

## From German Idealism to American Pragmatism—and Back

Bob Brandom

Kant's most basic idea, the axis around which all his thought turns, is that what distinguishes exercises of judgment and intentional agency from the performances of merely natural creatures is that judgments and actions are subject to distinctive kinds of *normative* assessment. Judgments and actions are things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for.

The classical pragmatist versions of naturalism and empiricism fit together much better than the traditional and logical empiricist versions that preceded and succeeded them. Far from being in tension, they complement and mutually support one another. Both the world and our knowledge of it are construed on a single model: as mutable, contingent products of statistical selectional-adaptational processes that allow order to pop to the surface and float in a sea of random variability. Both nature and experience are to be understood in terms of the processes by which relatively stable constellations of habits arise and sustain themselves through their interactions with an environment that includes a population of competing habits.

*Fundamental pragmatism* is the more specific strategy by which the classical American pragmatists sought to naturalize the concept of *experience*—to demystify and domesticate it, to disentangle it from two centuries of Cartesian encumbrances. It is the idea that one should understand knowing *that* as a kind of knowing *how* (to put it in Rylean terms). That is, believing *that* things are thus-and-so is to be understood in terms of practical abilities to *do* something.

The fundamental pragmatist aspiration is to be able to exhibit *discursive* intentionality as a distinctive kind of *practical* intentionality.

If understanding in general is to be viewed as the faculty of rules, judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under a given rule (*casus datae legis*). General logic contains and can contain no rules for judgment...If it sought to give general instructions how we are to subsume under these rules, that is, to distinguish whether something does or does not come under them, that could only be by means of another rule. This in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment. And thus it appears that, though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practised only, and cannot be taught. [Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, A132/ B171]

What should it mean upon the instrumental theory to accept some view or idea as true upon social credit? Clearly that such an acceptance itself works.

[Dewey: "A Reply to Professor Royce's Critique of Instrumentalism" *Middle Works* Vol. 7, p. 75.]

What the experimentalist means is that the effective working of an idea and its truth are one and the same thing—this working being neither the cause nor the evidence of truth but its nature...

[Dewey: "The Intellectualist Criterion of Truth" *Middle Works* Vol. 4 p. 69.]

Naturally, the pragmatist claims his theory to be true in the pragmatic sense of truth: it works, it clears up difficulties, removes obscurities, puts individuals into more experimental, less dogmatic, and less arbitrarily sceptical relations to life; aligns philosophic with scientific method; does away with self-made problems of epistemology; clarifies and reorganizes logical theory, etc. He is quite content to have the truth of his theory consist in its working in these various ways, and to leave to the intellectualist the proud possession of a static, unanalyzable, unverifiable, unworking property.

[Dewey: "A Short Catechism Concerning Truth" *Middle Works* Vol 6 p. 10.]

We here assume Japan to exist without ever having been there, because it WORKS to do so, everything we know conspiring with the belief, and nothing interfering... [James: *Pragmatism* Lecture VI.]

On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true.

[James: *Pragmatism* Lecture VIII.]

*Instrumental pragmatism* about semantic norms is the claim that semantic norms are understood in instrumental terms, in terms of utility. Truth-evaluable states such as beliefs are thought of on the model of tools, which can be more or less apt or useful, in concert with others that are available in a concrete situation, relative to some desired end or purpose.

- Instrumental pragmatism is a theory of *meaning*, not a theory of *truth*.
- Instrumental pragmatism is a comprehensive holist functionalism about the content of states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions.

A new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. It must both lean on old truth and grasp new fact; and its success... in doing this, is a matter for the individual's appreciation. When old truth grows, then, by new truth's addition, it is for subjective reasons. We are in the process and obey the reasons. That new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying our double urgency. It makes itself true, gets itself classed as true, by the way it works; grafting itself then upon the ancient body of truth, which thus grows much as a tree grows by the activity of a new layer of cambium. [James: *Pragmatism* Lecture II.]

Schiller says the true is that which 'works.' Thereupon he is treated as one who limits verification to the lowest material utilities. Dewey says truth is what gives 'satisfaction.' He is treated as one who believes in calling everything true which, if it were true, would be pleasant. [James: *Pragmatism* Lecture II.]

Pupil: Objection Nine. Still the pragmatic criterion, being satisfactory working, is purely personal and subjective. Whatever works so as to please me is true. Either this is your result (in which case your reference to social relations only denotes at bottom a number of purely subjectivistic satisfactions) or else you unconsciously assume an intellectual department of our nature that has to be satisfied; and whose satisfaction is truth. Thereby you admit the intellectualistic criterion.

Teacher: Reply. We seem to have got back to our starting-point, the nature of satisfaction. The intellectualist seems to think that because the pragmatist insists upon the factor of human want, purpose, and realization in the making and testing of judgments, the impersonal factor is therefore denied. But what the pragmatist does is to insist that the human factor must work itself out in cooperation with the environmental factor, and that their coadaptation is both "correspondence" and "satisfaction." As long as the human factor is ignored and denied, or is regarded as merely psychological (whatever, once more, that means), this human factor will assert itself in irresponsible ways. So long as, particularly in philosophy, a flagrantly unchastened pragmatism reigns, we shall find, as at present, the most ambitious intellectualistic systems accepted simply because of the personal comfort they yield those who contrive and accept them. Once recognize the human factor, and pragmatism is at hand to insist that the believer must accept the full consequences of his beliefs, and that his beliefs must be tried out, through acting upon them, to discover what is their meaning or consequence.

[Dewey: "A Short Catechism Concerning Truth" *Middle Works* Vol. 6 p. 11.]

The possible misunderstanding is, I think, actual in the reference to "our needs" as a criterion of the correctness of truth of an idea or plan. According to the essays, it is the needs of a situation which are determinative. They evoke thought and the need of knowing, and it is only within the situation that the identification of the needs with a self occurs; and it is only by reflection upon the place of the agent in the encompassing situation that the nature of his needs can be determined. In fact, the actual occurrence of a disturbed, incomplete, and needy situation indicates that my present need is precisely to investigate, to explore, to hunt, to pull apart things now tied together, to project, to plan, to invent, and then to test the outcome by seeing how it works as a method of dealing with hard facts. One source of the demand, in short, for reference to experience as the encompassing universe of discourse is to keep us from taking such terms as "self," "my," "need," "satisfaction," etc., as terms whose meanings can be accepted and proved either by themselves or by even the most extensive dialectic reference to other terms.

[Dewey: Introduction to *Essays in Experimental Logic*, *Middle Works* Vol. 10, p. 364.]

By 'lingualism' (a term meant to belong in a family with 'rationalism') I mean commitment to understanding *conceptual* capacities (discursiveness in general) in terms of *linguistic* capacities. Dummett epitomizes a strong version of this order of explanation:

We have opposed throughout the view of assertion as the expression of an interior act of judgment; judgment, rather, is the interiorization of the external act of assertion. [Dummett: *Frege's Philosophy of Language* p. 361.]

A weaker version of linguisticism claims only that language is a *necessary* condition of discursiveness, not that it is a sufficient condition that can at least in principle be made intelligible independently of talk about discursive commitments.

*Methodological pragmatism* is the principle that the *point* of associating meanings, extensions, contents, or other semantic interpretants with linguistic expressions is to codify (express explicitly) proprieties of *use*.

*Semantic pragmatism* is the principle that in a natural language, all there is to effect the association of meanings, contents, extensions, rules, or other semantic interpretants with linguistic expressions is the way those expressions are *used* by the linguistic practitioners themselves. Semantic pragmatism is a kind of use-functionalism about meaning.

*Formal semantics* for *artificial* languages can content itself with the explicit stipulation of such rules or associations of meanings, by the semantic theorist working in a semantic metalanguage. *Philosophical semantics* for *natural* languages is obliged to say what it is about the practices the users of those expressions engage in or the abilities they exercise, in virtue of which they should be understood as *governed* by those rules, or as *conferring* those meanings.

The lore of our fathers is a fabric of sentences...It is a pale grey lore, black with fact and white with convention. But I have found no substantial reasons for concluding that there are any quite black threads in it, or any white ones.  
[Quine: "Carnap on Logical Truth", p. 406]

Language is the existence [Dasein] of Geist. [Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit* [652], [666]]  
(By 'Geist' he means the whole normatively articulated discursive realm.)

Language in its widest sense—that is, including all means of communication such as, for example, monuments, rituals, and formalized arts—is the medium in which culture exists and through which it is transmitted.  
[Dewey: *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry, Later Works* Vol. 12, p. 28]

Pragmatists who have made the linguistic turn take it that the most important feature of the natural history of creatures like us is that we have *come into language*: come to engage in distinctively linguistic practices and to exercise distinctively linguistic abilities. This is both an ontogenetic and a phylogenetic achievement. Understanding it requires, at a minimum, addressing three large, interconnected kinds of question. These concern the issues of *demarcation*, *emergence*, and *leverage*.

- The *demarcation* question is definitional. How are *linguistic* practices and abilities (and hence, the linguist about discursivity claims, *discursive* ones) to be distinguished from nonlinguistic ones?
- The *emergence* question concerns the requirement that any account of language that aspires to being naturalistic in even a very broad sense must explain the possibility of the transition from nonlinguistic to linguistic practices and abilities. How are the abilities we can see in non- or prelinguistic creatures recruited, deployed, and transformed so as to amount to linguistic ones?
- The *leverage* question is how to characterize and explain the massive qualitative difference in capacity between linguistic and nonlinguistic creatures: the bonanza of new abilities and possibilities that language opens up for those that do make the transition.

Upon the whole, professed transcendentalists have been more aware than have professed empiricists of the fact that language makes the difference between brute and man. The trouble is that they have lacked naturalistic conception of its origin and status. [Dewey: *Experience and Nature, Later Works* Vol. 1, p. 134.]

Any theory that rests upon a naturalistic postulate must face the problem of the extraordinary differences that mark off the activities and achievements of human beings from those of other biological forms. It is these differences that have led to the idea that man is completely separated from other animals by properties that come from a non-natural source....The development of language (in its widest sense) out of prior biological activities is, in its connection with wider cultural forces, the key to this transformation. The problem, so viewed, is not the problem of the transition of organic behavior into

something wholly discontinuous with it—as is the case when, for example, Reason, Intuition and the A priori are appealed to for explanation of the difference. It is a special form of the general problem of continuity of change and the emergence of new modes of activity—the problem of development at any level.

[Dewey: *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry*, *Later Works* Vol. 12, p. 50.]

The evidence usually adduced in support of the proposition that lower animals, animals without language, think, turns out, when examined, to be evidence that when men, organisms with power of social discourse, think, they do so with the organs of adaptation used by lower animals, and thus largely repeat in imagination schemes of overt animal action. But to argue from this fact to the conclusion that animals think is like concluding that because every tool, say a plow, originated from some pre-existing natural production, say a crooked root or forked branch, the latter was inherently and antecedently engaged in plowing. The connection is there, but it is the other way around.

[Dewey: *Experience and Nature*, *Later Works* Vol. 1, p. 215.]

The demarcation question is prior. If one is going to say how Geist precipitates out of nature, and how it transforms sentient organisms into sapient ones, one should try to say what it is. The challenge is to offer satisfactory responses to *both* the emergence question *and* the leverage question. Focusing on just one of them makes it too easy. In the passage above, Dewey says in effect that the neo-cartesian intellectualists make the leverage question too easy to respond to, by ignoring (or making it impossible to address) the question of emergence. I have just accused him of making the complementary mistake. In any case, it is clear that the hinge that connects the issues of emergence and leverage is the question of demarcation. For the challenge is to show that the *same* phenomenon that one has accounted for the emergence of can leverage sentience into sapience. So demarcating the realm of linguistic or discursive practices and abilities is an absolutely essential element of the philosophical project I have been describing: the development of pragmatism after the linguistic turn, a lingualist fundamental pragmatism.

My idea is that pragmatism can usefully be combined with a *rationalist* criterion of demarcation of the linguistic—and hence of discursiveness in general. What distinguishes the linguistic practice in virtue of which we are sapient and not merely sentient beings is its core practices of giving and asking for *reasons*. A necessary and sufficient condition of being a discursive practice is that some performances are accorded by it the pragmatic significance of *claimings* or assertings. Semantically, claimable or assertible contents are *propositional* contents. Syntactically, what expresses those contents is declarative sentences. This combination of pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic features is the iron triangle of discursiveness. The pragmatist order of explanation of course starts with the pragmatics. The thought is that to have the *pragmatic* significance of an assertion is to be able both to serve as a reason, and potentially to stand in need of reasons. So, *semantically*, propositional contents are those that can play the role both of premise and of conclusion in *inferences*. Discursive practice is accordingly understood as essentially inferentially articulated.

Rationalism as I have described it is not a form of the intellectualism that stands opposed to fundamental pragmatism. It is wholly compatible with understanding discursive intentionality as a kind of practical intentionality: specifically, as the kind that includes practices of making claims and giving and asking for reasons. It aims to say what structure a norm-instituting social practice must have in order properly to be understood as such a practice: a *discursive* practice. It offers a specific proposal for how to understand the kind of practical knowing *how* that adds up to cognitive claiming *that*: it is practical mastery of broadly inferential relations and transitions. And answering the demarcation question about discursive practice in a rationalist manner neither makes it impossible in principle to answer the emergence question nor obliges one to give a cartesian answer to it.

The move beyond Dewey and Wittgenstein to a rationalist, more specifically inferentialist pragmatism that I am recommending is accordingly also a return to pragmatism's roots in German idealism. As Kant synthesized empiricism and rationalism, and the pragmatists synthesized naturalism and empiricism, I'm suggesting that a way forward is to synthesize pragmatism and rationalism—in the form of the rationalist response to the demarcation question.

## On the Way to a Pragmatist Theory of the Categories

In the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not" (*EPM* §41).

[In] characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (*EPM* §36).

Besides concepts whose characteristic expressive job it is to describe and explain empirical goings-on, there are concepts whose characteristic expressive job it is to make explicit necessary structural features of the discursive framework within which alone description and explanation are possible.

[O]nce the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*. [CDCM §79.]

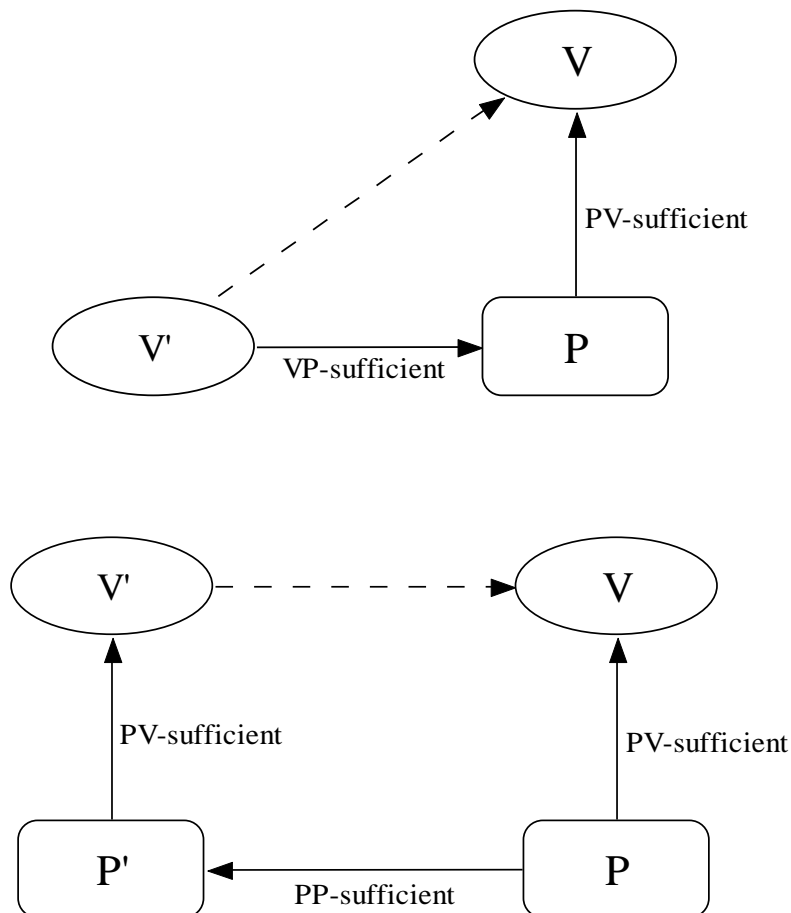
Although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*. It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects, even such basic expressions as words for perceptible characteristics of molar objects, locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label. The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand. [CDCM §108]

...we have been led to distinguish the following six conceptions of the status of material rules of inference:

- (1) Material rules are as essential to meaning (and hence to language and thought) as formal rules, contributing to 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.
- (3) Same as (2) save that the acknowledgment of material rules of inference is held to be a dispensable feature of thought, at best a matter of convenience.
- (4) Material rules of inference have a purely derivative authority, though they are genuinely rules of inference.

- (5) The sentences which raise these puzzles about material rules of inference are merely abridged formulations of logically valid inferences. (Clearly the distinction between an inference and the formulation of an inference would have to be explored).
- (6) Trains of thought which are said to be governed by "material rules of inference" are actually not inferences at all, but rather activated associations which mimic inference, concealing their intellectual nudity with stolen "therefores". [IM p. 7]

...it is the first (or "rationalistic") alternative to which we are committed. According to it, material transformation rules determine the descriptive meaning of the expressions of a language within the framework provided by its logical transformation rules... In traditional language, the "content" of concepts as well as their logical "form" is determined by the rules of the Understanding. [IM]



# Towards an Analytic Pragmatism: Meaning-Use Analysis

Bob Brandom

## Outline:

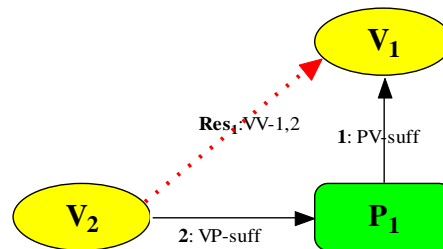
1. The classical project of philosophical analysis
2. The pragmatist challenge
3. Extending the project of analysis: pragmatically mediated semantic relations
4. Automata: syntactic PV-sufficiency and VP-sufficiency
5. The Chomsky hierarchy: a syntactic example of pragmatic expressive bootstrapping
6. Semantic examples of pragmatic expressive bootstrapping and further basic and resultant meaning-use relations

Analytic philosophy seeks to use *logical* vocabulary to make sense of the meanings expressed in some *target* vocabulary in terms of the meanings expressed in a *base* vocabulary.

Some candidates for the key kind of semantic relation between vocabularies include: analysis, definition, paraphrase, translation, entailment, reduction of different sorts, truth-making, supervenience.

Two core programs of analytic philosophy are empiricism and naturalism.

Meaning-Use Diagram #1:  
Pragmatic  
Metavocabulary



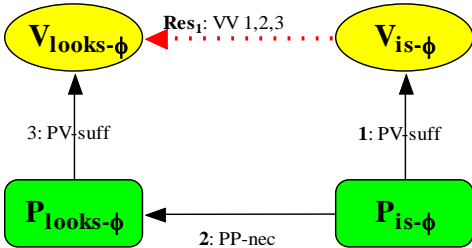
The conventions of this diagram are:

- Vocabularies are shown as ovals, practices-or-abilities as (rounded) rectangles.
- Basic meaning-use relations are indicated by solid arrows, numbered and labeled as to kind of relation.
- Resultant meaning-use relations are indicated by dotted arrows, numbered, and labeled as to kind and the basic MURs from which they result.

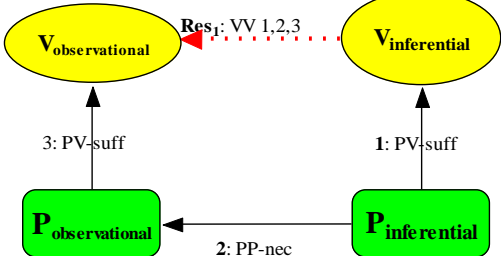
The idea is that a resultant MUR is the relation that obtains when all of the basic MURs listed on its label obtain.

**My basic suggestion for extending the classical project of *analysis* so as to incorporate as essential positive elements the insights that animate the *pragmatist* critique of that project is that alongside these classical semantic relations between vocabularies we consider *pragmatically mediated* ones, of which the relation of being a pragmatic metavocabulary is a paradigm.**

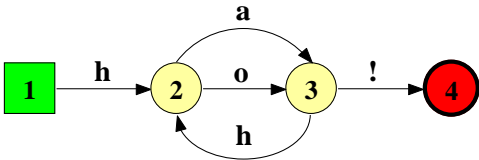
Meaning-Use Diagram #2:  
Pragmatically Mediated  
Semantic Presupposition



Meaning-Use Diagram #3:  
Pragmatically Mediated  
Semantic Presupposition



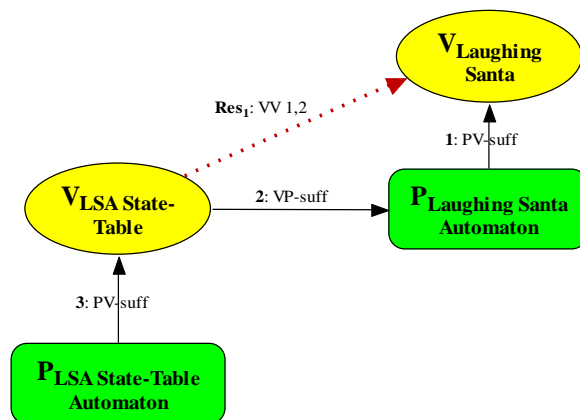
The Laughing Santa  
Automaton



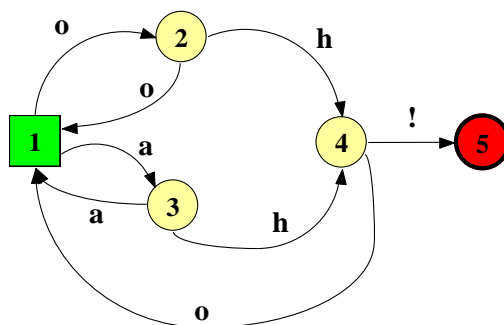
	State 1	State 2	State 3
a	Halt	3	Halt
h	2	Halt	2
o	Halt	3	Halt
!	Halt	Halt	4

aHalt3Halh2Halt2oHalt3Halt!HaltHalt4.

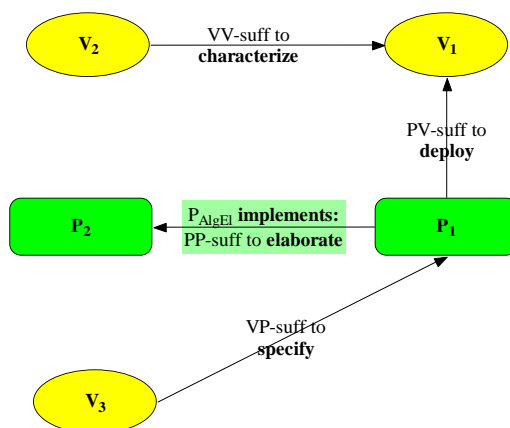
**Meaning-Use Diagram #6:  
Specifying the Automaton  
that Deploys the Laughing  
Santa Vocabulary**



**The "I'll Have What She's  
Having" Automaton**



## MUA Terminology



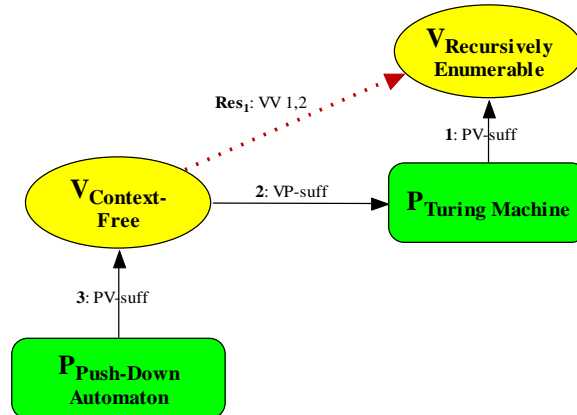
The Chomsky Hierarchy

<u>Vocabulary</u>	<u>Grammar</u>	<u>Automaton</u>
Regular	$A \rightarrow aB$ $A \rightarrow a$	Finite State Automaton
Context-Free	$A \rightarrow \langle \text{anything} \rangle$	Push-Down Automaton
Context-Sensitive	$c_1 A c_2 \rightarrow c_1 \langle \text{anything} \rangle c_2$	Linear Bounded Automaton
Recursively Enumerable	No Restrictions on Rules	Turing Machine (= 2 Stack PDA)

The surprising fact is that **the abilities codified in Turing Machines—the abilities to recognize and produce recursively enumerable vocabularies—can quite generally be specified in *context-free* vocabularies.**

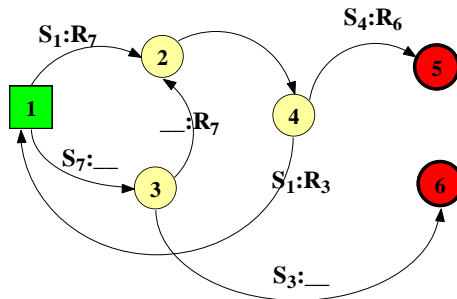
Meaning-Use Diagram #7:

Syntactic Pragmatic  
Expressive Bootstrapping



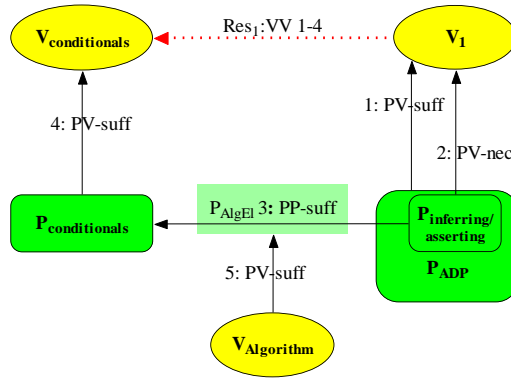
- If, at time  $t$  and place  $\langle x, y, z \rangle$ , speaker  $s$  wants to assert that some property  $P$  holds of  $\langle x, y, z, t, s \rangle$ , it is correct to say “ $P$  holds of *me here and now*.”

A Finite-State  
Transducing  
Automaton

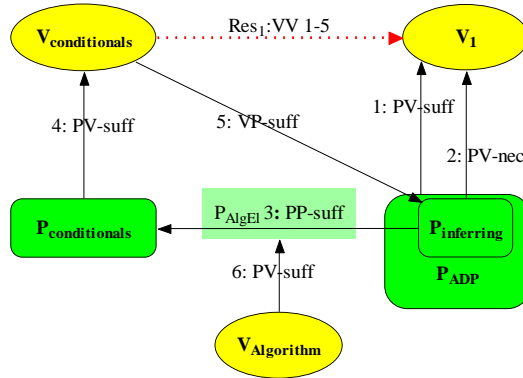


- Assert the conditional ‘*if p then q*’ if one endorses the inference from *p* to *q*;
- Endorse the inference from *p* to *q* if one asserts the conditional ‘*if p then q*’.

### Elaborating Conditionals



### Elaborated-Explicating (LX) Conditionals



## Pragmatism, Inferentialism, and Modality in Sellars's Arguments against Empiricism

Bob Brandom

Three master ideas shape Sellars's critique of empiricism:

- A key criterion of adequacy with respect to which its semantics will be found wanting concerns its treatment of *modal* concepts.
- The remedy for this inadequacy lies in an alternative broadly functional approach to the semantics of these concepts that focuses on their *inferential roles*.
- Consider *semantic* relations among the meanings expressed by different sort of vocabulary that result from *pragmatic* dependencies relating the practices one must engage in or the abilities one must exercise in order to count as using those bits of vocabulary to express those meanings.

Sellars: ...what was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than supposed origin in experience, their primary feature. [*Action, Knowledge, and Reality*, H. N. Castaneda (ed.) p 285.]

At the center of Sellars's critique of empiricism in EPM is an argument against the weakest, least committive, observational, version of empiricism. That argument depends on both his inferential-functionalist semantics and on his pragmatism. Its fundamental strategy is to show that the proposed empiricist base vocabulary is not *pragmatically* autonomous (and hence not semantically autonomous). Observational vocabulary is not a vocabulary one could use though one used no other. Non-inferential reports of the results of observation do not form an autonomous stratum of language. In particular, when we look at what one must *do* to count as making a non-inferential report, we see that that is not a practice one could engage in except in the context of *inferential* practices of using those observations as *premises* from which to draw inferential *conclusions*, as *reasons* for making judgments and undertaking commitments that are *not* themselves observations.

### Argument 1:

1. The basic idea of a phenomenalist-empiricist semantic analysis of ordinary objective vocabulary is that the expressive work done by talk of mind-independent objects and their properties and relations can be done by talk of *patterns* in, *regularities* of, or *generalizations* concerning sense experiences characterized in a phenomenalist vocabulary.
2. An account of objective reality in terms of the *powers* of circumstances to *produce*, or my *dispositions* to *have*, sensations, experiences, beings-appeared-to and so on essentially involves *modal* concepts. The patterns, regularities, or generalizations in subjective appearances that are supposed to constitute objective realities are modally robust, counterfactual-supporting patterns, regularities, or generalizations.
3. So essential features of the only remotely plausible *constructive* strategy of phenomenalist empiricism are simply incompatible with the most prominent *skeptical* consequences about modal concepts characteristically drawn both by traditional and twentieth-century logicist empiricism.

Argument 2:

The conditionals codifying the patterns, regularities, or generalizations concerning sense experience that correspond to judgments about how things objectively are must not only be subjunctive, counterfactually robust conditionals, but in order to have any hope of being materially adequate (getting the truth-conditions even approximately correct) their *antecedents* must themselves be expressed in *objective* vocabulary, *not* in *phenomenalist* vocabulary.

Sellars: To claim that the relationship between the framework of sense contents and that of physical objects can be construed on the [phenomenalist] model is to commit oneself to the idea that there are inductively confirmable generalizations about sense contents which are ‘in principle’ capable of being formulated without the use of the language of physical things....[T]his idea is a mistake. [Phenomenalism]

Sellars: [T]he very selection of the complex patterns of actual sense contents in our past experiences which are to serve as the antecedents of the generalizations in question presuppose our common sense knowledge of ourselves as perceivers, of the specific physical environment in which we do our perceiving and of the general principles which correlate the occurrence of sensations with bodily and environmental conditions. We select those patterns which go with our being in a certain perceptual relation to a particular object of a certain quality, where we know that being in this relation to an object of that quality normally eventuates in our having the sense content referred to in the consequent. [Phenomenalism]

Sellars: ...the logical dependence of the framework of private sense contents on the public, inter-subjective, logical space of persons and physical things.  
[Phenomenalism]

Sellars: [O]nce the tautology ‘The world is described by descriptive concepts’ is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*. [“Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and Causal Modalities” Section 79.]

Sellars: ...although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*. It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects, even such basic expressions as words for perceptible characteristics of molar objects, locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label. The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand.... [CDCM Section 108.]

Sellars: To make first hand use of these [modal] expressions is to be about the business of explaining a state of affairs, or justifying an assertion. [CDCM Section 80.]

Sellars: ...a sympathetic reconstruction of the controversy in the form of a debate between a Mr. C (for Constant Conjunction) and a Mr. E (for Entailment) who develop and qualify their views in such a way as to bring them to the growing edge of the problem. [CCDM Introduction.]

Sellars: It is now high time that I dropped the persona of Mr. E, and set about replying to the challenge with which Mr. C ended his first critique of the entailment theory. [CCDM Section 85.]

- Practical endorsement of the propriety of an inference from things being A to their being B;
- The explicit statement that one may infer the applicability of 'B' from the applicability of 'A';
- The statement that A physically entails B;
- The statement that As are necessarily Bs.

Sellars: Mr. E has a ready answer. ...it might...be called 'natural' or 'physical' entailment, for while any entailment is a logical relation, we can distinguish within the broad class of entailments between those which are, and those which are not, a function of the specific empirical contents between which they obtain. The latter are investigated by general or formal logic (and pure mathematics). Empirical science, on the other hand, to the extent that it is a search for *laws*, is the search for entailments of the former kind. (Putative) success in this search finds its expression in statements of the form 'It is (inductively) probable that A physically entails B.' [CCDM Section 56.]

Interpretive/expository suggestion: The view Sellars is expounding and defending can be put less paradoxically if we don't take a detour through entailment statements, but concern ourselves directly with the relation between the endorsement of patterns of inference and modal statements.

The underlying rationalist insight is a pragmatist-inferentialist one: what one is *doing* in making a modal claim is endorsing a pattern of inference. Modal vocabulary makes possible new kinds of *sayings* that have the *pragmatic effect* of endorsing inferences. To say that is not yet to say what they *say*, it is only to say what one is *doing by* saying them. But it does settle the *pragmatic significance* of such modal claims, in the sense of their appropriate circumstances and consequences of application.

The Kant-Sellars thesis about modality: Anyone who has the practical ability to deploy "purely descriptive" vocabulary already knows how to do everything he needs to know how to do to deploy modal vocabulary as well.

#### Argument:

1. The activity of describing is unintelligible except as part of a pragmatic package that includes also not just the making of inferences, but the making of *counterfactually robust* inferences: the sort of inferences involved in *explanation*, and licensed by explicitly *modal* statements of *laws*.

2. Grasp of a concept is mastery of the use of a word. And that use includes not only sorting inferences (however fallibly and incompletely) into materially good and materially bad ones, but also, among the ones one takes to be materially good, to distinguish (however fallibly and incompletely) between counterfactual circumstances under which they do, and counterfactual circumstances under which they do not, *remain* good. Part of taking an inference to be materially good is having a view about which possible additional collateral premises or auxiliary hypotheses would, and which would not, infirm it.

3. Explicitly modal “lawlike” statements are statements that one is committed or entitled to whenever one is committed or entitled to endorse such patterns of counterfactually robust inference, and commitment or entitlement to which in their turn commit or entitle one to the corresponding patterns of inference. Saying that about them settles what one needs to *do* to *use* such modal statements. It does *not* say how one is thereby *describing* the world as being when one does. It does not, in particular, *describe* a pattern of inference as good (though that saying does, in its own distinctive way, *express endorsement* of such a pattern). It does not do those things for the simple reason that the use of modal expressions is *not* in the first instance *descriptive*. It codifies explicitly, in the form of a statement, a feature of the use of descriptive expressions that is indissolubly bound up with, but not identical to, their descriptive use.

Articulating and justifying his version of the Kant-Sellars thesis about modality is Sellars’s constructive response to the empiricist tradition’s “nothing-but-ism” about modality.

My overall aim has been to place the arguments against empiricism presented in the first half of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” in the larger context opened up by laying them alongside the further battery of arguments Sellars aimed at the empiricist treatment of modality, completing what then becomes visible as a two-pronged attack on the principle contentions and projects of empiricism, only the opening salvos of which were fired in EPM.

And I have been concerned to show that the methodological strategies that guide all of these discussions are Sellars’s *pragmatist* insistence on looking at what one must be able to *do* in order to deploy empirical descriptive vocabulary, and his *rationalist* commitment to the necessary *inferential* articulation of the concepts expressed by the use of such vocabulary.

## Modal Expressivism and Modal Realism: Together Again

Bob Brandom

Kant saw that in addition to concepts whose principal use is to make it possible for us to describe how things are, there are concepts that make explicit features of the framework that makes such description possible. An important class of the framework-explicating concepts comprises alethic modal concepts, such as necessity and possibility.

1. "It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects... locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label." Wilfrid Sellars: "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and Causal Modalities" In *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume II: Concepts, Theories, and the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Herbert Feigl, Michael Scriven, and Grover Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p.225-308.] (hereafter CDCM), § 108.
2. It is an essential feature of the inferential relations in which, according to claim (1), descriptive concepts must stand that they can be appealed to in *explanations* and *justifications* of further descriptions.
3. "although describing and explaining...are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*... The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand...." CDCM § 108.
4. The expressive role distinctive of modal vocabulary is to make explicit these explanatory and justificatory relations.

The "Kant-Sellars thesis about modality": In knowing how to use ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do in order to be able (in principle) to use alethic modal vocabulary.

Sellars sees modal locutions as tools used in the enterprise of  
"...making explicit the rules we have adopted for thought and action...I shall be interpreting our judgments to the effect that A causally necessitates B as the expression of a rule governing our use of the terms 'A' and 'B'." ["Language, Rules, and Behavior" footnote 2 to p. 136/296 in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds*.]

To make first hand use of these [modal] expressions is to be about the business of explaining a state of affairs, or justifying an assertion. CDCM § 80.

...some kind of openness, variableness, or satisfiability characterizes all hypothetical statements alike, whether they are recognized "variable hypotheticals" like "For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a man,  $x$  is mortal" or are highly determinate hypotheticals like "If today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday.

Gilbert Ryle " 'If', 'So', and 'Because' ", pp. 302-318 in Black, Max (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis* [Prentice Hall, 1950], p. 311.

Shall we say that modal expressions are metalinguistic? Neither a simple 'yes' nor a simple 'no' will do. CDCM §82.

It is sometimes thought that modal statements do not describe states of affairs in the world, because they are *really* metalinguistic. This won't do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits. It is more plausible if it is meant that statements involving modal terms have the force of *prescriptive* statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language. Yet there is more than one way of to '*have the force of*' a statement, and failure to distinguish between them may snowball into a serious confusion as wider implications are drawn. CDCM §81.

By “modal realism” I mean the conjunction of the claims that:

MR1) Some modally qualified claims are *true*.

MR2) Those that are state *facts*.

MR3) Some of those facts are *objective*, in the sense that they are independent of the activities of concept-users: they would be facts even if there never were or never had been concept-users.

Many of the laws of nature (including all the Newtonian ones) exhibit a temporal symmetry: they hold indifferently at all times. So they are independent of the advent, at some particular time, of concept-users. And one of the mainstays of physics over the last century—substantially contributing to its distinctive conceptual shape—is the result of the Noether theorem that tells us (entails) that that this fundamental temporal symmetry is mathematically equivalent to the physical principle of conservation of energy. Denying MR3 is denying the temporal symmetry of laws of nature. And the theorem tells us that that means denying the conservation of energy.

Hegel’s view is that determinateness is a matter of standing in relations of material incompatibility (his “determinate negation”) and material consequence (his “mediation”) to other determinates. We might think of these as related by the principle that one property, say **metallic** is a consequence of another, **copper**, in case everything incompatible with being metallic (say, being a mammal) is incompatible with being copper. A property possession of which rules out possession of *no* other properties, and has as a consequence possession of no others, is in so far such *indeterminate*.

There is no further vocabulary to which ordinary empirical descriptive (OED) vocabulary stands in the same semantically explicative relation as alethic modal vocabulary stands to it.

The modal expressivism of Part I and the modal realism of Part II are not only compatible, but that that account of the expressive role distinctive of modal vocabulary is just what is needed to understand the central claims of modal realism.

Modal expressivism (ME) makes claims about what one is *doing* in using modal concepts, while modal realism (MR) makes claims about what one is *saying* by using modal concepts. ME says that what one is doing when one makes a modal claim is endorsing an inference relating descriptive concepts as subjunctively (including counterfactually) robust, or treating two descriptive concepts as incompatible. MR says that when one does that, one is claiming *that* possession or exhibition of one empirical property is a consequence of, or is incompatible with, possession or exhibition of another. The claim that ME and MR are compatible is the claim that one can *both* be *doing* what ME says one is doing in applying modal vocabulary *and* be *saying* what MR says one is saying by doing that.

According to this way of understanding the relations between ME and MR, the claims of modal expressivism are made in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary for modal vocabulary: that is, a vocabulary suitable for specifying the practices, abilities, and performances that make up the *use* of modal vocabulary. And the claims of modal realism are made in a *semantic* metavocabulary for modal vocabulary: that is, a vocabulary suitable for specifying the *meanings* or conceptual *contents* expressed by modal vocabulary.

Reconciling these claims requires specifying a sense of “describing” or “empirical fact-stating” that is broader than that applicable to the primary use of OED vocabulary, but still sufficiently akin to it that the broader sense applicable to modal claims and the narrower sense applicable show up as species of a recognizably descriptive genus.

A broader sense of “fact-stating” and “description” that is not yet so promiscuous as the declarativist candidate is defined by the dual requirements of *semantic government* of claimings by facts and *epistemic tracking* of facts by claimings.

What one is talking *about* is what exercises a certain kind of *authority* over what one says; what one says is *responsible to* what one is talking about, in a way that is characteristic of this relation as *semantic*. What one is talking about provides a standard for the assessment of what one says.

By “semantic government” I mean that descriptive claims are subject to a distinctive kind of ought-to-be. It ought to be the case that the content of a descriptive claiming stands in a special relation, which we might as well call “correspondence,” to a modal fact, which it accordingly purports to state (and in case there is such a fact, succeeds in stating). In virtue of that semantic norm, claimings are answerable for their correctness (accord with that norm) to facts.

Normative semantic government of claimings by facts says that it ought to be the case that there is a fact whose content is articulated by objective modal relations of material consequence and incompatibility that line up with the subjective (in the sense of pertaining to knowing and acting discursive subjects) normative relations of material consequence and incompatibility that articulate the content of a claiming. If that norm is not satisfied, the claiming does not live up to the standard provided by the fact it purports to state.

Where semantic government of claiming by facts is a normative matter, epistemic tracking of facts by claimings is a modal one. It is a matter of the subjunctive and counterfactual robustness of the conceptual content correspondence between facts and claims. The tracking condition holds just insofar as the subjunctive conditional “If the fact were (or had been) different, the claiming would be (or would have been) correspondingly different,” is true. Insofar as this condition holds, there is a *reliable* correspondence between the contents of facts and the contents of claimings. That is to say that the inference from a claim about the content of a claiming to the content of the corresponding fact is in general a good one.

When the two requirements of semantic government and epistemic tracking are satisfied, it makes good sense to think of the claimings in question as fact-stating and descriptive.

It is a consequence of the version of Kant-Sellars modal expressivism that I outlined in Part I that instituting semantic government of modal claims by modal facts, and of achieving epistemic tracking of modal facts by modal claims must be an aspect of the process of instituting semantic government of ordinary empirical descriptive claims by the facts they state, and of achieving epistemic tracking of those facts by ordinary empirical descriptive claims.

Determining and applying descriptive concepts inevitably involves committing oneself as to the subjunctively robust inferential and incompatibility relations they stand in to one another. Rectifying concepts, determining facts, and establishing laws are all projects that must be pursued together. Empirical evidence bears on all of the semantic, epistemic, and explanatory tasks at once, or it bears on none of them.

Modal claims (and the concepts that articulate them) exhibit semantic government by and epistemic tracking of facts no less than ordinary empirical descriptive ones do. Far from being incompatible with this fundamental modally realistic claim, modal expressivism is just what is needed to make it intelligible. By showing how the use of modal concepts and the use of ordinary empirical descriptive concepts are inextricably bound up with one another, modal expressivism also shows itself and modal realism as two sides of one coin.

## Sellars's Pragmatic Metalinguistic Expressivist Nominalism

Bob Brandom

In GE, Sellars identifies two major objections that any metalinguistic nominalism about properties and kinds (universals) of this shape must face. The first is that ontologically categorizing statements such as “Triangularity is a property,” do not mention linguistic expressions, while their proposed paraphrases, such as “‘Triangular’ is a monadic predicate,” do. The second objection Sellars considers is that metalinguistic nominalism does not avoid ontological commitment to properties (or universals, more generally). Rather, it eliminates nonlinguistic properties and kinds for linguistic ones.

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

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

“...not all ones over and against manys are universals (i.e. qualities, relations, sorts, kinds, or classes), and consequently to conclude that the problem of “the one and the many” is in fact broader than the problem of universals...” [AE I, p. 166].

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

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

and the class of pawns, which must not be confused with the lion and the pawn as construed above.” [AE I, p. 167]

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

The K is F  $\approx$  Ks are F.

The •triangular• is a predicate  $\approx$  •triangular•s are predicates  $\approx$  triangularity is a property.

Sellars offers a further characterization of the difference between abstract entities in the narrow sense, invoked by unperspicuous nominalizations to be nominalistically paraphrased metalinguistically, and in the wider sense. It corresponds, he says, to the distinction between abstract entities which are not objects, but functions. Kind-terms (which have both criteria of application and criteria of individuation and identity) admit both readings, while predicate adjectives (which have only criteria of application) initially support only the functional reading. “The possibility that the word “kind” might have these two senses throws light on Russell’s erstwhile distinction between classes as ones and classes as manys. Or, with an eye to Frege, we can say that in contexts such as [“The •the lion• is a DST,” which reduces to “•the lion•s are DSTs”] kinds are distributive objects, whereas in [“The •lion• is a common noun,” which in turn reduces to “•lion•s are common nouns” (Sellars’s paraphrase of “Lionhood is a kind,”)]-like contexts they are concepts or functions.” [AE V, p. 186]

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

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

Triangular (a)

into two parts, one of which has to do with the universal rather than the particular, the other with the particular rather than the universal, and tempts us, therefore, to construe the statement as asserting a dyadic relation (“exemplification”) to obtain between the particular and the universal. [AE 201]

Sketched with a very broad brush, I think the argument goes like this. Predicate-adjectives have a very different function and use than do singular terms. Hence, it is misleading to understand

singular terms formed by nominalizing them as referring to a special kind of thing: abstract entities. I don't think this is a good inference.

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

If I am right that the principle insight driving Sellars's metalinguistic nominalism is the idea that what one is *doing* in deploying concepts such as triangularity, lionhood, property, and kind is functionally classifying expressions using metalinguistic vocabulary of a distinctive kind (nominalizations formed according to the “illustrating sign-design principle”), that is an insight properly expressible in a *pragmatic* metalanguage. The conclusion he wants to draw, however, concerns the *semantics* proper for that class of nominalizations and covering common nouns.

“It is also argued that exemplification is a ‘quasi-semantical’ relation, and that it (and universals) are “in the world” only in that broad sense in which the ‘world’ includes linguistic norms and roles viewed (thus in translating) from the standpoint of a fellow participant.” [NS 103]

Even if the semantic claim that transcategorial nominalizations are not genuine (referring) singular terms is accepted, that in no way entails that only what can be so referred to exists in the real world. Such an ontological stipulation is at most compatible with the semantic commitment. So I do not think that there is an argument from Sellars's metalinguistic pragmatic and semantic nominalization nominalism to his ontological nominalism.

I conclude that Sellars has introduced and deployed the metalinguistic machinery of dot-quotes, distributive singular terms, and Jumblese to offer a sophisticated account of a distinctive metalinguistic role that transcategorial nominalizations and their associated common nouns play. That account, though, operates primarily at the level of pragmatics: as part of a theory of the *use* of these expressions. He has not thereby put himself in a position to be entitled to draw nominalistic semantic or ontological conclusions from the identification of that distinctive expressive role.