class referred to as *rot*), dots are used to signal that the extension of the dotted expression includes every item that is functionally equivalent to it (such that tokens of the German word *rot* all fall in the extension of •red•).

At last, we are left with a puzzle. On the one hand, as early as pure pragmatics, Sellars puts an incredible amount of effort to show that meaning is not a relation. And above we saw indeed that the meaning of •red• does not stem from a relation of designation with either abstract entities (such as redness), or concrete red objects. This is precisely what the notion of *type* allows us to see: meanings are properly functions, and "to mean" implies indeed to functionally classify types with respect to their role. On the other hand, however, Sellars never denies that meaning bears on how language relates to the world. In this sense, *tokens* allow us to reflect on language by considering it as an ordinary, natural phenomenon – for instance, as a product of evolution, or as a recurring uniformity in behavior. How does Sellars reconcile the two dimensions?

To the answer to this question is devoted the next and final section of this work.

3.2.2 Naturalizing Meaning

In "Some Reflections on Language Games", Sellars gives a definitive shape to the semantical holism that he was pursuing as early as pure pragmatics. The "pure pragmatic account of verification" that he laid down in ENWW and RNWW has shown indeed that Jones' world-story is verifiable only in holistic fashion (section 1.2.1 of this work). The logical empiricist's presupposition about the possibility to directly confront atomic sentences with experience is revealed to be a myth: it is only a *whole pack* of atomic sentences that can be confronted with another such pack. Such an account is in tune with the importance later accorded to the concept of a *family* of possible worlds (CIL *passim*, P *passim*) in terms of possible worlds semantics. Through this notion, Sellars showed that the fundamental unit of modal discourse is not constituted by single universals in isolation: rather, it consists of a whole body of interrelated universals, which makes up a system of real connections and compossibilities.

By pouring the insights above into his inferentialism, Sellars provides the definitive translation of the rationalist intuition about semantical holism – the old "fire burning under the smoke" (LRB 39) – in empirically acceptable terms. By distinguishing formal and material rules of inference, not only he translates the ontologically problematic lexicon of real connections and possible worlds into linguistic structures, but he also makes room for revisability in light of scientific advancements.

Language is considered by Sellars holistically, as a system of relations and connections that is *applied* to experience (see pure pragmatics), so to say, *as a whole*. According to this view, concepts are interrelated and interdependent. As he puts it in SRLG, rather than learning meanings in isolation, we learn to play *language games*.

Observational knowledge is also accountable as a language game:

> To learn the use of observation predicates, we must not only be put by our teachers in standard conditions and conditioned to respond – e.g., to red objects with "red" – but we must learn to recognize that the circumstances are standard. In other words, the language of observation is learned as a whole; we do not have any of it until […] we have it all. […] The use of observation predicates, when they have achieved their status as such, and are no longer mere isolated and conditioned responses, involves the ability to draw inferences […]. I am able to "see at a glance" that something is red only because I have a conceptual picture of myself as being in a situation consisting of such and such objects thusly located in Space and Time, a picture which I am constantly checking and revising, a picture any part of which, and any principle of which, can be put in jeopardy – but which cannot be put in jeopardy all at once.

As he explained in IM, no language has "hallmark of royalty" (IM 48) with respect to any other. The number of languages and, thus, of conceptual frameworks, is indefinite.

The conceptual framework in which we live in cannot be put into jeopardy all at once, but each part of it is inherently revisable. Of course, depending on which position they occupy in the framework, some pieces will be more prone to be revised than others. Some of them – such as the one that allows the move from "x is red" to "x is colored" – will be especially hard to revise: these are the ones that Sellars calls synthetic *a priori* propositions.

Now, even though such an account has an advantage in making no ontological claims about anything other than the linguistic expressions it talks about, to account for traditional semantics terms in terms of metalinguistic expressions by which object-language expressions are classified with respect to their functional role could give the impression that Sellars is cutting language from the world altogether (DeVries 2005, p. 36). Is it?

To find an answer to this question, the first thing that shall not be forgotten is that, since the Introduction to this dissertation, I have highlighted how the portrait of Sellars as a radical conceptualist – a portrait popularized by left-wing Sellarsians, which favored Kantian themes over empiricist ones – shall be mitigated by keeping on mind his equally radical endorsement of scientific realism, which he inherited from his father. In what remains, I will show how the impression of linguistic idealism that seems to plague Sellars' holistic account is balanced precisely through his non-reductive naturalism.

A first road towards the reconciliation of the two poles was already carved by Sellars through the sophisticated account of pattern governed behavior given in SLRG. There, Sellars delineates a conception of behavior as a mediating concept between the space of norms and the space of causes. The key to the notion of pattern governed behavior as mediating the gap between the mere *conformity* and the explicit *obedience* to rules was inspired by the example of the bee. The behavior followed by the bee in its dancing and wiggling is, indeed, not formulated with an explicit intention in view: rather, it embodies a sort of practical regularity which is inherited from generation to generation for reasons of evolutionary fitness and success. Through the notion of pattern governed behavior, Sellars is able to account for the fact that perceptual knowledge includes direct, non-inferential reliable responses even *within* the boundaries of an inferentially and holistically structured conceptual framework. Thanks to the training phase, rules become indeed gradually "ingrained" in our behavior until they become "second nature"

to us: "Through training and education, concepts trickle down to the very deliverances of perception, becoming part of our conditioned responses to the environment – norms written in flesh and blood" (Rey 2020, p. 499).[196] In this sense, concepts are both causally responsive *and* expression of the normativity that pervades the conceptual framework of which they are part. But how shall this dichotomy be conceived, ultimately? Key to the resolution of this tension is the so-called reducibility-*cum*-irreducibility principle. This principle, which lies at the core of Sellars' refined version of naturalism, is first presented in "A Semantical Solution of the Mind-Body Problem" (SSMB, 1953).[197]

The mind-body problem, "notoriously a tangle in which all the major puzzles of philosophy can be found" (SSMB 1), is tackled by Sellars from the point of view of one of the more popular versions of the "naturalistic fallacy": the reducibility of the *Ought* to the *Is*. It is by discussing this topic that he introduces two different senses of reducibility: logical reducibility, and causal reducibility (*ibid.*, 6.). In general terms, logical reducibility requires for a (normative) concept to be accounted for as descriptive – that is, without recurring to normative terminology. Causal reducibility, on the other hand, requires for (normative) phenomena to be completely accounted *via* causal explanation.[198] Inflating some later terminology in the picture, this distinction is used by Sellars to help us understanding "the relationship between the intensional conceptual framework pertaining to mind, meaning, morals, and the modalities on the one hand, and the extensional ontology of an ideal scientific account of human-being-in-the-world on the other" (O'Shea 2009, p. 195).

As it concerns the problem to which the essay is addressed – the Ought/Is reducibility, and the mind-body problem – Sellars' via media between intuitionist (here standing for ethical non-naturalists) and ethical naturalists carves a middle way proposing logical irreducibility *cum* causal reducibility – which, as we know, will remain among the central tenets of Sellars' entire

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[196] "Sellars, for all his Kantian inclinations and commitments, was not insensitive to the bodily and practical dimension of our relationship with language […]. His subtle and complicated understanding of concepts in terms of rule-following is testimony to his effort to offset the formalism of analytic philosophy in the direction of a pragmatist-inspired conception of meaning. […] [I]ndeed for him, 'the mode of existence of a rule is a generalization *written in flesh and blood*, or nerve and sinew, rather than in pen and ink'. And although to some ears this might sound a little metaphoric and perhaps even elusive, the truth is that what he is saying is something that every reader of Wittgenstein or the classical American pragmatists would immediately recognize, namely, the way in which basic intentionality is a type of involved *know-how* that serves as the backdrop for the explicit manipulation of concepts through judgments and propositions" (Rey 2020, pp. 489-90).

[197] A similar argument is also to the found in the slightly previous "Mind, Meaning and Behavior" (MMB, 1952).

[198] "A concept will be said to be causally reducible to descriptive concepts if (roughly) it is either definable in descriptive terms (the trivial case), or occurs in the antecedent of a properly constructed causal explanation only as a subordinate element in a descriptive mentalistic contexts (e.g. as 'entails' occurs in 'Jones believes that responsibility entails indeterminism')" (SSMB 6).

philosophy up until the latest writings, not only with regards of the topics mentioned above, but in regard of the very distinction between manifest and scientific image (O'Shea 2009). According to this view, the Ought cannot be reducible to the Is in the sense that it cannot be analyzed through concepts lacking its normative force, unless one is willing to sacrifice the normative force that is precisely what provides the Ought with its peculiar meaning. This holds for the whole family of normative terms, including the ones encountered in pure pragmatics.

However, the *logical irreducibility* of normative terms does not imply that to normative terms cannot be given an explanation that renounce to their use. In fact, Sellars' robust scientific realism implies that to each phenomenon can be given a *causal explanation* referring solely to the relationship between the subject and its (causal) relationship with the environment. As he claims in the previous "Mind, Meaning and Behavior" (MMB), "although the normative is not logically reducible to the descriptive, one can nevertheless explain the history of moral agents without making ethical assertions" (MMB, p. 85).[199]

Solving the so-called mind-body problem (whose "semantical" solution is referred to, once again, "a normatively characterized functional role semantics that is supposed to apply both across natural languages and by analogy to a theoretically posited Mentalese", O'Shea 2009) through the formulation of the reducibility-*cum*-irreducibility principle allows us to clarify Sellars's stance towards mental acts in general. His overarching strategy consists in acknowledging the "double life" of linguistic activity, in the sense that while the behavioral uniformities generated by normative principles can be described in naturalistic terms and *are*, indeed, causally reducible, the normative principles themselves are not.

The "causal reducibility" and "logical irreducibility" of the normative discourse is motivated by the fact that:

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[199] Even though formulated four years later, this view was envisaged already in LRB, where Sellars once again pays his debt to Kant "The historically minded reader will observe that the concept of rule-regulated behavior developed in this paper is, in a certain sense, the translation into behavioristic terms of the Kantian concept of Practical Reason. Kant's contention that the pure consciousness of moral law can be a factor in bringing about conduct in conformity with law, becomes the above conception of rule-regulated behavior. However, for Kant's conception of Practical Reason as, so to speak, an intruder in the natural order, we substitute the view that the causal efficacy of the embodied core-generalizations of rules is ultimately grounded on the Law of Effect, that is to say, the role of rewards and punishments in shaping behavior. The most serious barrier to an appreciation of Kant's insights in this matter lies in the fact that most discussions in philosophical circles of the motivation of behavior stand to the scientific account […] as the teleological conception of the adjustments of organisms to their environment stands to the evolutionary account" (LRB 18 fn3).

> Whatever users of normative discourse may be *conveying* about themselves and their community when they use normative discourse, what they are *saying* cannot be said without using normative discourse. The task of the philosopher cannot be to show how, in principle, what is said by normative discourse cannot be said without normative discourse, for the simple reason that this cannot be done.
>
> (SSMB 66)

If we look back to rules with this in mind, we see how the distinction between the logical irreducibility and the causal reducibility of the normative allows Sellars to avoid any naturalistic fallacy when he speaks of rules as *embodied* in behavior. Thus, this principle allows Sellars to explain the co-existence of the normative and the natural without his view resulting in contradiction.

CONCLUSION

In my original intentions, the analysis of the early writings of Wilfrid Sellars was supposed to form only the first chapter of what I envisioned to be a more comprehensive work on his philosophy. Once I started to dig in, however, I was startled by the lack of studies in literature. This lack slowed down my work considerably, but it also prompted me to pay special attention to those writings. I thus realized that all the problems characterizing the "famous" Sellars were already present from the start.

Although they are carried out through a privileged focus on language and linguistic phenomena, the early writings touch on much broader themes such as intentionality, the causal modalities, normativity, and realism, not to mention Sellars' relationship to Kant, Carnap, and C.I. Lewis. At this stage also emerged the reflections on the relationship between norms and nature that would form the heart of his entire philosophical enterprise. I thus began to read these essays in depth, and I slowly became convinced that an analysis of them would be valuable in its own right, both in relation to the little attention that has been paid to them so far, and as an exploration of the origins of Sellars' later better-known topics.

In the introduction to this work, I pointed out how Sellars' most famous students split into two opposing schools – so-called right- and left-wing Sellarsians – at the master's death. It is hard to find another contemporary philosopher who left behind such an internally divided legacy. In my opinion, such a split signals the most vulnerable point in his entire philosophical project, with which I have closed this work: the relationship between norms and nature. Even though its elucidation through the theory of *picturing* will be given only in much later essays, Sellars' exploitation of concepts from evolutionary theory, especially in "Language, Rules and Behavior" and "Some Reflections on Language Games", provides him with the raw material for the later formulation of the isomorphism between states of affairs in the world and internal states of the organism.

From this point of view, Sellars' enterprise entails the attempt to "correctly locating the conceptual order in the causal order" (AR, p. 283) from the very start. In the path that I have traced, I have shown how Sellars accomplishes this task not with respect to the manifest and scientific images of man in the world, but with respect to his early attempt to collocate the "perennial", rationalist philosophy's setup within a naturalistic, acceptable to empiricists frame.

The work done makes no claim to completeness, but if anything, it opens to further research. One of the most interesting points, that surely requires further exploration, concerns Sellars' relationship with logical empiricism, which has been the background of the analysis of the early essays (especially those on pure pragmatics). Although the mainstream view sees Sellars' relationship to empiricism essentially in terms of a rejection and subsequent overcoming, I showed how the origins of his philosophical work are to be conceived as an *internal* reworking *within* the horizon of empiricism.

This story can also be seen from the opposite side. When it comes to Sellars' overcoming of relational theories of meaning, Carnap is often mentioned in over-simplified versions (especially by left-wing Sellarsians) as the target of Sellars' attack. However, as I could only hint, Carnap by no means espouses a straightforward truth-conditional semantics. Sellars and Carnap's views on meaning seem indeed to be much closer than they are usually portrayed: for instance, from the point of view that Carnap himself also conceives meaning as determined by metalinguistic *rules*, or from the point of view of his reflections on linguistic frameworks specifying the laws, kinds and categories we use, precisely as Sellars' conceptual frameworks do. All this calls for an exploration of the relationship between Sellars and Carnap that, on the face of the obvious discrepancies, would consider also the profound similarities.

Of course, the fact that Sellars came to be known as one of the empiricism's annihilators has a reason. Delving into Sellars' relationship with empiricism, I was able to appreciate a completely different conception of the underlying philosophical enterprise. While according to Carnap the logical syntax is *analytic* and *a priori*, Sellars conceives philosophy as a *synthetic* pursue. While Carnap aimed at getting rid of metaphysics, Sellars did not. The metaphilosophy construed by Sellars as early as pure pragmatics ascribe to philosophical propositions a special *status*. While philosophy does not have a specific subject-matter, it has a very specific take: it acknowledges the normative dimension behind many statements that special sciences mistake as descriptive. In this sense, it interrogates and brings to the surface the categories constituting the deep structure of the conceptual framework in which we are immersed.

As I have only mentioned, Sellars' idea of what a philosophical enterprise should consists of comes from his father. One "promissory note" that I did not dwell on, but which I hope could be taken up in further works, concerns precisely Sellars' relationship to his father and in general to the so-called "pre-analytic" era of American naturalism (thus including the figure of Marvin Farber, under the supervision of whom Sellars have worked starting form 1933). In this regard,

I showed how Sellars' naturalism is entirely unique. Its originality lies in its attempt to reconcile a physicalist ontology with a non-reductivist image of the normative space, which I have discussed predominantly in relation to his conception of psychologism. On this ridge plays out the legacy of his father and the influence of Farber. Indeed, they embrace a distinctive version of naturalism which Sellars both appropriates and criticizes.

Especially with regard to his father, Sellars' versatility with the tools of the new analytic philosophy, coupled with a systematic conception of philosophy such as the one he inherited from him, enables the son to develop a particularly sophisticated naturalism. This versatility is what, at the end of the day, allows him to retain a transcendental dimension in his reasoning, and thus not fall into his father's naiveté. One example in this regard is Roy Wood Sellars' attempt to "correct" Kantian categories through phylogenetic inquiry. According to Roy Wood, Kant's philosophy was in open contradiction to naturalism, which made Kant's whole enterprise useless to his perspective. He was indeed convinced that the normative structures underlying language shall be investigated through evolutionary theory and psychology (surely not from transcendental philosophy). In this respect, the son accomplishes quite a point. Wilfrid shares with his father the conviction that to thought and intentionality shall be given a causal account, but he was also well aware that to solve the problem of the *quaestio facti* about the origin of the categories was quite another story than accounting for the authentically philosophical *quaestio iuris* (Gironi 2017). By separating the questions about causal explanation and normative justification, Wilfrid proved to be less naïve and more sophisticated than his father. On how much all this is indebted to a Kantian influence that extends throughout the whole of Sellars' philosophical development, thus from the very earliest writings, I have said enough.

I have concluded by listing only a few examples of the many themes that could be explored further regarding Sellars' early writings. Hopefully, these and many others will be the focus of further future studies.

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