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Faculty of Philosophy and Arts

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**THE ONTOLOGICAL PRIVILEGE OF SCIENCE –
WILFRID SELLARS, PRAGMATISM AND
SCIENTIFIC REALISM**

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and that I correctly acknowledged the work of others in accordance with academic standards.

Pilsen, August 2017

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My son was a small child beginning to attend kindergarten when I started on my doctoral thesis. Now, with the thesis finished, he has become a reflective and witty schoolkid. It is him that I want to thank above all for reminding me in his own way that there is a life besides doctoral studies.

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1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Wilfrid Sellars belongs to the greatest analytical philosophers of the 20th century. Jay Rosenberg, one of Sellars's well-known students, claims Sellars's equality to Willard van Orman Quine (Rosenberg 2007a, 33), Richard Rorty compares him to Charles Sanders Peirce (back cover of Brandom; Scharp 2007). Whether we want to go along with these claims or not, the profundity and originality of Sellars's work is generally acknowledged. However, the remarks of respect for his work contrast with the feeble intensity with which it has been interpreted and developed further. Maybe this is changing currently, for there are signs of an upsurge of interest in Sellars's texts. In the last two decades, two high-quality introductions to Sellars's work were published (deVries 2005; O'Shea 2007), there is a new introduction to *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (deVries, Triplett 2000), some recent collections of papers on Sellars (deVries 2009a; O'Shea 2016; Pereplyotchik, Barnbaum 2016) and several monographs on more specific topics in Sellars's philosophy (Brandom 2015; Olen 2016; Sachs 2014).

It is often claimed that Sellars's philosophy has still to offer many valuable thoughts to contemporary discussions. If this is true, interpretations of Sellars's philosophy are not only interesting for scholars studying this particular philosopher and his philosophical environment, but can also be inspiring and challenging with respect to what philosophers are doing today. However, there is no agreement as to which of Sellars's ideas should be ascribed this outstanding status. Robert Brandom claims that we should treat Sellars's metalinguistic functional development of Kant's categories as such a groundbreaking idea. Others, such as Johanna Seibt, think that we should search for Sellars's living thoughts in his scientific naturalism, his process ontology and his naturalistic treatment of linguistic roles. This diversity of opinion would not be problematic if these different elements of Sellars's thought did not stand in mutual tension. But such tensions are quite apparent – it even seems as if Sellars was caught up in a fundamental conflict between his key thoughts. These tensions will be the main focus of my thesis.

The fact that there are at least *prima facie* conflicting tendencies in Sellars's work has been emphasized in various forms and under various names: a tension between Sellars's thoughts inspired by the early and those inspired by the later Wittgenstein (Millikan 2005), a tension between his emphasis on norms and his emphasis on naturalism (O'Shea 2007), between what a right-wing and a left-wing reader of Sellars would make

of his work (a distinction ascribed to Richard Rorty), or between two conflicting Kantian ideas in Sellars's thought (Brandom 2015, ch.1). For reasons that I will explain, I will characterize these tensions as a conflict between Sellars's pragmatist and realist commitments.

There are several ways to deal with Sellars's *prima facie* conflicting commitments. Some of Sellars's readers choose to reject one of the poles his work is drawn to. Brandom rejects the scientific realist part of Sellars's thought in a recent monograph (Brandom 2015). Others, such as Paul Churchland, Ruth Millikan or Jay Rosenberg, though they do not reject Sellars's emphasis on normativity, try to give norms a place in a scientific, naturalist framework.

My thesis deals with the aforementioned tensions in a different way. I follow those who want to offer a balanced account of Sellars's thought. My intention is to make as much sense as possible of what Sellars writes, i.e., to see what resources he himself can offer to deal with the conflicting tendencies that can be found in his work. What I would like to do is offer one specific reading of Sellars's approach to them and pursue this reading as far as possible.

Two questions, aims and motivations

In the beginning, we need to become clear on the questions to be pursued here. It is useful to subdivide the problem of resolving the tensions between Sellars's realism and pragmatism into two complementary questions. Later, I will talk about how and where realism and pragmatism are exemplified in Sellars's work and how they create conflicting tendencies:

1. Given that Sellars conceives of the natural sciences as providing us, sooner or later, with the adequate description of the world and given that, according to him, the commonsense framework is "radically false" (SRI, §48),¹ how can we make room for rational action, ourselves as persons, norms and our practical world?

¹ Sellars's works are cited by their standard abbreviations, under which they are also listed in the bibliography at the end. I refer to paragraph numbers in Sellars's texts in cases where this is possible to facilitate locating the cited passage in different editions of a given text. Where this is not possible, I refer to page numbers.

2. Given that Sellars accepts our “situatedness” in contingent, historically evolved and changing systems of norms and practices and given that he understands these as crucial for what we take to be true and real, how can he countenance a notion of ultimate reality or of an ultimate conceptual scheme capturing it?

The first question has been treated more intensively in the recent literature on Sellars (see e.g. DeVries 2012; O’Shea 2012; Christias 2017b). In contrast, my main concern will be the second question. Thus, I will be concerned with what Sellars could understand by ultimate reality or “*the truth*” about the world given that his pragmatist commitments seem to inhibit him from accepting these notions.

Sellars’s realism is not a realism *tout court* but an avowedly scientific realism,² it tells us that “*science is the measure of all things*” (EPM, §41; my emphasis). Thus, for Sellars it is from the ultimate scientific vocabulary that we read off our ultimate ontology. This generates a second question which I will be concerned with: if we can motivate the notion of ultimate truth about the world at all, how can we justify that there is one specific human activity (in our case science) that conducts us to that truth? These two problems, i.e., how Sellars can justify realism given his pragmatist commitments and how he can justify what we might call his scientism, will be my main concern. My aim is to outline a way of reading Sellars which can solve these two problems.

Why is it worthwhile to think about these two questions? Pragmatist thinkers have often adopted a distanced position towards the notion of an ultimate truth or reality, as well as to the idea of an absolute privilege for the scientific description of the world. One of the greatest pragmatist enemies of these ideas is Richard Rorty, who argued extensively against their intelligibility and fruitfulness (therefore, I will come back to Rorty many times in my text). Also, the classical pragmatists James and Dewey (but not Peirce) prefer

² Brandom (2015) expresses his qualms about this terminology, reserving the term “scientific realism” for the less radical view that theoretical scientific statements have genuine truth values, a view which Brandom himself shares with Sellars. What I call Sellars’s scientific realism here, i.e. the view that the scientific vocabulary is privileged in matters of ontology over other vocabularies, Brandom labels “Sellars’s scientific naturalism” (and rejects). Nothing much hinges on how we label Sellars’s position as long as it is clear what we are talking about. What is more, Sellars apparently uses the term “scientific realism” in a similar way as I do here, or at least ties scientific realism very closely to it (see SSIS 420). Other authors have also called the position expressed in Sellars’s *scientia mensura* a scientific realist position (e.g. Gutting 1978; Rosenberg 1975, 147; O’Shea 2009 or Seibt 2009, 262) and I will stick to this usage.

pluralist approaches to the world over monistic ones that, in their eyes, overemphasize stability and value a kind of unity and certainty which is illusory. There have been attempts to import Sellars for the pragmatist tradition, especially by Rorty and Brandom. In the light of these attempts, it makes sense to ask how much of Sellars's thought harmonizes with pragmatist convictions. Rorty and Brandom both give a restrictive answer to this question: for them, especially Sellars's realist and scientific realist commitments conflict with pragmatism. I will argue that when we adopt a different reading of Sellars, his pragmatist and realist commitments need not be seen to conflict so starkly, at least not for the reasons given by Rorty and Brandom. My thesis is therefore also meant to contribute to the ongoing discussion about whether and how much of Sellars can be incorporated into the pragmatist tradition.

There is a second pay-off to the kind of inquiry I want to pursue. At a first glance, both poles in Sellars are attractive in their own right. His pragmatist approach to such topics as truth, modality and normativity enables us to reinterpret these philosophically contested concepts in a fruitful, metaphysically deflated way. At the same time, naturalism and scientific realism are widely held positions among contemporary analytic philosophers. Because of the attraction of the two ideas, there would be much worth not only for Sellars-scholars in a reading of Sellars which could reconcile them.

Sellars was a writer with an eye to the bigger picture, even if it is sometimes striking how little he spells out the implications of his views in detail. As far as the questions of this text are concerned, he provides us with a broad sketch and pregnant remarks but, characteristically, details are missing. It is surprising how little Sellars seems to care about the questions raised at the beginning of this section. One explanation might be that he was not aware of them at all. But that seems doubtful given that Sellars was sensitive to the implications that views in a certain area of philosophy have for other areas. I want to indicate how some of the gaps left open by Sellars can be filled. I will not claim that my reading is the only possible or defensible but want to suggest it as one conceivable and, hopefully, attractive understanding of Sellars. But there is no doubt that given the complex and sometimes porous textual basis that Sellars offers, many other lines could also be defended.

There is one kind of approach to Sellars I would like to take direct issue with nevertheless, an approach which I will call the "straightforward reading". Proponents of

this kind of reading claim that Sellars is justified in rejecting the idea of semantical or intentional relations between words and things, and thereby rejects the idea that we could understand ultimate truth in such relational terms. But then, according to straightforward readers, he introduces a non-semantical relation (picturing) which is meant to take over precisely the job now vacant, i.e. to make the idea of ultimate truth and reality intelligible. Some straightforward readers see this as a destructive move, others have no qualms with it. Regardless of their attitude, I want to argue that this reading should be replaced by a more complex understanding which does more justice to Sellars's texts.

I want to show that to make Sellars's scientific realist and pragmatist commitments compatible we should emphasize rather than suppress what many pragmatist readers have cherished about him: his rejection of semantical relations, of a confrontational picture of mind and world, of a substantial idea of reference, and of the correspondence theory of truth. Some authors, such as Rorty, think that Sellars was good at rejecting all this but that he sneaked it back in when he introduced ideas like picturing and an ultimate conceptual scheme. I will try to indicate how Sellars can be read in a different way if we attempt to understand these ideas as being part and parcel of his pragmatist thinking rather than being antagonist to it.

Sellars's philosophical thought covers wide space and not all aspects of it can be treated here. I will be concerned with the possibility of one ultimately adequate vocabulary in general and with the claim that this ultimate vocabulary is the one of science. I will not dig deep into what form this vocabulary should have, even though Sellars has some concrete suggestions about this. Thus, I will not be concerned with Sellars's treatment of universals and his nominalism in general³ and just link my argument to these topics where this is appropriate. A second topic I would like to leave more or less to a side, at least more than might be expected given the focus of my text, is Sellars's distinction between the manifest and the scientific image of man-in-the-world. I will be concerned with the distinction when I characterize Sellars's realism and when I discuss existing approaches to the problem of ultimate reality in Sellars, but I will not use it in my own reading. This may be surprising as the distinction between the two images seems to be a core exemplification of Sellars's scientific realism. I will explain later in the text, why I do not think that we should put this distinction to substantial use. Everything that Sellars wants

³ An encompassing treatment of Sellars's system from the point of view of nominalism is Seibt (1990).

to say about science can be said without the distinction between the two images. It does not convey much content of its own but rather has a programmatic, organizational function in Sellars's work.

Outline

My thesis is organized into 4 main chapters, a conclusion and this introduction. In chapter 2, I build the ground needed for the subsequent text. That is, I introduce Sellars's realism, scientific realism and pragmatism and show in what sense they conflict. In doing so, I touch on a number of topics and questions in Sellars's work which are linked to realism and pragmatism. These are, for example, Sellars's pragmatist account of truth and meaning and, on the realist side, the idea of an ultimately adequate, Peircean conceptual scheme and picturing. To show how the two tendencies in his work conflict, I then point out two apparently opposing notions of adequacy of conceptual schemes to the world which parallel Sellars's realist commitments on one side and his pragmatist commitments on the other. I highlight a possible conflict between Sellars's pragmatism and his specifically scientific realism by drawing on Huw Price's claim that a global pragmatist approach to language forecloses the possibility of attributing an absolute privilege to scientific discourse.

In chapter 3, I discuss three existing approaches which directly or indirectly address the problem of ultimate truth and reality in connection with pragmatist themes in Sellars. These three accounts are provided by Robert Brandom, Willem deVries and Jay Rosenberg. In criticizing deVries's and Brandom's accounts, I try to bring out some assumptions which we should avoid as they are not helpful or do not do justice to Sellars's texts. The discussion of Rosenberg focuses on an alternative account of Sellars's picturing and provides a transition into the more constructive next two chapters.

In chapter 4, I try to indicate a general direction for reading Sellars which helps to address the questions raised at the beginning. First, I address two possible objections to my reading of Sellars which lie close at hand: that Sellars is a relativist about truth and that he is committed to incommensurability between different conceptual schemes. If these two threats cannot be fended off, we will not be able to bring anything remotely reminiscent of realism into Sellars's picture. Then, I turn to existence and reality talk and argue that it can be given a reading parallel to Sellars's understanding of truth as semantic

assertibility. I argue against the view (assumed by proponents of the straightforward reading) that what reality is needs to be explained by Sellars in a quasi-representationalist way (“reality as what is represented by an ideal, ultimate conceptual scheme”).

What makes Sellars a realist, is his insistence on an ultimate, Peircean scheme or an ideal language that gives predicates like “is true” or “is real” a dimension potentially transcending our here and now conceptual scheme. I turn to this topic in the second half of the fourth chapter where I address the status of this ideal scheme. I argue that it is neither something remote from our present conceptual practices, nor that it is something we conceive of in terms of its content (what Peirceans would talk about, what laws they would accept etc.). Rather, I argue that we conceive of the Peircean scheme as a perfect embodiment of the principles we already need to be committed to if we want to possess the status of concept-users. The adequacy of this Peircean scheme to the world does not need to be interpreted in a representationalist way but it can be understood as practical adequacy. In the last part of the chapter, I show that this ultimately leads us into Sellars’s moral theory. I also address some difficulties and new questions which this move raises.

After having shown that there are prospects of reconciling Sellars’s realist and pragmatist commitments, I turn to the question of scientific realism in the last chapter. I argue that Sellars’s scientific realist program is distinct from the contemporary mainstream of scientific realism in that contemporary scientific realism tries to offer empirical justifications for its theses. Sellars’s defense of science’s privileged position, however, does not draw on any such justification. I show that there are two aspects to Sellars’s understanding of science. From one angle, he treats science as an actually existing, historically evolved area of culture. From the second angle, science is simply the activity of pursuing systematically what we all need to pursue to some extent in order to count as concept-users. This latter aspect could be called a priori or transcendental. I argue that if we emphasize this aspect, Sellars’s scientific realism meshes quite naturally with his pragmatism. However, read in such a way, his claims on the privilege of science need to be understood in a rather modest way.

Methodological problems and difficulties of interpretation

When we want to give an account of an author’s views, we can take one of two approaches or a combination of these. These two approaches are sometimes called internalist and

externalist, or, e.g., thematic and historical (Olen 2015). When we adopt an externalist stance, we inquire into the social, political, personal and intellectual surroundings in which the views of the respective author formed. Such an inquiry gives us a certain type of answer to the question “Why does the author hold such and such views?”. There has not been much historical inquiry into Sellars, although currently this approach to his work is becoming more widespread (see, e.g., Olen 2016).

Thematic or internalist approaches pursue a different strategy to answer the question “Why does the author hold such and such views?”. They focus on the internal coherence and interconnections between different parts of an author’s thought system. Such an account of why an author holds a certain view will display how that view is situated within the larger scheme of the author’s thought, whether it necessarily follows from other commitments the author undertakes, whether it is crucial in justifying other views of his, etc. If we do not find any such internal connections, we may claim that a certain view is “unjustified” or “unmotivated”. That does not mean, of course, that the author has no motivation at all for holding that view, but only that it cannot be placed into a justificatory net with other views of his. Still, there may be external motivations in the social, intellectual or personal environment in which the author’s views took shape. What we mean by calling it “unmotivated” from an internal point of view is that it has the status of an unquestioned presupposition. For example, it is sometimes claimed that Sellars’s scientific realism does not have a motivation internal to his thought system (e.g. deVries 2009b, 238). However, that does not mean that we cannot trace external factors explaining why Sellars holds this view. Brandom indicates, for example, that the scientific, logical empiricist intellectual period in which Sellars’s views developed explains his radical pro-science attitude (Brandom 2015, 85).

Of course, internalist and externalist approaches are not mutually exclusive. They represent two different ways of explaining why an author holds certain views. We might say that the “why” is understood differently in the two cases: the thematic, internalist approach understands it as a question for the justification of a view, the historical, externalist approach understands it as a question for the causal factors (broadly conceived) which gave rise to a view. As they tackle different questions, externalist and internalist approaches need not be in mutual conflict. That is, one can give an exhausting overview of the justificatory interconnections of an author’s view but still ask for the circumstances in which these views developed and gain new insights from this latter inquiry.

My approach to Sellars will be internalist. That is, for example, even though there probably are important external, social and maybe personal factors which explain why Sellars holds a scientific realist view, I will focus on how this position is interlinked with other parts of his system. This is not because I see no worth in external inquiries. However, my interest is targeted differently: I want to ask to what extent Sellars can give us a model of reconciling pragmatist and realist concerns about truth and reality. For this question, an internal point of view is more salient. Internalist approaches sometimes face the objection of being ahistorical and under threat of anachronism. However, I think that we can approach philosophers of the past not only as historical figures but also as possible partners in a contemporary dialogue. This is the way Sellars himself treated the philosophical tradition (see, e.g., BBK for Aquinas or SM for Kant).

Sellars's work has several characteristic traits which render the task of interpreting his thought complex. He was productive over a period of 35 years and his work comprises an impressive amount of published as well as unpublished material. I will concentrate on his published works. This is not to say that unpublished material is of second-rate importance, for a historical inquiry it is indispensable. However, unpublished material has a less clear status than published works. In the case of the latter, one can presuppose an authorization by the author herself (probably, no material would have been published that did not express her views at that given time). For unpublished material, the case is less clear-cut. What, for example, is the status of a notebook entry that deviates from formulations in published works? Should we take it seriously into account or reject as something the author himself did not deem worthy to be published in that form? Only a thorough historical investigation can decide such questions, and this is not the purpose my thesis is meant to pursue.

Sellars's published essays and books cover the period from 1947 to 1981. With such a long period of writing, as for any author, the problem of consistency between different phases of writing arises. Paradoxically, Sellars's work generates this problem ever the more, precisely because of its high degree of diachronic consistency. There are no major breaks between earlier and later periods of writing (maybe except for his position on rules which may have shifted from his early to his mature phase, see Olen 2016). Although there are shifts of emphasis and thematic focus, the whole of Sellars's work seems like the continuous development of a system that was at least vaguely present in his thought right from the beginning of his career (and Sellars himself insinuates this in his autobiographical

reflections, see AR, 284). Given this emphasis on systematic thought, on diachronic and synchronic consistency, even minor shifts may seem like major reevaluations.

Of course, we cannot expect to find complete consistency over such a long period of time, and neither complete terminological precision. Thus, we will have to cope with terminological shifts, *prima facie* contradicting modes of expressing oneself and the like. If we want to emphasize the consistency in Sellars, we are faced with a pressing methodological question: Which of these terminological shifts, etc., to take seriously, i.e. as real countervailing instances to our main line of reading which press us to change our interpretation, and which of them to treat as mere rhetorical slips or cases of insufficient awareness to one's own better thought?

There are no fixed methodological guidelines offering a rough and ready solution to this question. How we answer will obviously depend on the author we interpret, on his idiosyncrasies and on the particular line of interpretation that we pursue. It will also depend on the degree of "admissible" or "accepted" inconsistency that we want to allow. There may not be anything like a universal and perfect balance between interpretative charity and austere, "merciless" ways of reading an author. Neither a reading which brushes aside any countervailing textual evidence as irrelevant nor a reading that takes every utterance of an author quite literally and is unwilling to compromise in places where we could reasonably do so will be attractive. Too much focus on the consistency of our reading may lead us to construct "hidden" layers that have no textual support, too much focus on literalness may lead us to exclude promising lines of interpretation by a verbatim reading that inflates minor or superficial dissonances in a text. My approach will be to offer a charitable reading of Sellars trying to render his views as consistent as I can while staying close to his texts. This obviously includes the task of explaining why some of the discrepancies we will encounter are only of minor importance.

These are general difficulties that we would have to face with regard to almost any author. There are, however, some aspects of Sellars's writing that confront us with specific obstacles. Sellars's style of exposition is distinctly dialectical, that is he develops his own position by constantly considering other possible positions and bringing to light their shortcomings. In contrast to these detailed dialectical parts in his texts, straightforward statements of his own position are short, often sketchy and sometimes completely missing. That means that there often is no concise and at the same time convincing way of stating

what Sellars's position is. Usually, if we take only into account the things that he straightforwardly says about a certain issue, many blanks remain to be filled in.⁴ Part of what makes up his position has therefore to be reconstructed from Sellars's dialectical passages. This is difficult because during a dialectical exposition Sellars sometimes adopts a certain position only preliminarily, for the dialectics' sake. His final stance may well be more detailed and complex than this transitional position,⁵ or it may even be opposed to his preliminary positions in important respects.

There is a second, related problem about terminology. In many texts, Sellars tries to establish points of contact with contemporary as well as historical discussions. His aim on such occasions is not primarily to inquire into the history of philosophy for its own sake but to use the positions of the classical philosophers as points of reference for his discussions.⁶ One way in which he does that is employing the terminology used in these discussions, even where this terminology (or what seems to be implied by it) is *prima facie* conflicting with views that we would expect Sellars to hold. These are cases where, as mentioned above, an excessively literal reading will be of no help. One example is Sellars's reference to the "standard modern" (logical empiricist) account of theoretical explanation (LT, §3). Sellars claims that he accepts "something like" this account even though his final position can be more straightforwardly read as a criticism of it.

Sellars's work is also specific in covering a broad range of philosophical areas. He treats these not as isolated fields but his views in one are often entangled with his views in other fields. Still, how the single pieces of the bigger picture come together to make up one whole is often hard to tell, even where this bigger picture is clearly intended by Sellars

⁴ This is not meant as a criticism of Sellars's style. To the contrary, his way of proceeding has advantages. It appears to be anchored in methodologic convictions on how to arrive at philosophically stable solutions. Sellars claims that if we do not see through the philosophical dialectics on a certain topic, we will be prone to adopt unreflected assumptions we unconsciously inherit from the historical dialectic:

Solutions can be quick and obvious—arrived at almost by 'scrutiny'—only because one begins with so much inherited dialectic that there is room for only one alternative which is either not absurd or the absurdity of which can be parsed as the paradoxical wisdom of the learned. (BD, §98)

⁵ This is connected to a philosophical method frequently employed by Sellars, that of model construction. Sellars often begins his exposition by proposing a simple and clear model used to map either a philosophical problem space (e.g., his distinction between the manifest and the scientific image of man-in-the-world) or used as an explicative tool for certain concepts which are formed from the model by analogy (e.g., our concept of overt speech as a model for our concept of thought, see, e.g., MFC). In both cases, Sellars gradually complicates and refines the model. It would therefore be a mistake to take the initial, cruder versions of the model to express his position.

⁶ See, e.g. John McDowell who writes on Sellars on Aquinas that Sellars treats Aquinas as a colleague and antagonist. (McDowell 2009, 254).

himself. One such case which I will address is the connection between Sellars's practical philosophy and his philosophy of science.

Some conceptual clarifications

There are some concepts on which I will rely heavily in my interpretation of Sellars. His treatment of most concepts is complex and there will not be enough room to address all aspects in my text. Still, in order to avoid confusions, I would like to dedicate a few paragraphs here to clarifying them.

I will constantly use terms such as "language" or "conceptual scheme". Both of them are hard to define in a concise way and it is not initially clear how they are linked. As far as the term "language" is concerned, we must distinguish two uses in Sellars. From the first point of view, the term "language" denotes what linguists, sociologists or anthropologists would denote by the term, i.e. historically developed distinct systems of oral and written communication, such as English or Portuguese. However, most of the time Sellars uses the term "language" to denote something more general and abstract. This does not mean that this more general understanding of language is opposed to the more concrete understanding above. Historically developed systems of communication like English and Portuguese will be instances of language in the more general sense, too, however the more general rendering allows us to include many other phenomena under the heading of "language" as well.

By "language" in this more abstract sense, Sellars means a set of practices governed by rules, specifically conceptual practices. "Conceptual" for Sellars means that these practices are inferential (see IM). Thus, the rules⁷ which govern the practices are ones which determine when a certain word can be applied and what follows from applying it. For example, the concept of flour, figures in sentences like "This is flour." This sentence maybe used when we have already asserted "This is a white, powdery material gained by grinding wheat." What follows from it are sentences like "This material is a crucial ingredient in bread baking." or "If one meshes it with water, one will (*ceteris paribus*) obtain a sticky mass." etc. If the sentence "This is flour." did not stand in these inferential relations but in others, i.e. if it had a different inferential role, the respective concept would

⁷ Of course, there are many problems about rules, about their ontology, efficacy etc. There is no room here to go into these. For Sellars's approach see e.g. SRLG, MFC, ME.

not be our standard concept of flour.

For Sellars, a language in the wider sense is a system of these interlinked conceptual roles. They are necessarily interlinked, because the circumstances in which we apply a concept and the consequences following from this application include other concepts (in our example of the concept of flour, these were the concepts of white, wheat or bread). Sellars does not make any restrictions on the scope of these systems of conceptual roles, thus under the heading of “language” we may find natural languages such as English alongside the very restricted artificial languages which, for example, Carnap uses in his *Logical Syntax of Language*. A language may be empirically applied or not. However, Sellars’s focus lies on what he calls “empirically meaningful languages” in his early essays, i.e., languages that embody knowledge about the world and are used to act in this world.

Sellars never talks about languages without implying that systems of conceptual roles are materially embodied in one way or another. Conceptual roles are not concrete objects themselves, but material objects can embody conceptual roles. For natural languages, these will be sound patterns, ink marks and also pixel patterns or patterns of zeros and ones. For example, uses of sounds of the pattern [red] in English exhibit regularities which can be traced back to the rules governing the concept of red. There is no initial restriction as to which objects can come to embody conceptual roles. As Johanna Seibt writes, even such objects as footprints in snow can become meaningful in this thick conceptual sense if we treat them accordingly (Seibt 2007, 103).

Sellars’s term “conceptual scheme” is very close to “language”. When he speaks about his notion of an ultimately adequate conceptual scheme (which we will focus on later), he dubs it “Peirceish” analogically to existing languages. A conceptual scheme, however, is a language in the more abstract sense discussed above, rather than merely a historically evolved, existing language like English. A conceptual scheme is a system of conceptual roles and as such it can be embodied in various existing languages. When we use the term “conceptual scheme”, we disregard the material embodiment which existing languages provide and focus solely on the system of roles or concepts. Sellars writes in *Science and Metaphysics*:

Since the term “language” as it is ordinarily used refers to the specific linguistic materials (sign designs and surface grammar) which differentiate, e.g. French from German, we need another term for the common game which is played by users of such differing

resources. I shall use the expression “conceptual structure” to serve this purpose. (SM, ch. V §49)

As for the abstract notion of language, Sellars never claims that a conceptual scheme must encompass everything a standard natural language is able to express. Thus, we may have more comprehensive conceptual schemes as well as miniature conceptual schemes such as scientific theories (this reading is supported by the fact that in a footnote to the passage above Sellars compares his “conceptual structures” to language games, which can also be much more restricted than what we usually call “a language”).

A conceptual scheme or language in the abstract sense is not a description of how speakers use words. Rather, it is a set of rules which specify how words ought to be used correctly. Still, how a word is to be used correctly is not established once and for all and conceptual systems are in constant flux. When we speak of “a” conceptual scheme, we mean what Sellars sometimes calls “a cross-section” (e.g. SM, ch. V §42) in an otherwise continuous development.

There is one more clarification I want to make before entering the main discussion. As I said, conceptual systems can be embodied in some material or other, and there is no general restriction on what can serve as such material. One characteristic Sellarsian tenet is the claim that thinking, too, can be understood in this way. Thinking is conceived by Sellars as a form of language in the general sense, i.e., thoughts have a conceptual role analogously to the sentences which express them. The thought that it will rain is an item which has the same functional role in the overall system of our thinking as the sentence “It will rain” in overt, i.e., spoken and written language. As to the material embodiment of our conceptual scheme in the case of thought, Sellars leaves that question to science, especially neuroscience, and claims that it is best to assume that in the case of thinking our conceptual scheme is embodied by events in the brain (EPM §58). Sellars’s close analogy between thinking and speaking allows me to disregard the difference between thought and speech for the purposes of my text. So, whenever I will speak of language and conceptual schemes, what is meant is not only overt speech production but thought as well.

2. Sellars's realism and pragmatism – locating the problem

As a first step, we must get clear about where to locate the tensions in Sellars's work. The aim of this chapter is threefold. First, I want to specify what Sellars's realism and pragmatism amount to – as both of these labels are obviously vague and comprise a number of different possible positions. Second, I want to introduce those of Sellars's thoughts which are salient for the overall topic of my text. I will limit myself mostly to what can be uncontroversially said about them, leaving the specific details of the reading I want to defend for later. Third, I want to specify where we can see tensions between Sellars's realism and his pragmatism and as a corollary to this I shall also vindicate my characterization of these tensions.

2.1. Realism

Realism is not a philosophical position in itself. Rather, it is a general type of approach to philosophical issues that can concern very different subject matters.⁸ When a philosopher simply asserts that she is a realist, there always will be a special domain implied which her realism is targeted to – one cannot be a realist *tout court*. Thus, we can speak of moral realism, realism about universals, scientific realism, modal realism, realism about the external world, etc. These specific positions can be held and defended independently from one another, although there are affinities and antagonisms between some of them. Someone who already is a realist about universals may find it more natural to also be a realist about values or possible worlds (all of them being a realism about some type of abstract entity). That there are many specific types of realism can also be seen in the fact that there are various different opposing positions to “realism” (e.g., instrumentalism in the case of scientific realism, idealism in the case of realism about the external world, nominalism in the case of realism about universals).⁹

Whatever the domain in which someone wants to call themselves a realist there are normally two ways of doing so. First, we can assert our realism on an ontological level,

⁸ Concerning “realisms”, Michael Dummett speaks about difference in subject-matter but resemblance in form (Dummett 1982, 145).

⁹ I use these pairs of opposition for means of illustration only. I do not want to imply that we can divide the philosophical map neatly into such pairs of antagonist positions. What we really find is a dialogue of several positions, sometimes distinguished from each other only by small differences and sometimes going by the same name although they are in some respects clearly distinct.

claiming that such and such entities (values, universals, theoretical entities, etc.) exist. In order for the position to count as realism, it is often requested that “exist” means that those entities exist independently of human minds, human language or human social practices in general. As Jay Rosenberg characterizes realism, it

proposes to distinguish the *existence* of a thing from its being perceived or thought of (that is, from its being *represented*). (Rosenberg 1980, 28, Rosenberg’s emphasis)

But this need not always be the case: In the case of value realism, a realist position can be combined with the claim that values are dependent on human beings, while for realism usually opposed to idealism it is a defining mark that such a dependence on human minds, language or practices is rejected. Thus, there does not seem to be a unifying account of what “real existence” is supposed to mean across all the different specific realisms.

Second, we may prefer, for various reasons, to characterize our specific type of realism not on the ontological but on the linguistic level. A realist position characterized in these terms claims that the terms of a certain vocabulary refer (as opposed to the terms of some other vocabulary that may lack reference). Thus, for a realist about universals, terms such as “whiteness”, “beauty” or “circularity” refer to an abstract entity that cannot be reduced to non-abstract entities.¹⁰ Opponents to such a view, i.e. nominalists, reject the idea of a reference relation between an abstract singular term and some kind of basic, non-reducible entity.

Even though in this example it is clear that the argument between a proponent of realism and his opponent does not turn on whether the statements in a certain discourse have or lack truth values (for a nominalist can regard sentences like “Circularity is a flaw in philosophical arguments.” or “Beauty is ephemeral.” as true or false), the linguistic characterization is still sometimes put in these terms (e.g. Brandom 2015, ch. V). As Dummett makes clear, the issue is not primarily about certain statements having or lacking truth-values but about how their having their truth-value is explained. A realist about a certain statement type claims that these statements have their truth-value objectively, i.e. independently of my ways of determining it and independently of my very existence as

¹⁰ For an example of this move in the case of a realism about sorts and kinds see this statement by Peirce:

Since, therefore, the word ‘man’ is true of something, that which ‘man’ means is real. (Peirce 1868/1992, 53).

such a “determiner” (Dummett 1982). Thus, a scientific realist claims that theoretical statements have an objective truth value, independently of the modeling and constructing methods of science, independently of the existence of scientists or science as an activity. The relevant type of opposing position (the anti-realist position in the respective domain) denies that statements of the respective type have a truth value which is objective in this sense, but it need not claim that they have no truth-value at all.¹¹

Talking about ways of determining truth-values may seem metaphysically less committal than speaking about the existence or non-existence of certain entities. But this can be deceptive. At the heart of realism on the linguistic level, there is the attempt to make a qualitative distinction between statements of different types, between those that can be treated realistically and those which cannot. What distinguishes the former from the latter is that the latter have their truth value, if they possess one at all, due to constraints internal to linguistic practice (considerations of coherence, methods of construction, social interaction etc.) while the former typically possess their truth value due to an external constraint. It is this external constraint which gets reflected when we say that for a realist about a certain statement type the terms used in this statement type refer. For this implies that there is some non-linguistic entity, object or aspect which the given statement must be true *to* in order to be true. Thus, moving to the linguistic level does not free a realist from ontological commitments.

This is not to say that the ontological and the linguistic characterization of realism simply amount to the same thing. Not all realists may want to make existence claims on the basis of which linguistic expressions refer, simply because they do not construe reference as a language-world relation (this is Sellars’s case). Thus, someone may want to assert “Electrons really exist, but abstract entities such as whiteness do not exist.” without claiming “The term “electron” refers, but abstract terms such as “whiteness” do not refer.”.

Still, moving to the linguistic level may change some parameters of the debate between the realist and his opponent in the relevant domain. This is because tackling the issues between realism and opposing positions on a linguistic level must involve, as Huw

¹¹ The case is different for a constructive empiricist of van Fraassen’s type (see e.g. van Fraassen 1980). He does not reject the claim that the theoretical statements of science have truth values and that they have them because of “what the world is like independently of us”. However, he is not interested in questions of truth and reality, but rather in what is involved in scientific reasoning and scientific practice. He argues that scientific realism, i.e. the belief that theoretical scientific statements are true, is not needed to make sense of how science works.

Price (2004) has indicated, some philosophical position about the relations of linguistic expressions to the rest of the world. But here, there are diverse possibilities, from a straightforward referential semantics to a complete rejection of any semantic relations between linguistic expressions and other parts of the world. Thus, it is not completely indifferent at which level the debate is led.

Realism in Sellars – describing an independent world by science

To get clear about Sellars's realism, we first have to locate it in the range of different possible realist positions indicated in the last section. Sellars is no realist about abstract entities. Quite to the contrary, he is a thoroughgoing nominalist, to such an extent that Seibt describes his system as "the only fully worked out nominalism in the history of Western philosophy" (Seibt 2007, 32). In line with this rejection of the existence of abstract entities is his rejection of the existence of any *facts* as entities in the world, be they empirical, moral, alethic modal etc.¹² Thus in this sense, Sellars is neither a moral nor a modal realist.

If, however, we defined moral or modal realism in such a way that these positions imply objective truth values for moral or modal statements the case would not be as clear anymore. Sellars countenances the idea that, e.g., for moral or normative discourse we find concepts akin to our concept of objective matter-of-factual truth (in the case of moral discourse the concept of categorial validity, see SM, ch. VII). In *Science and Metaphysics*, he remarks:

¹² It may be better to say "full-blooded existence" for we can find statements by Sellars like this one:

the theory would enable us to explain how a philosopher could be justified in acknowledging that

There are qualities, for example, triangularity

while denying that there *really* are qualities. (TTC, §31, emphasis Sellars)

So, according to Sellars there are abstract entities in some specific sense, but they do not really exist. This can be spelled out in terms of Sellars's nominalist metalinguistic treatment of abstract singular terms (see, e.g., GE, or most thoroughly AE).

We have to distinguish these statements of nominalism from superficially similar claims Sellars makes about commonsense objects and their existence compared to the objects of scientific theory. In several places (e.g. SM, ch. V), Sellars speaks about commonsense objects existing in one sense but not existing in a different sense. In this case, however, understanding these puzzling statements is not achieved by focusing on Sellars's nominalism, but rather regards questions of conceptual change (which I will pursue in chapter 3.1 and 4).

Now it is clear that the above account of truth [truth as semantic assertibility, see below] applies to all kinds of propositions, ranging from singular state-of-affairs intensions to the propositions of mathematics and even the propositions of practical discourse. (SM, ch. IV §30)

This shows that we cannot simply equate ontological and linguistic characterizations of realism. Some philosophical positions, as for example Sellars's, may cut across this supposed ontological-linguistic parallel in such a way that it would not lead us to a useful characterization of the realist aspects involved in the position. In Sellars, this becomes visible in the fact that, e.g. for moral discourse, he says all the following:

A1) Moral statements can be true and false.

A2) Some moral statements are true.

A3) These statements are true independently of what anyone of us thinks.

A4) Thus, some moral statements state facts.

A5) Thus, in a sense, there are moral facts. (= moral realism)

B1) Facts are abstract entities.

B2) There are only concrete particulars. (Sellars's nominalism)

B3) Thus, there are no moral facts. (= moral antirealism)

A5 and B3 seem to be in direct conflict. The conflict resolves when we see that the "there are" has a different meaning in the two cases. The first roughly means that we can usefully speak about facts, that the concept of a fact is intelligible and its use justified (because "fact" means "true statement type"), the second refers to the idea of *really* existing. Whether we want to call Sellars a realist or an anti-realist with respect to moral, alethic modal and other discourses will therefore depend on our emphasis.

However, such an argument about whether Sellars is or is not a realist with respect to certain discourse types is not at the center of my concern, here. For there is a different sense in which Sellars is a realist. This is the sense in which Kant, for example, speaks

about realism, i.e. realism in contrast to idealism. From this point of view, being a realist means accepting that there is a domain of things¹³ which make up the world and exist in themselves. They exist without any contribution on our part, be it of the human mind, language or social practices in general. Advocates of this idea also typically hold that there is only one complete true description of this independent world. This position is sometimes called metaphysical realism (see, e.g., Putnam 1990, 30).

This kind of realism is something that shows through much of what Sellars says. He is committed to a certain way that the world is like, to a “world one never made” (KTE, §36) and to “the ideal of *the* truth about the world” (SM V, §55). Sellars has the tendency to adopt a Kantian vocabulary to illustrate his position, emphasizing that things-in-themselves are knowable by science. For example, he writes that

the real or “noumenal” world which supports the “world of appearances” is not a *metaphysical* world of unknowable things in themselves, but simply the world as construed by scientific theory. (PHM, 97; Sellars’s emphasis)

This amounts at least to a tentative endorsement of the notion of a real world or a world as it is in itself (although I will have to say something about why, on the other hand, we should not overemphasize the parallel between Sellars and Kant in this respect in chapter 3.2).

Many other Sellarsian tenets do not make much sense without assuming that our conceptual practices target a world which is independent of them. First and foremost, his well-known distinction between the manifest and the scientific image of man-in-the world and his prioritizing of the scientific image in ontological respects would not make sense without it. The distinction is put forward in *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* (PSIM). Here, Sellars claims that the philosopher in today’s world is confronted with the task of resolving the conflict between two wholesale conceptualizations of the world: the manifest image and the scientific image. The manifest image is limited to what is observable and it has an existential dimension: it is the conceptualization of the world in which, in Sellars’s words, “man first encountered himself” (PSIM, 6). In terms of the manifest image, human beings first conceptualized themselves as persons, as responsible actors, which, on its turn, is a presupposition of counting as concept-user (this is why

¹³ “Thing” is meant in a wide scope, i.e. it also comprises relations and structures in order not to exclude structural realism.

Sellars speaks of the emergence of the manifest image as a paradoxical or holistic event – at least it seems like that from the standpoint of the manifest image). The scientific image postulates unobservable entities to explain phenomena which cannot be explained in terms of the manifest image (among them is the question how our conceptual systems relate to the world, PSIM 17). Both images purport to be the whole truth about the world, but they cannot be easily united into a unified grasp of the world: it is not the case that one image can be simply converted into the other or reduced to the other. In some respect then, there is a clash between the images. For Sellars, this clash makes itself manifest in the problem of sensible qualities: these are what Sellars calls ultimately homogenous, i.e. any and even the smallest part of a colored entity is itself colored, and this is something which the scientific image with its ontology based on micro-particles none of which is colored cannot accommodate. In a second sense, the clash extends to our manifest image concept of persons as responsible actors which does not have any counterpart in the scientific image but cannot be simply sacrificed.

What is important to us here, however, is that in matters of ontology Sellars gives primacy to the scientific image. That is, as he expresses in an often-cited passage, “science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.” (EPM, §41). But the claim that the scientific image is ontologically primary seems to make sense only if we assume that ontological primacy consists in a better ability to capture an independent world. If we understood the world as dependent on human mind, language or practice, the manifest image and the scientific image would be two different languages or sets of practices, each “constructing” a world. It is hard to see how Sellars’s claim that the two images clash could be justified without assuming that, in the end, they target one and the same independent world.

Also, Sellars frequently insists during *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* that manifest image entities are mere appearances.¹⁴ Such a characterization does not make sense without the assumption that there are things which are real in the sense of not

¹⁴ However, he puts “appearance” mostly in quotation marks when he says this, as here:

the “appearance” which is the manifest world. (PSIM, 36)

This may indicate different things: a merely guarded endorsement by Sellars of the Kantian distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves (as I argue in chapter 3.2), perhaps a cautious position on what “being mere appearance” means for the existence and non-existence of manifest image objects, or both.

being mere appearance, i.e., of not being dependent on human sensory and conceptual capacities. The distinction between the manifest and the scientific image also brings out the exclusive element in Sellars's scientific realism: scientific theories do not only describe the world, but they are the only adequate description of the world.

One of the controversial points about Sellars's realism is this exclusive element. The mere claim that theoretical vocabulary is apt to describe the world, that its terms refer or that we should regard the entities postulated by the theory as existing is not necessarily disputable for the pragmatist. But for Sellars, the vocabulary of completed science is ultimately the only one to generate true descriptive sentences about the world while other *prima facie* successful descriptive vocabularies, i.e. our everyday way of describing the world, are to be abandoned as false. This can be expressed in the form of a double claim made by Sellars about the manifest and the scientific image:

The conflict-thesis: There is a clash between the manifest and the scientific image, at least concerning the description of the world. Both aspire to be complete, i.e. the "whole truth" about man and the world but they cannot both be so (PSIM, 4).

The scientism-thesis: The scientific image is superior to the manifest image in matters of describing the world (PSIM, 27).

In the conflict-thesis, Sellars's realism as such is epitomized: there is only one vocabulary which exclusively captures what the world is really like (however that phrase should be understood). The scientism-thesis expresses why Sellars's realism is a scientific realism: it holds this ultimate vocabulary to be the vocabulary of an imaginary, completed science.

Of the two claims presented above, pragmatist readers of Sellars characteristically reject the first and therefore mostly do not bother with the second one at all. They usually do not try to defend the ambitions of our commonsense ways against those of the scientific way of describing the world. Rather, they claim that the whole idea of a "clash" between these two, and other, ways of describing the world is flawed. We will see this, for example, in the case of Robert Brandom discussed in the next chapter.

Sellars's distinction between the manifest and the scientific image engenders many

questions:

Do terms in the scientific vocabulary refer to the same objects as commonsense vocabulary?

What is the relationship between commonsense and scientific descriptive terms (synonymy, identity, reduction, simple replacement etc.)?

How can we understand the notion of greater “adequacy” of conceptual frameworks?

Sellars himself does not give exhaustive answers to them. We certainly cannot expect that, according to him, there is only one relation between commonsense and scientific objects which holds in all cases. In some cases, this relation may be reducibility, but certainly not in all. In many cases, to understand what a certain commonsense object is, especially in the case of intentionally designed artifacts, we will have to work with normative and functional vocabulary. This is emphasized by deVries (see SRIL, n. 24; deVries 2005, 274; see also chapter 3.2). According to Sellars, these types of statements are not reducible to the descriptive statements neither of science nor of common sense, simply because the question whether they are so reducible is wrong-headed. Someone who asks this question overlooks that normative, functional discourse (as well as some other types of discourse) are not to be assimilated to descriptive discourse, that the work done by the former is different from the work done by the latter (see e.g. CDCM, §79).

The relation between commonsense and scientific vocabulary which Sellars highlights most is that of reconceptualization: commonsense objects are reconceptualized in scientific descriptive terms in the scientific image. Thus, if we claim that commonsense objects do not exist we either mean that they do not exist as conceptualized according to common sense or that they do not have any scientific successor concept. But, provided they have such a scientific successor concept, they may be said to exist as conceived by science. I will return to this in chapter 3.1. Because of this key role played by reconceptualization, Sellars’s scientific realism is not reductive in a straightforward sense. Rather, it exhibits some characteristics of an eliminative approach claiming that the ultimate scientific account of things shows that commonsense objects do not exist (LT, §52), however, not without many qualifications as to how we should understand this claim.

Sellars's distinction between the manifest image and the scientific image is convenient for highlighting some aspects of Sellars's realism. However, in my own account, I will leave this theme in his thought mostly to a side. This is because the distinction between the two images is good at concisely capturing and making attractive a certain philosophical program but it is not as good as a tool for carrying through this program. When it comes to implementing this philosophical program, we find a much subtler account in Sellars than the rather crude distinction between the manifest and the scientific image would allow for. Therefore, I will not return to the distinction, save when discussing other authors who make use of it (i.e. Brandom and deVries in the next chapter).

An ultimate conceptual scheme

Sellars's realism consists in the claim that the conceptual scheme built by science in the process of its own completion would be adequate, in some meaning of the term, to an independently existing world (and that this would be the only ultimately adequate conceptual scheme). This idea of adequacy to an independent world captures the realist requirement for an external constraint on true linguistic expressions. Still, the term "adequacy" can be understood in several different ways. We could conceive adequacy as a special type of world-language relations, one of "fitting", "matching" or "corresponding". One of my main contentions will be that in order to make sense of Sellars's scientific realism as a part of his overall system, we must not read adequacy in this way but give it a different reading.

What is uncontroversial is that for Sellars not any conceptual scheme could be ultimately adequate, but only an imaginary final, ideal scheme. It is final in the sense in which Charles Sanders Peirce introduced this idea: as the outcome or ideal endpoint of an ongoing ideal process of inquiry. Sellars endorses the basic lines of this idea:

the concepts of "ideal truth" and "what really exists" are defined in terms of a Peircean conceptual structure (SM, ch. V §75).

This Peircean conceptual scheme (Sellars often calls it "Peirceish" or short "CSP") is the conceptual scheme of an ideal scientific community at the imagined end of scientific inquiry. For Peirce, reality is what a community would finally settle on "in the long run". More precisely, not *a* community but rather *the* community for Peirce's final community is not to be conceived as any empirical community, not even a potentially existing

advanced future empirical community, but rather as the imagined community of all rational and perfectly informed beings. Membership in this community is “granted” not on the basis of biological, social or similar considerations but on the ground of someone’s being a rational and informed being (Peirce calls it a “communion of minds”, Peirce 1871/1992, 90).¹⁵ Thus, membership is neither bound to being human nor to being a scientist but it is bound to having the capacities of a rational being.

Still, there needs to be something which distinguishes this ideal, ultimate conceptual scheme from all the other “less adequate” conceptual schemes, be this difference a qualitative or a gradual one. Here, there is a divergence in Peirce and Sellars: At least in Peirce’s earlier writings, the move from our actually existing imperfect conceptual systems, statements of natural laws and the like to an imagined limit of perfection is identical to progress in inductive reasoning: the ongoing confrontation with new cases allows us to refine our laws and to get to a more and more adequate statistical form of these laws (Peirce 1869/1992).

By contrast, we do not arrive at Sellars’s ultimate conceptual scheme only by induction¹⁶ but by the postulation of new entities which we did not speak about before and whose postulation offers us the best explanation of the phenomena that we observe (LE, §42). The laws embodied in the conceptual schemes created by postulation are not mere statistical refinements of the laws we accepted before. They are the basis of a whole new conceptual structure in which the objects of the former structure appear only as they are

¹⁵ This ideal state of possessing all-encompassing factual information and explanatory capacities as well as perfectly rational reasoning could, of course, be in principle embodied in an actually existing community, but it need not, and neither Peirce nor Sellars take their arguments to depend on this actualization (see SM, ch. V §75 and Peirce 1871/1992, 91).

¹⁶ Actually, this point needs some qualifications due to the possible different senses of the term “inductive reasoning”. We might understand this kind of reasoning in opposition to hypothetical-deductive reasoning in a classical Popperian sense (see Popper 2002). If we look at Sellars’s account of inductive reasoning, however, (especially IV, NDL, also OAFP) we see that he draws no neat line between inductive and postulational reasoning in the way it was traditionally drawn. In *Induction as Vindication* (IV), Sellars is concerned with probability arguments, i.e., with what are generally called inductive arguments. Under this heading, he includes not only arguments on numerical ratios and the acceptance of universal empirical generalizations (“inductive laws”), i.e., what is ordinarily seen as inductive reasoning, but also the “probability” of theories. What is more, Sellars shows how the same general structure of reasoning stands behind probability arguments on each of these three levels, that is both behind what would traditionally be called induction and what would traditionally be called postulation, abduction etc. This is not to say that there is no difference at all between induction and abduction for Sellars. But on his account, the difference is simply not a salient one any more, the two processes are just two subtypes of one general type of reasoning. Thus, when I say that we should not conceive Sellars’s limit to which science gradually approaches in terms of ongoing induction, I have in mind induction as it is classically understood (and as Peirce understood it).

reconceived in the light of this new conceptual structure.¹⁷

How, then, does Sellars conceive of the limit that science at least purportedly approaches to? There are two lines which usually have been followed to answer this question. The first is based on the theme of explanation already mentioned. The limit which science approaches would be one of absolute explanatory completeness. This is a theme which Jay Rosenberg, one of the most prolific interpreters of Sellars's work, draws on heavily (see chapter 3.3), and also, though critically, Bas van Fraassen (see, e.g., van Fraassen 1980 and van Fraassen 1976). Absolute explanatory coherence would be a state where for every obtaining state of affairs we have a good, relevant answer to the question why this state of affairs obtains.¹⁸ The process of approaching the ideal limit of inquiry would be one where we develop more and more coherent and more and more powerful explanations.

Sellars does not explicitly claim that his ultimate conceptual scheme would be one of absolute explanatory completeness. But there are several remarks which could be used to justify that he held some such view. Sellars often claims that the aim of accepting new law-like statements is to be in a position to explain observations already made:

the end-in-view, E, in the case of the acceptance of law-like statements is the state of being in a position to draw inferences concerning new cases, in a way which explains the observed cases. (OAFP, §35)

He also links the growth of explanatory strength to the notion of improvement and progress when he writes that

the descriptive and the explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand; and to abandon the search for explanation is to abandon the attempt to improve language, period. (CDCM, §108)

Finally, we can also find remarks to the effect that a conceptual system with more

¹⁷ Feyerabend makes a similar point in Feyerabend 1974, ch. 15.

¹⁸ I do not think that a Sellarsian state of explanatory completeness requires that we be able to answer similar questions for law-like statements themselves, e.g. why the laws of thermodynamics hold. For Sellars, the target of our explanations are concrete states of affairs (LT, §41), and, at most, only indirectly and secondarily generalizations and law-like statements. Van Fraassen objects to Sellars's scientific realism that it generates a never-ending need of explanation as we will have to explain why our scientific laws hold, then why the explanations of these laws hold, etc. (van Fraassen 1980). But Sellars never claims that laws themselves need explanation, only particular states of affairs do.

explanatory power has a greater claim to describe the world as it is:

Today we are in a better position to distinguish between the conceptual framework of which nature was the cause, and the freely elaborate conceptual frameworks with which we now challenge nature. It is the greater explanatory power of the latter which stands behind the claim that things as they are in themselves are things as ideal science would find them to be. (MP, §61)

Taken together, these remarks give enough warrant to the idea that Sellars would characterize the ultimate conceptual scheme in terms of absolute explanatory power and coherence. Note, however, that Sellars never explicitly addresses the process of approximation to the ultimate conceptual scheme in terms of growing explanatory power. This is what Rosenberg (see chapter 3.3) tries to do after him, but it is doubtful whether Sellars himself would have envisaged such an account.

The second way to capture what Sellars means by a limit to which science approaches is based on Sellars's picture theory of language, or short "picturing". According to Sellars, any linguistic expression has a "Janus-faced character" (NAO, ch.5 §64), i.e., it can be considered under two different aspects: as something subject to the rules of our language which has meaning or as a complex material object or event involved in causal relations (such as tokens of sound patterns, of patterns of ink marks and other such patterns – ones and zeros in binary code and possibly also patterns of neural activity). Sellars calls these latter "natural-linguistic objects". Picturing is a causal projection relation that holds between objects in the world¹⁹ and natural-linguistic objects. The two systems related by the picturing relation, the system of natural linguistic objects and the system of natural objects, stand in a relation of isomorphism (TC, 51). Sellars often compares these linguistic pictures to maps of the environment of the language-user (see for example BBK or NAO, ch. 5 §50 ff.).

Sellars claims that picturing is a fundamental process in any representational system including human languages. However, it is hard to illustrate it for the case of human languages. If I picture the world correctly in accordance with the rules of my language, any time I am confronted with an object *a* which is red, I produce an utterance of "*a* is

¹⁹ To say that what is pictured by natural-linguistic objects are objects in the world is not to say that the natural-linguistic objects themselves could not be pictured by other natural-linguistic objects and so forth. This means that the picture of a simple structural isomorphism between objects or events in the world and occurrences of natural linguistic objects is too unsophisticated.

red.”²⁰ But it is clear that we do not behave in this way. We do not openly comment on any feature of our environment while navigating through it. But Sellars’s claim is that even if there is no such overtly observable process, this “commenting” in an extended sense happens mentally (and ultimately in the form of neural events).

Still, Sellars employs a number of non-human illustrations of picturing, mostly of machines or machine-like intelligences. In *Being and Being Known*, he asks us to imagine a robot moving through its environment and recording sentences about the object in its environment and their spatial and temporal coordinates. He writes:

it makes perfectly good sense to say that as the robot moves around the world the record on the tape contains an ever more complete and perfect map of its environment. In other words, the robot comes to contain an increasingly adequate and detailed picture of its environment in a sense of ‘picture’ which is to be explicated in terms of the logic of relations. (BBK, §40, Sellars’s emphasis)

The robot example helps us to understand what is meant by picturing: it is a process which results in a structure that reflects features of its environment and this result is achieved by causal projection (here from environmental features to the robot’s recording tape).

According to Sellars, neither moral, mathematical or modal expressions nor expressions for abstract entities picture. Rather, picturing is the task of basic *empirical* statements, thus statements of the logical form $f(a)$, where “ f ” is a variable for empirical properties and “ a ” the name of a concrete, particular object.²¹ It is not completely clear what the term “basic” in “basic empirical statements” means. Sellars is quite explicit that a basic picturing statement is not necessarily an observation statement:

[a sufficiently abstract transcendental philosophy] will not assume that the basic constituents of conceptual pictures must be statements of the kind which occur as conceptual responses to sensory stimulation. (SM, ch. V §92)

Picturing statements rather seem to be basic in a logical sense for Sellars, regardless whether they are used in direct observation. Possibly, Sellars is close here to the early

²⁰ This utterance may be a non-inferential reaction to the object but it need not be. It may also be inferred from other statements.

²¹ Another form these basic empirical statements can take for Sellars is a name concatenated with a definite description (see SM, ch. V §26).

Wittgenstein's logical notion of an elementary sentence. In some of his expositions of picturing (see especially TC), Sellars relies heavily on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and its picture-theory, although he criticizes the way in which Wittgenstein conceived its details (Sellars thinks that Wittgenstein understood this relation too much in terms of a meaning relation between language and world – a relation which, for him, is fictitious – while he should have understood it purely causally, see TC, compare Wittgenstein 2001, 2.19; 2.221; 4.014; 4.0141).

Sellars claims that the final, Peircean conceptual framework of completed science would allow its users to form “ideally adequate” pictures of the world (SM, ch. V §69). Thus, progress in science towards its ideal end is connected to the growing pictorial adequacy of the successive conceptual frameworks. Pragmatist readers of Sellars (e.g., Rorty 1988) often have worries about the idea of an ultimate conceptual framework generating “perfect pictures” of the world. They claim that if picturing is to give us a measure of the extent to which a conceptual framework “captures reality”, a measure which is independent of any conceptual framework that we already use or could use (thus, a neutral criterion of evaluation), the idea is idle because we cannot understand what such a framework-independent point of view should be. Picturing is therefore one of the key places in Sellars's thought where the pragmatist and the realist spirit of his philosophy seem to part ways.

Scientific realism

Sellars's realism is a scientific realism. Its core claim is that “to have good reason for holding a theory is ipso facto to have good reason for holding that the entities postulated by the theory exist.” (PHM, 91). Thus, warrant for a theory in which things of kind *k* are postulated is at the same time warrant for statements of the form “There are *k*'s.”. As we have already seen, it is not only that we claim that such entities exist when we accept a scientific theory but we also ascribe a privilege to the ontologies of these theories over, for example, our commonsense ontologies. The question is what a good reason for theory acceptance is.

For Sellars, theoretical reasoning is tightly linked to practical reasoning. He highlights that accepting a theory is something we do, an action. Actions are brought about by intentions, i.e., linguistic events of the form “I will do A (in circumstances C).” or “I

shall do A (in circumstances C).” An argument which concludes in an intention is a practical argument. Characteristically for Sellars, reasoning on what theory to accept does not only involve theoretical arguments but also practical ones. The conclusion of the latter will be the intention to accept or not to accept a certain theory (see IV, sections III-V; OAFP). One premise of such an argument is the statement of a certain aim that we know can be achieved by the acceptance of theories with certain qualities. In *On Accepting First Principles*, Sellars introduces the practical argument for theory acceptance in this form:

We shall bring about E [an end].

Bringing about E implies accepting theories of such and such a character.

T [a certain theory] is of this character.

Therefore, we shall accept T. (OAFP, §19)

Thus, a “good reason” to accept a theory (which is, at the same time, a good reason to believe that the entities postulated by the theory exist) is that we pursue a certain aim and that the respective theory is such that it helps us to pursue this aim. The question of reality and of an ultimate description of the world is therefore bound up with practical thought.

Last but not least, it should be emphasized that Sellars’s scientific realism is not something loosely connected to the rest of his thought. For example, it plays a fundamental role in his philosophy of mind and his account of mental entities, i.e., of thoughts and sensations. In the narrative which Sellars calls “the myth of Jones” (EPM, sections XIV to XVI), concepts for mental entities as we use them are fictionally introduced as quasi-theoretical entities. The success of this imaginary theory of mental entities in explaining human utterances and human behavior in general constitutes, according to Sellars’s scientific realism, a good reason to suppose that the posited entities, thoughts and sensations, really exist.²² Without Sellars’s scientific realism, the myth of Jones would lack a decisive ingredient to make it work.

Scientific realism is also an important aspect in Sellars’s reading of Kant and his Kant-inspired theory of experience, a more worked out and integrated form of the mythical

²² Without committing oneself as to what category these entities will ultimately belong to. It is clear, however, that on Sellars’s account where existence means existence as a spatiotemporal item standing in causal relations, the bias against dualism is strong.

Jonesian proto-theory. For example, he postulates quasi-spatial and quasi-temporal sequences in order to explain our experience of space and of change in time (see, e.g. CLN or the appendix to SM). As to Kant himself, Sellars reads him as someone already departed towards a scientific realist outlook concerning our own, human being (Sellars's reading of Kant's treatment of the I, see, e.g., I, §26, or Sellars's reading of Kant's sensations as entities postulated in the Jonesian spirit, SRPC, § 42, see also CLN B.37, B.38 and B.44). According to Sellars, Kant's approach already contains the ingredients and motivations for scientific realism. The reason for that is that if we want to make Kant's account work we need to suppose cognitive access to some things-in-themselves, namely those connected to the working of our mind.

Thus, Sellars's scientific realism is not an isolated tenet. However, it is equally clear that in the case of the two examples mentioned above (the myth of Jones, Sellars's reading of Kant) it would be enough to hold that science, at least in its ideal form, describes the world or that entities postulated by it exist. It is not necessary that science provide the exclusive description of the world. Maybe it is possible to drop this latter tenet without doing harm to many other parts of Sellars's system, however I will try to show in the following chapters that at least some Sellarsian motivation for this radical view can be found.

2.2. Pragmatism in Sellars

Realism, though a broad type of philosophical position, is delineated by criteria of content, by what one has to hold, at least in outline, in order to count as a realist. In contrast to this, the label "pragmatism" came into being by certain authors self-ascribing it to their own position from the second half of the 19th century. These fathers of the label are in the first instance C. S. Peirce and, a little later, W. James and J. Dewey. Besides, there are authors like C. I. Lewis who are mentioned less frequently but also belong to the first wave of pragmatism in America. After pragmatism's eclipse in the middle of the 20th century, a new tide of authors claiming the label "pragmatism" or sometimes "neo-pragmatism" arrived during the second half of the 20th century, e.g. Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom or Huw Price. However, the label "pragmatism" was first wedded not to a clearly delineated position but to a set of authors who understood the label differently (e.g., Peirce being dissatisfied with how James used it). This has several consequences for how we handle

this term. If someone calls herself a realist, there only rarely is a quarrel about the question if she really has a claim to this label. When there is doubt on the issue, we can look to the core realist tenets and decide to what extent her position accords to them.

For pragmatism, the situation is different. It was born as a specific stance towards philosophical questions, not as a set of answers to them. James emphasized that pragmatism is a method, not a body of doctrines (James 1995, lec. 1). Still, after the re-appropriation of the label “pragmatism” was started by Putnam and Rorty it was sometimes claimed that they were not justified in doing so, that their type of position, “neopragmatism”, was untrue to its origins. This was backed up by the assertion that their positions did not agree with some of the theses of the founding fathers of pragmatism (e.g., with their emphasis on experience, Šíp 2008; or with their concept of truth, Haack 1995, 147). Thus, the criteria for identifying a pragmatist seemed to be connected to a certain historical position or set of positions formulated by concrete authors; they were not as depersonalized as those of realism.

Even if this situation has changed to some extent, pragmatism seems to be divided today into two camps, the “old” and the “new”, or “classical pragmatism” and “neopragmatism”. Again, both of these are closely connected with specific authors rather than with a depersonalized set of core claims, but there are efforts at changing this. There are attempts, especially by Rorty and Brandom, to incorporate thoughts of historical figures as well as contemporaries who never assigned the label “pragmatist” to themselves into an imagined pragmatist movement. This concerns Kant and Hegel in the case of Brandom (see Brandom 2002 and Brandom 2013) and Quine, Sellars and Davidson in the case of Rorty with some attempts to extend this to the continental tradition, e.g. to Gadamer and Heidegger (see especially Rorty 1979, where Rorty still calls pragmatism “methodological behaviorism”). Those efforts and the various critical reactions to them express attempts to detach pragmatism from its close connection to a certain set of authors and to characterize it by a class of core tenets.²³

Space does not allow me to give an overview of the broad range of contemporary pragmatists and their characterizations of pragmatism. What pragmatism comprises is contested, and different authors tend to put stress on different aspects of it. Still, we need

²³ These attempts are not only made by current pragmatists. James claimed the approach of the “English School” (the British empiricists), as well as that of Socrates and Aristotle, to be pragmatist, thus consciously importing them for pragmatism (see James 1995).

at least some idea of what a pragmatist position is about to get the pragmatist aspects of Sellars's work into clearer focus. What I shall do is offer a list of theses which have been called pragmatist by one or the other author appropriating the label for him- or herself.

Pragmatists usually emphasize that only those aspects of concepts and distinctions have importance which entail practical consequences, i.e., make a difference in practice. This theme runs like a red thread through the pragmatist tradition, right from the tradition's official beginnings in Peirce. One formulation of his pragmatist maxim is the following:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (Peirce 1878/1992, 132)

Thus, rather than seeking definitions or "essences" of concepts, especially philosophically contested concepts like truth, knowledge, meaning, reality, experience, and so on, a pragmatist enquires into their roles in the overall economy of our behavior, of our interactions with the world and with each other, roles which may also change over time. A pragmatist asks what difference it makes for us to have, for example, a concept of truth, what use we can put this concept to and what profit we gain by using it in this way. Thus, a pragmatist would typically not focus on questions like "What is the nature of x?" but rather ask "What is our concept of x good for?"

It is probably no mere coincidence that pragmatism's upsurge falls into the time of the first wave of the reception of Darwinian evolutionary theory in the second half of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, of the acceptance of the idea of natural selection and adaptation (even though, of course, the question by what process adaptations arise was still disputed at the time). An explanation of adaptations needs to take into account the environment, genealogy and functionality of a certain trait. This is very similar to the stance that James takes up towards truths (James 1995, lec. 6) and Peirce to belief and other concepts (Peirce 1877). In this spirit, what is distinct about pragmatism is its insistence that our behavior, including conceptual activity, is a natural phenomenon which must have "a point", e.g., helping to satisfy our needs or pursue our aims.

There are two moves pragmatists often make: the first is not to inquire into things but into our concepts of things. In contemporary pragmatism, this often takes the form of an inquiry into how we use the words which "express" the given concepts, compared to

classical pragmatism it puts much greater stress on linguistic behavior. The second move is not to see our inquiry into concepts as simply a substitute to the question “What is the nature of x?”. The pragmatist’s aim is not to answer this question by more convenient means, i.e., by an inquiry into language and concept use. Thus, the idea is not that “What is the nature of x?” is a question we cannot come by and that we therefore should revert to the more tractable question “How do we use the concept of x?” and then say that our use of the concept of x gives us at least some grip on the nature of x. Pragmatists mostly reject the underlying assumption of this idea: that there are semantic relations of matching, meaning, reference or representation between the concept of x and x’s that would allow for the reasoning described above.²⁴ Rather, a pragmatist would stop short after answering questions about the use or function of certain concepts and claim that all that is interesting about the concept of, say, truth, meaning, etc., is captured in a good answer to the question of how we fruitfully use such concepts. Asking further about the nature of the thing we refer to when we use the concept does not make much sense from this perspective.

With this comes a rejection to work with philosophical concepts which are preconceived in such a way that they are disconnected from our practice. One example is the notion of truth as something we could fail to detect even if we had perfectly well-working theories about the world which would fulfill all the criteria for being good theories. Such a concept of truth is predesigned to be disconnected from practice, and thus is neither intelligible nor interesting to be inquired into for a pragmatist.

The details of the pragmatist functional approach to certain concepts in itself may vary. If we stay with the concept of truth we find a number of different pragmatist accounts of its function: James with truth as an established process of mediating between experiences (James 1995, lec. 6), Peirce with truth as a norm that lets us consider what an ideal community would accept (Peirce 1868/1992, 52), Price with truth as “convenient friction” (Price 2003b), i.e. as a norm making disagreement and its resolution relevant to us, Sellars with truth as S-assertibility (see below), Rorty and his three functions of truth (Rorty 1986), Brandom with the “truth-predicate” as a prosentence-forming operator (Brandom 1994, 303-305), Davidson with his theory of truth giving us the underpinnings for interpretation, i.e. a theory of meaning (Davidson 2005, 75).²⁵ Despite this diversity,

²⁴ This is a view often expressed by Rorty and also Huw Price (see Macarthur, Price 2007, 97).

²⁵ In the case of truth, however, there is the claim (made for example by Sellars, see SRLG, §34, but also by Brandom 1994, 286) that the early pragmatists tended to take their way of approaching truth as capturing the nature of truth instead of just giving an account of how this concept works.

the general strategy is shared between the different authors and it is not the search for a definition of what truth is but for an account what the concept of truth is good for.

Sometimes, especially in the case of Rorty, pragmatism is delineated almost only negatively, i.e., in terms of what it wants to overcome. For Rorty, this is dualism, metaphysics, realism, the correspondence theory of truth, foundationalism, representationalism, epistemology and analytical philosophy as philosophical disciplines, etc., with the faint outline of a more creative, tolerant and humane age that could be reached in this way. But most other pragmatist authors attempt to construct positive alternative accounts in traditionally contested areas of philosophy.

Pragmatism puts into focus for what purpose and how concepts and language are used. But as language use is a social phenomenon, this draws attention to groups of language users. Often inquiry into a piece of behavior will not achieve much if it focuses only on the point of the behavior for me as an isolated individual, but it needs to take into account the point of the behavior for me as a member of a community. Hence pragmatism's accent on the notion of social interaction, social practice and community.

The concept of a community is a vague one. In everyday life, it is obvious that we are part of different, sometimes overlapping communities. Rights and duties following from the membership in these communities may be in mutual tension. At the same time, it is not clear for many communities how to delimit them and what the criteria for membership in them are. Does the community of English-speakers include only native speakers or also second-language speakers, advanced learners, beginners in English or three-year-old children learning English as a native language? The answer seems to be a matter of choice, not a matter of fact. One reaction to this problem is the idea that membership in a community is a matter of being accepted by the other members as a part of the community, as sharing the rights and duties coming with membership in the community. This acceptance may find expression in a certain legal status (e.g. citizenship in a certain state), but it need not.

The impossibility of pinning down an all-purpose criterion for delimiting and individuating specific communities does not mean that this concept is philosophically or scientifically useless. Our understanding of the notion of community is intuitively clear enough for us to use the concept. Nor does pragmatism need to involve anything like community essentialism or community realism (i.e., taking communities to be actually

existing abstract objects over and above their respective members). We can use the concept of community fruitfully while staying conscious of the fact that in the end we would have to unravel it into countless social encounters of individual actors which would not allow us to draw sharp boundaries at all.

In many pragmatists, we find the theme that “practice” comes first and “theory” piggy-bags on it. This means that our interactions with the world and each other are in the first place guided by our interests, needs, values and practical goals (dependent on the communities we belong to), rather than by inert theoretical ideals like absolute truth. Even better than as a primacy of practice over theory the point may be put as questioning the assumption that there is a useful distinction between “theory” and “practice”.

One of the disputed issues in the pragmatist camp is the role of linguistic analysis as a tool that helps us to come up with these functional accounts of entities. Some (such as Peirce, Brandom or Sellars) lean towards a normative or reconstructive approach towards language while others (Rorty, Price, Davidson and the late Wittgenstein as far as these latter two can be seen as pragmatists) tend towards an empirically oriented, more or less anthropological approach. This is only to state a tendency and not to say that the positions of the respective authors are always clear-cut on this matter. We could, for example, argue that Sellars started out at the beginning of his publishing career with a formal approach to language, but incorporated more and more empirical elements during his career (culminating in his late account of language as a special and highly developed type of animal representation system in MEV, one of the last of Sellars’s texts published during his lifetime, in 1981). Davidson, on the other hand, champions an empirical approach to language (e.g. Davidson 1973), but the theory of meaning falling out of this approach can be regarded as a formal, though highly versatile reconstruction of language (Davidson 1986, 438).

Sellars as a pragmatist – a pragmatist approach to concepts

In what sense is Sellars a pragmatist? According to Brandom, Sellars never openly endorsed pragmatism (Brandom 2015, 5). This is true if we regard an endorsement of pragmatism to be something like a self-avowal: Sellars never labeled himself a pragmatist. The labels he applies to himself are rather “materialist”, “scientific realist” or “naturalist”, i.e., he ascribes positions to himself that do not have any straightforward connection to

pragmatism. Additionally, he has some critical things to say about pragmatism (see NAO, 1; SLRG, §49; LRB §5).

Peter Olen even goes beyond these scattered critical remarks by Sellars to claim that Sellars was globally criticizing pragmatism, especially in the form of C. I. Lewis's conceptual pragmatism (Olen 2015). Olen's target is the historical thesis that Sellars is part of the pragmatist tradition. However, what Sellars criticizes in Lewis is not a distinct pragmatic trait but Lewis's inclination to empiricism. To equate this with a critique of pragmatism is to assume that Sellars took a pragmatist approach to be essentially wedded to empiricism, which is what Olen does. But it is not clear that Sellars did not discriminate between the radical empiricist elements in the classical pragmatists' position and some self-standing pragmatist core. As for Lewis, Sellars explicitly says that he endorses the pragmatist part of him but rejects the empiricist part:

This [Sellars's conception], I believe, is a pragmatic conception of the *a priori* akin to that developed under this heading by C. I. Lewis in his *Mind and the World Order*, though I should reject the phenomenalism in which he clothes his formulation. (P, 293-294)²⁶

In any case, I am not so much concerned here with the historical connection between the earlier and later pragmatists and Sellars than with the question if there is some pragmatist content to be found in Sellars regardless of whether he would accept the label "pragmatist" for himself or not.

One of Sellars's most straightforward critical remarks on pragmatism is to be found in the introduction to *Naturalism and Ontology*, where he sketches his historical connections to pragmatism and says that in his philosophical home (i.e., his father) pragmatism had a bad name for being "all method and no results" (NAO, 1), a remark directly echoing James's characterization of pragmatism in his *Pragmatism* lectures (James 1995). But more often than not, this and other such remarks by Sellars are followed by positive evaluations of some aspect of pragmatism. These concern, for example,

²⁶ In addition, there are others who attribute pragmatism to Sellars in a straightforward way. Jay Rosenberg writes, for example,

Sellars's philosophical orientation in general may be characterized as a sophisticated Kantianism tempered by the insights of an indigenous, especially Peircean, American pragmatism. (Rosenberg 1983, 417)

pragmatism's emphasis on the link between language and action (SLRG 49; SM V 32), Dewey's rejection of the given as well as his emphasis on intersubjectivity and community (NAO, 1; LRB, §25), or pragmatism's approach to mathematics (LRB, §4). We also have to be aware of the fact Sellars was writing his texts before the official resurrection of pragmatism at the hands of Rorty and Putnam. Thus, the simple fact that Sellars mentions pragmatism critically as well as positively already indicates his interest in pragmatist ideas.

When we look at Sellars's treatment of philosophically problematic concepts such as truth, knowledge, concepts for mental entities, modal concepts, moral concepts as well as metaphysical concepts (e.g. substance), we see a characteristic strategy of refusing to define them or to characterize the "entities" designated by them. That does not mean that Sellars leaves the concepts mentioned above unaccounted for. In most cases, he offers an account of how the given concept functions in the wider frame of our conceptual systems.

Sometimes, this functional understanding of problematic concepts is given in a quasi-genetical account. This is most obvious in the case of the Myth of Jones, where Sellars puts forward a fictitious explanation of the origin of mental concepts (see EPM, sec. XII-XVI). The proto-scientist Jones introduces concepts of inner, mental episodes (thoughts and sensations) into a linguistic community which lacked them before. These new concepts are characterized with the help of a model, i.e. concepts which are already used by the community and to which the new concepts are linked by analogy. In the case of thoughts, the model is overt linguistic utterances, in the case of sensation the model is physical replicas. The core of what the Myth of Jones is intended to tell us for example about our concept of thoughts is this: Our concept of a thought is the concept of something unobservable for other persons, going on "inside persons", which causes linguistic utterances, which has the same function in the overall scheme of thoughts which the utterance it causes has in overt language and which accounts for the fact that we behave intelligently even at times when we do not utter anything (see EPM sec. XV or SRTT, §59/SM, ch. III §69). Sellars's myth does not answer the question "What are thoughts?" but it rather addresses the question "How does our concept of thought work, how is it connected to other concepts we use and why is it useful?"²⁷

²⁷ One could object that Jones, Sellars's proto-scientist, takes himself to address the question "What are thoughts?" for Jones postulates thoughts as existing events and ascribes properties to them. Thus Sellars's Myth of Jones may seem to be intended to answer the question what mental episodes are, in spite of what I have claimed. But it is important not to identify Sellars with Jones. Jones is a scientist and Sellars is a philosopher. As a philosopher, Sellars uses his fiction about a scientist postulating mental

In the case of alethic modal, normative and semantic concepts, Brandom has argued that Sellars accounts for them as metalinguistic pragmatic concepts (Brandom 2015, Brandom 2008), that is, in his words, concepts which can be elaborated from basic empirical descriptive discourse and do not add to the empirical vocabulary of a language. At the same time, they explicate the use of this basic empirical vocabulary. Modal vocabulary, for example, is used to make explicit material inferential relationships²⁸ between sentences (not only) in this basic descriptive vocabulary. It conveys information about what sentences may be inferred from what others. Therefore, it lays open features of the correct use of linguistic expressions and is, from this perspective, pragmatic.

The point of using alethic modal vocabulary and of making explicit certain pragmatic features of our basic descriptive vocabulary lies in tracing more effectively, what can be inferred from what. Having a way of speaking about the inferential relationships in a language gives us room to wield very complex conceptual structures and to manipulate purposefully with those relationships. We may thus purposefully change the way in which we use empirical descriptive vocabulary (e.g., for it to have greater predictive success). Imagine a conceptual scheme where the alethic modal statement “Whales are (necessarily) fish.” was adopted and thus the inference from “This is a whale.” to “This is a fish.” was valid. However, observations that whales bear their offspring alive and breathe oxygen lead to considerations to drop the adopted modal statement and adopt a new one, namely “Whales are (necessarily) mammals.” In the use of empirical descriptions, this is reflected in the fact that now the inference above is not accepted as valid anymore, whereas the inference from “This is a whale.” to “This is a mammal.” is valid, with all the implications that the whale’s being a mammal will have for our further expectations as to its behavior. Thus, one practically relevant point of having alethic modal vocabulary is to effectively control and change our conceptual system in order to adapt ourselves to our surroundings.

episodes to illustrate how our concepts of these episodes work, not in order to give his own “scientific” explanation of what thoughts are.

²⁸ A material inference is an inference where non-logical vocabulary has an irreplaceable role. The inference from “It rains” and “If it rains, the streets are wet.” to “The streets are wet.” is a formal inference: everything that is important in getting from the premises to the conclusion is contributed by the logical vocabulary, the non-logical vocabulary could be exchanged arbitrarily without this affecting the soundness of the inference. In contrast, the inference from “It rains.” to “The streets are wet.” is a material inference, as well as, e.g., the inference from “Lightening now.” to “Thunder shortly.”, or from “This tomato is red.” to “This tomato is ripe.”. Sellars claims that material inferences are not mere abbreviated formal inferences but are substantial for our having a language (see IM).

Science, in speaking about natural laws or other lawful connections, speaks about modal sentences and Sellars often calls science a way of rationally changing our conceptual systems:

[...] from the standpoint of the anthropologist, science consists exactly in the attempt to develop a system of rule-governed behavior which will adjust the human organism to the environment. (LRB, §38)

These are the outlines of an explanation of what makes modal discourse useful to us. And the leading question in this account of alethic modal discourse is not “What is necessity?” or “How can the word ‘necessary’ be defined?” but “What do we do when we use a statement containing the expression ‘necessarily’?”. Thus, apart from other things I will mention shortly, there are elements in Sellars’s general philosophical strategy which parallel a pragmatist approach.

A pragmatist treatment of truth

What is most interesting for the topic of my text is Sellars’s treatment of the concepts of truth, existence and reality. I will focus on the concept of truth here for that is where Sellars’s account is most detailed (I will return to the concepts of existence and reality in chapter 4).

Sellars’s way of treating truth is sometimes characterized as a two-fold approach, claiming that for Sellars there are two concepts of truth, i.e. truth as semantic assertibility (S-assertibility) and truth as picturing. Truth as picturing is the notion of a correct projection from objects in the world into natural-linguistic objects as described in the last subchapter. In contrast, a sentence is semantically assertible if it is correct to assert the sentence according to the rules of our language. If someone claimed, for example, that the sentence “Grass is green.” is true, he would be claiming that according to the rules of our language (explicitly formulated and implicit) this sentence may be correctly asserted.

Saying that truth is assertibility according to the rules of language presupposes that we can understand language as a rule-governed system or process. On the one hand, this is an attractive idea, as rules of language in all kinds and variants are ubiquitous. On the other hand, the idea that language is first and foremost a rule-governed system leads to paradoxes as to how language can be learned (as understanding a rule presupposes

linguistic abilities) or as to how a rule can be understood even by mature speakers (as we always need another rule determining how the first rule is to be understood).

Sellars wants to adopt the idea that language is rule-governed while circumventing these difficulties. The details of his solution are not central for my topic (see, e.g., SRLG; MFC; LTC). However, in order to handle these problems, he introduces a distinction between ought-to-do rules and ought-to-be rules which I will rely on later. Ought-to-do rules are rules of action of the form “S ought to do A in circumstances C.”, e.g. “I ought to brush my teeth every evening.”. To act in accordance with an ought-to-do rule presupposes that one can understand the rule. Ought-to-be rules, however, do not presuppose this. They express what ought to be the case. Sellars’s example is

Clock chimes ought to strike on the quarter hour. (LTC, sec. II)

Clock chimes cannot possibly understand the rule in question, but still their behavior can accord with it or not. Their behavior can be evaluated as in accordance to the rule or not because there are actors with a genuine grasp of rules who follow an associated ought-to-do rule (“One ought to bring it about that clock chimes strike on the quarter hour.”). The solution to some of the puzzles connected to language as a rule-governed activity is to see language-learners, i.e. children, as sophisticated clocks and mature speakers, their “trainers”, as those who bring it about that the language-learners conform to the ought-to-be rules of the language until they finally achieve a level of sophistication where they are prepared to grasp the connected ought-to-do rules themselves (MFC, 422-423).

Let us return to Sellars’s account of truth and the question how many and what concepts of truth Sellars employs. The reading that Sellars has two concepts of truth can be attacked, as I will try to show. However, it is fair to say that this reading gains some support by Sellars’s way of handling the question of truth in *Science and Metaphysics* (SM, especially ch. IV and V), when he speaks for example of

the difference between the *primary* concept of factual truth (truth as correct picture), which makes intelligible all the other modes of factual truth, and the *generic* concept of truth as S-assertibility (SM, ch. V §9; Sellars’s emphasis).

This seems to indicate a dualistic understanding of truth: one in which a true sentence is a correct picture of objects in the world, and another in which a true sentence is one which

is correctly assertible according to the rules of our language.

This reading cannot be right for several reasons. First and most importantly, Sellars does not speak of two concepts of truth standing side by side or operating at the same level. Instead, he calls S-assertibility the generic concept of truth and picturing a special case of this generic understanding of truth. That is, a sentence true as a picture of objects will also be a sentence true on the ground of its semantic assertibility in a language in which it is a true picture. Now, it would not make sense to speak of a generic concept of truth which has only one special type falling under it. In this case, we could make do with only one concept of truth. Rather, Sellars claims that there is a number of more specialized notions of truth, specialized to specific types of statements:

[...] the concept of truth as S-assertibility is universal in its scope, applying to propositions of the most divergent types. On the other hand, as a generic concept it takes specific forms which are functions of the semantical rules which govern these different types of propositions. (SM, ch. V §1)

[...] the varieties of truth correspond to the relevant varieties of semantical rule. (SM, ch. IV §26)

“truth applies to philosophical statements; it applies to ethical statements; it applies to mathematical statements” (KPT 12, 42)

He also mentions other specializations of semantic assertibility for logical and mathematical propositions as well as for practical discourse: provability (SM, ch. IV §62) and categorical validity (SM, ch. VII §112). Therefore, it would be wrong to say that Sellars countenances two notions of truth.²⁹

The two-notions-of-truth reading is helped by the fact that of all the specialized notions of truth Sellars almost exclusively discusses picturing. The reason for this may be simply that after having introduced a generic notion of truth that applies to any type of statement, Sellars needs to provide a means of singling out empirical truth, i.e., he needs to make clear how true empirical statements differ from, for example, true moral

²⁹ He entertains a double notion of the correspondence aspects of truth (correspondence in the deflationary sense and correspondence as pictorial isomorphism, see BBK, §32). But here we do not have the case of one generic notion of correspondence and one specialization of this generic notion. Rather we have two different intuitions of what correspondence means which are run together, according to Sellars, in the traditional correspondence theories of truth.

statements or true mathematical statements. This is necessary to defend his scientific realism, for he needs to claim that the basic empirical statements of science (which tell us something about the real world) are true in a way different from, e.g., mathematical statements (which do not describe the real world).

It is obvious that Sellars's generic understanding of truth, i.e. truth as semantic assertibility, has affinities to pragmatism. It echoes accounts of truth as warranted assertion or warranted belief which can be found in some classical pragmatists as well as in some neopragmatists (e.g. in Rorty). But we also cannot simply proclaim Sellars's treatment of truth as pragmatist on these grounds. Sellars is very clear that he does not have an epistemized account of truth in mind, i.e., an account of truth based on what we do or can know:

Obviously "true" does not mean the same as either "known to be true" or "probably true". Thus "correctly assertible" does not mean the same as "assertible with good reason or warrant". Semantic and epistemic oughts must be handled with the same care as that involved in distinguishing (and relating) the various senses in which an action can be said to be morally suitable. (NAO, ch. 4, §95)

For Sellars, the notion of assertibility salient to truth is not the notion of warranted or justified assertibility. We are not speaking of the idea of an assertion which can be defended or justified face to face with a critical audience (as does Rorty) but of the idea of an assertion which ought to be made according to the semantic rules of a language (or is not prohibited by the rules). That a statement is assertible in this sense does not imply that the speaker can defend his statement (even though this might be necessary for the speaker's knowing what the statement says).

However, we close in on what is pragmatist in Sellars's account of truth when we follow up by a question which he poses himself:

The explication of truth as S-assertibility raises the question: assertible by whom? (SM, ch. V §48)

Sellars proposes a tentative, but in his view superficial answer according to which a true statement is semantically assertible by users of the respective language. Then he goes on to claim that

the more penetrating answer is: S-assertible by *us*. For truth in the “absolute” sense is, *in its own way*, language relative, relative to *our* language. (SM, ch. V §48; Sellars’s emphasis)

This reference to “us”, “our community”, “our language” (and not “a community”, “a language”, etc.) is characteristic for Sellars and indicates two aspects close to pragmatism: First it emphasizes the role of a certain concept, here the concept of truth, as part of a socially shared process. Second, it does not do so from a detached standpoint, but from an involved one, i.e., from the standpoint of the user of a certain language who understands himself as the member of a community (as one of “us”).

Before I go deeper into the question of how to understand this second claim, I would like to make some critical remarks. There is an aspect of Sellars’s writing about truth which is not especially happy and that I would like to ascribe minor importance to (in the light of other, happier things that Sellars says, of course). Pragmatism views philosophically puzzling concepts in an anthropological and functional light and claims that there is no further interesting analysis beyond such an approach. Sellars’s treatment of truth is very much in line with this. However, in some places he writes as if he was giving an analysis of the concept of truth. For example, he occasionally talks about “truth as S-assertibility” (e.g. SM, ch. V §1). This way of expressing himself has two drawbacks: First, it insinuates that Sellars has, in his view, finally hit on what property of a sentence truth really is, namely semantic assertibility. Second, as has often been claimed, truth cannot be defined as, analyzed as or identified with “mere” assertibility, semantic or other (e.g. Putnam 1990; Habermas 2000, 41) because these two concepts work in different ways. For many statements, it makes sense to ask: “This statement is assertible by the rules of my language, but is it true?”³⁰ Thus, truth cannot be straightforwardly defined as semantic assertibility.

Reading Sellars in this way as defining truth as semantic assertibility would have unfavorable consequences. First, it would not fit into the pragmatist attitude which I would

³⁰ That does not mean that we always take up this critical stance towards our own utterances. As for example Dreyfus and Taylor emphasize in their recent book *Retrieving Realism* (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015), such a critical stance builds on our precritical being in and understanding the world. When we operate on this uncritical level, we supposedly do not distinguish between what is assertible and what is true. But this does not exclude that we have the capability to take up a critical stance towards any sentence which is semantically assertible by our language in circumstances where this is appropriate (see also Habermas 2000 and chapter 4.3).

like to claim Sellars takes up towards concepts such as truth, knowledge, reality or existence. Second, if Sellars attempted to define the concept of truth as assertibility and given the fact that such a definition would not be sufficient, we could be led to the idea that the function of the second notion explicitly introduced by Sellars in connection with truth, i.e. picturing, is to prop up the insufficient definition of truth as S-assertibility. As a result, we would come to see Sellars's concept of empirical truth as "made up" of two components, or stages or phases – S-assertibility and picturing.³¹ We might want to understand the role of picturing as adding to the concept of S-assertibility what the latter lacks to capture precisely the absolute, neutral and timeless character of our commonsense concept of truth, a character expressed in the question: "This statement is assertible by the rules of my language, but is it true?". This conception of the role of picturing will then be open to all the attacks launched against it from pragmatist quarters (see Rorty 1988, and next subchapter).

Ineliminable users

In my eyes, it is a mistake to think that Sellars attempts to give a definition of truth. He says things which indicate that he does not aim at such a definition. There is a partly dismissive, partly endorsing remark on classical American pragmatism where he states that

[...] Pragmatism, with its stress on language (or the conceptual) as an instrument, has had hold of a most important insight—an insight, however, which *the pragmatist has tended to misconceive as an analysis of "means" and "is true"*. For it is a category mistake (in Ryle's useful terminology) to offer a definition of "S means p" or "S is true" in terms of the role of S as an instrument in problem solving behaviour. (SLRG, §49; my emphasis)

This passage can be read in two different ways. First, Sellars could express his qualms with a certain kind of attempt to define the concept of truth, (i.e. the classical pragmatist one which, in Sellars's eyes, defined truth in terms of the usefulness of the sentence claimed to be true) but not with the endeavor as such to give a definition or analysis of the

³¹ I think this is how Danielle Macbeth understands Sellars and then criticizes him for failing to capture the concept of empirical truth, Macbeth 2000, 114, for a similar approach to Sellars see also Rottschaefter 1978).

concept of truth. Second, Sellars may insinuate that we should reject *any* attempts to define the concepts of truth and meaning. As Sellars calls the pragmatist approach to language insightful and only its status misconceived, this second option cannot be excluded.

To get more clarity into this question, let us first look at Sellars's treatment of the second concept mentioned in the passage above, i.e., meaning. Even though the concept of meaning is not in the main focus of my text, it is worth having a short look at it as Sellars's account of meaning is more detailed than his account of truth (for some of his many expositions of it see MFC; NAO, ch. 4; AE, sec. II-III; SRTT/SM, ch. III). Sellars's approach to meaning is quite well known, so I will limit myself just to some essential remarks.

Sellars's standard strategy in giving an account of meaning statements begins with translation. This is because the main target of Sellars's account are relational understandings of meaning according to which statements like "Rot' means red." assert that there is a relation between a linguistic expression ("rot") and something else (an abstract entity, another linguistic expression etc.). In the case of translation, the temptation to introduce abstract entities and a meaning relation is big, for they are a convenient explanation of why two expressions in different languages are translatable into one another, i.e. have the same meaning. On such a relational view, this would be explained by the fact that both expressions refer to the same entity, in this case, for example, the abstract entity redness.

Sellars asks what we can make of sentences like

"Rot" (in German) means red.

How should we understand the "red" on the right side of the statement? Does it refer to an abstract entity (redness) to which both the German "rot" and the English "red" relate in the same way? Does the "red" just refer to an English expression? Why doesn't it occur in quotation marks, then? And if it occurred in quotation marks how would we translate the whole meaning statement into a different language without encountering new problems?³² Guided by these questions, Sellars finally transforms the meaning statement

³² If we took the statement to have the form

"Rot" means "red".

we could not translate the statement conveniently into a third language. In French, the translation of the

into

“Rot”s (in German) are •red•s.

The dot-quoted expression on the right side is an illustrating metalinguistic functional sortal. It classes together expressions of any design in any language which have a relevantly similar role to the role of sign designs illustrated by the design between the dot-quotes, in this case “red”, in the language of the user of the meaning statement. The point of making a meaning statement is to remind myself or my interlocuters of the use of an expression I or they already know, and to say that another expression has the same or at least highly similar use.

Now, we could ask whether the sentence we arrived at (“Rot”s (in German) are •red•s.) is an analysis of the initial meaning statement that “rot” in German means red. In order for it to be so, the following material equivalence would need to hold, as the truth conditions for the sentence analyzed and the result of the analysis need to be the same:

“Rot” means red. ↔ “Rot”s are •red•s.

It is clear that in this special case, at least, the equivalence holds (if it did not hold, Sellars’s procedure would not have led to a sound result). If this equivalence holds generally, translating one of the sides of the equivalence should not cause any difficulties, i.e., the equivalence would still hold in the same way. This is because truth conditions do not change by translation. At first sight, there seems to be no special problem about the equivalence

“Rot” signifie rouge. ↔ “Rot”s are •red•s.

As we said, the metalinguistic functional sortal •red• classes together all sign designs in any language which function in a relevantly similar way to “red” in the speaker’s language.

statement above would be

“Rot” signifie “red”.

while, for Sellars, the correct translation of the initial meaning statement would be

“Rot” signifie rouge.

Thus, our initial meaning statement cannot be understood as

“Rot” means “red”.

Tokens of the French “rouge” are also classed under the sortal •red• and therefore, no difficulties seem to arise by translating one of the sides of the equivalence. Both sides are true, therefore, the equivalence as a whole is, too.

But there is still something odd about this bilingual equivalence. What this is becomes clearer when we take into account how we characterized the dot-quoted expression “•red•”. “•Red•” is a sortal for all linguistic sign designs with a role relevantly similar to the role of the design between the dot-quotes *in the speaker’s language*. Thus, for Sellars meaning statements necessarily contain a reference to the users of the statement. For our bilingual equivalence this would mean that, except for special circumstances (a truly bilingual speaker), each statement at one of the sides of the equivalence would have to be used by a different speaker. There would be one equivalence but two users respectively asserting one of the sides of the equivalence (who asserts the whole equivalence?). Therefore, although there is no straightforward difficulty with our bilingual equivalence, there is a certain pragmatic uneasiness about it.

Can we then say that Sellars has given us an analysis or a definition of “S means p”? In one sense, he has, for he has revealed what he sees as the deep structure of “S means p”. But in a different sense, he has not. Definition and analysis are traditionally meant to give an account of concepts in terms of more basic concepts (in whatever sense we want to take the term “more basic” here), thus to lay open the complexity of the definiendum. However, this has not happened in the case of Sellars’s treatment of meaning statements. After his treatment, these statements have a more perspicuous form and we have a better, less misleading understanding of them. But their initial complexity has not been reduced to something more basic. Sellars’s treatment of meaning statements revealed a source of hidden complexity, namely that meaning statements contain an implicit reference to the speaker and her language. But this complexity has not been removed in Sellars’s “analysis”. The final form of meaning statements (“Rot”s in German are •red•s.) still contains the same implicit reference to the speaker and his language as the meaning statement in its initial form. Note that this final form is not

“Rot”s (in German) are •red•s in English.

nor

“Rot”s (in German) are •red•s in the speaker’s language.

although these statements are of course also true.

The “analysis” works if we keep in mind that a meaning statement is always used by someone and does a certain job for this person or his interlocutor, a job it could not do if it did not have this link to a user. This job is to rehearse the use of an expression which is already known to the speaker or his interlocutor (GE, 532), in this case the use of the expression “red”. To “rehearse a use” is to point to the speaker’s or interlocutor’s ability to use the expression in meaningful linguistic interchanges (thus the speaker need not reproduce a comprehensive set of explicit rules governing the use of this expression).

This is why we might hesitate to call Sellars’s treatment of meaning statements an “analysis”. Rather than being a classical analysis, Sellars’s metalinguistic functionally classifying statements, the “deep-grammar” version of meaning statements, make more perspicuous what speakers do when they use a meaning statement. That is, meaning statements are a nontransparent way for speakers of a certain language to functionally classify expressions from a different language by comparing their use to expressions they already know how to use. But meaning statements do not wear their purpose on their sleeves and this function is what Sellars’s “analysis” brings out.

Something similar happens in Sellars’s treatment of the generic concept of truth. He says that

From this point of view,

The •snow is white• is true

has the sense of

The •snow is white• is S-assertible. (SM, ch. IV §27)

Again, the dot-quoted expressions form metalinguistic illustrating functional sortals, this time of whole sentences.³³ What Sellars says here could be an attempt to define or analyze the concept of truth. But as in the case of meaning, we have to see that the illustrating functional sortal “•snow is white•” carries an implicit reference to the user of this truth claim. We can construct a similar equivalence as above in the case of meaning and test it

³³ Sellars uses them in the singular here, while above we used the sortals in the plural. This is nothing to distract us, for these sortals are used as distributive singular terms here (“the •red•”) and are interchangeable with the plural form (“•red•s”).

by translating one of its sides:

Le •la neige est blanche• est vrai. ↔ The •snow is white• is S-assertible.

Here again, we run into the pragmatic difficulties we have seen before in the case of meaning. Although “Le •la neige est blanche• est vrai.” is a correct translation of “The •snow is white• is true.” and although clearly the equivalence

The •snow is white• is true. ↔ The •snow is white• is S-assertible.

must hold if, as Sellars says, “is true” has the sense of “is S-assertible”, it functions in a pragmatically awkward way. It is not the case that the equivalence as a whole is sensitive to translation. The equivalence

Le •la neige est blanche• est vrai. ↔ Le •la neige est blanche• peut être affirmé sémantiquement.

is a correct translation of our original equivalence into French and perfectly workable provided that Sellars’s account is good. The problem about our equivalence is therefore not that it is sensitive to translation. Rather, it is user-sensitive. And not only that: As it is rules that determine when a statement is semantically assertible and as following rules is a social phenomenon for Sellars (see, e.g., MFC), this user is always a member of a wider linguistic community. Thus, it is not enough to say that a truth-claim is always bound to the perspective of a certain user, but it is bound to the perspective of a user who understands himself as the member of a certain speech community. A statement like “Sentence S is true.” does not only signal that I endorse S, but it also signals that any other member of my speech community could endorse S.

This pragmatic dimension of Sellars’s treatment of truth is also apparent in his statement that truth is “something to be *done* rather than *talked* about” (NS, 26). How does he mean that? In many accounts of truth, the word “truth” has been taken to label a relation or connection between linguistic expressions and objects or states of affairs in the world. Sellars adopts the idea that we can speak of a connection between “words” and the “world” but he rejects that this “connection” is a relation that can be labeled or described. He expresses this most clearly here:

That snow is white is true.

So, Snow is white.

But if the word “true” gets its sense from this type of inference, we must say that, instead of standing for a relation or relational property of statements (or, for that matter, of thoughts), “true” is a sign *that something is to be done*—for inferring is a doing. (TC 206; Sellars’s emphasis)

Thus, there is a close link between claims that a certain sentence is true and the doing of something. The key lies in considering what S-assertibility amounts to. If a sentence is semantically assertible we are authorized to assert it and we ought not assert its negation. Thus:

If someone utters “the •snow is white• is S-assertible” he ought to utter “snow is white”.³⁴

On this basis, according to Sellars’s approach to practical reasoning, if our reasoning functions appropriately and if we are in the right circumstances, we will form the intention to utter “Snow is white” which is followed by the respective behavior.³⁵

Thus, the claim that a certain sentence is S-assertible is linked to actual assertions of this very sentence, or as Sellars puts it

the cash value of S-assertibility is assertion by us *hic et nunc*. (SM, ch. V §53)

It need not be the case that the sentence is asserted every time the rules of our language instruct us to assert it³⁶ (otherwise we would not have a notion of breaking the rules) but the rule needs to be followed at least in a relevantly high number of cases. If it were not we could claim that a rule has been adopted (see NAO, ch. 5 §95).

As the concept of truth functions as the concept of S-assertibility, it, too, is linked to asserting. The assertion that a certain sentence is true calls for a certain further piece of

³⁴ A better formulation may be

... one ought to have the disposition to utter “snow is white”.

because it is clear that one need not always utter the respective sentences overtly.

³⁵ At least if we are in a reflective mood. As Sellars claims, most of our linguistic activity will not take place on such a reflective level with explicit practical reasoning triggering utterances, but it will be simply the unreflected following of established patterns (MFC, 424).

³⁶ More precisely, it need not be the case that we refrain from asserting the negation of the sentence which we called S-assertible every time that rule instructs us so. As Peregrin claims, rules of language are better understood as establishing constraints, i.e. instruct us what ought not be done, rather than as instructing us what is to be done (Peregrin 2006, 259-260). Thus, the claim that a sentence is S-assertible would imply that we ought not assert the negation of this sentence.

behavior, namely the assertion of this very sentence itself. Thus, in the deflationist equivalence adapted to Sellarsian instruments

The •snow is white• is true. \leftrightarrow Snow is white.

we have something more than just a simple statement of material equivalence, i.e. of sameness of truth conditions. The two sides of the equivalence are on different levels: the left-hand side is metalinguistic and talks about a certain linguistic performance saying that it is realizable or ought to be realized. The right-hand side is this very performance. The predicate “is true” is not a certain property of linguistic entities which we have managed to “analyze away” on the right side, but rather it is a pragmatic flag signaling that there is something which can be done (in the sense of is permitted or ought to be done) with this expression, namely assert it. This is why for Sellars, the connection between “words” (the metalinguistic left-hand side) and “the world” (the right-hand side) is done rather than talked about.

Sellars’s account of truth as semantic assertibility does not imply that “all truth is linguistic”, or that our language determines in a strong sense what is true and what is not. Many rules that determine what is or is not assertible have a conditional form, such as

It is correct to assert “It is raining.” iff it is raining.

Thus, when “It is raining.” is true it is not true because of the rules of our language in the sense that the rules make the assertion true. It is true because it is raining. When Sellars claims that the truth-predicate signals correctly assertible sentences, he does not mean to say that all truth are linguistic or that all truth can be read off from the rules of our language.³⁷

We can summarize this by saying that for Sellars the truth-predicate does not describe sentences, i.e. it does not ascribe a property to a sentence or describe a relation between this sentence and something in the world. Rather, it regulates further pieces of behavior, it commits us to undertake certain further linguistic actions and refrain from others. What is important for Sellars about the concept of truth is how our use of it is caught up in our linguistic practice, while he rejects the idea that “truth” describes a relation between language and the world.

³⁷ We could still ask whether the truth of lawlike statements like “Whales are mammals.” is a linguistic affair for Sellars as these are akin to linguistic rules. For more on this question, see chapter 4.1. on dogmatism.

Thus, Sellars's aim is not to offer a definition of truth in the sense of filling in the right-hand side in

A sentence/proposition/statement is true iff ...

As an important aside, this is why Sellars's view should not be conflated with "ideal warranted assertibility" or "ideal rational acceptability" (e.g. Putnam 1982), even though he uses the notion of an ideal Peircean conceptual scheme. Such views tell us that only sentences which will or would be warrantably assertible or rationally acceptable under ideal conditions are true. But this is not how Sellars treats the truth predicate. "Ideal rational acceptability"-theories, in contrast to Sellars, attempt to give a definition of truth. They also imply a certain alienation from our own conceptual scheme for it is possible that little of what we hold true now would be held true under ideal epistemic conditions. But Sellars's understanding of the expressions "true" as well as "means" are user-bound. An alienation from users who actually use the truth-predicate would not fit into his frame of thought.

Sellars takes "is true" to mean "is S-assertible" not simply by someone, but by *us*. This means that I can claim that a sentence is true only if I speak as a member of a certain community, i.e. from an involved viewpoint. As we have seen in our discussion of meaning and truth, on Sellars's account this user-sensitivity is built into the truth-predicate and cannot be disconnected from it. As one can be a user of a language only as part of a wider linguistic community, truth-statements (or meaning statements) do not only include an implicit reference to the user but also to a community. This idea, i.e., that philosophically problematic concepts like truth are bound to what statements a certain community, our community, holds good is not uncommon in the pragmatist tradition, Rorty or James are examples of authors with similar views.³⁸

Of course, the idea that the concept of truth functions to express what is S-assertible by us generates many question. First and foremost, this is the question of who "we" are, of who is meant by "us". The "we" or the community in question will certainly be a linguistic community, but such communities differ in scope. The scope may possibly vary on a diachronic level (that is the community in question may include earlier and later forms

³⁸ It is good to remember that the claim is not that truth *is* what a certain community (or our community) accepts. Rather, according to Sellars's account, it is the *function* of the truth-predicate is to state what I am permitted to assert as one of us, that is as the member of a certain linguistic community.

of a language) and also on a synchronic level (including different varieties of one national language etc.). In chapter 4.3, I will voice doubts on whether Sellars can offer a non-circular delineation of what communities are.

In this subchapter, I have tried to bring out what Sellars's pragmatism consists in, exemplarily for his treatment of truth. We have encountered several pragmatist aspects in his approach: the user-sensitivity and community-sensitivity of truth-claims as well as the idea that the concept of truth does not describe sentences or relations between them and the world but serves to trigger and channel linguistic activities. Sellars's overall aim is not to state what truth is or how we can define truth but to uncover what we do when we call a sentence true.

2.3. The tension between pragmatism and realism in Sellars

In this final part of the second chapter I want to do three things: First, I will specify more clearly where Sellars's (scientific) realism and his pragmatism clash. I shall do so from different angles, from the viewpoint of Sellars's own work, especially some of the early essays, and from the viewpoint of Huw Price's work, which, for its affinities and differences to Sellars, provides a convenient foil for reading Sellars. Second, I will vindicate the terminology I chose to characterize this clash (i.e. pragmatism vs. realism). Third, to obtain a handy formulation of the *prima facie* tension between Sellars's pragmatism and his realism, I will introduce what I shall call "the straightforward reading" which will then serve as a reference point in the later stages of my text.

The early Sellars and the adequacy of conceptual schemes

I will start with a look at Sellars's early essays (particularly PPE, ENWW and RNWWR).³⁹ In these early essays, several themes of Sellars's later philosophy are present in rudimentary, sometimes not well-articulated form. At the same time, the early Sellars puts forward some claims of interest here much more explicitly than in later texts. There are also some clear differences between Sellars's early essays and the later ones. In the early essays, Sellars is not so much concerned with realism, naturalism and a scientific world view but with the development of what he calls "pure pragmatics". Reflections on

³⁹ I cite the revised version of *Realism and the New Way of Words*.

realism and the like are not totally absent from these essays (the title of one of them is “*Realism and the New Way of Words*”), but it is a theme in the background addressed through the lens of “pure pragmatics”. In what follows, I will sketch some aspects of these essays which are relevant here, however, I cannot give an encompassing account of their intricacies (see Olen 2016 for a detailed exposition).

“Pure pragmatics” is a project which is akin to endeavors from the first half of the 20th century to develop formal accounts of some aspects of language, first syntax and later semantics. In his early essays, Sellars wants to extend this formal approach to the domain of pragmatics which focuses on how, by whom and in what circumstances language is used. Kinship in this sense does not mean that pure syntax, semantics and pragmatics are on a par for Sellars. To the contrary, pure pragmatics grounds the other two domains (RNWWR, §34). Pure pragmatics is “pure” because it does not inquire into specific, actually existing languages but into the structures any language must exhibit in order, in Sellars’s words, “to be an empirically meaningful language”, i.e. “be capable of being ‘about’ a world in which it is used” (PPE, §18). That is, pure pragmatics inquires which structures are needed and what requirements a language needs to fulfill to count as an empirically applicable language (the most prominent of these requirements is that such a language must have a set of “conformation rules”, which are later to become Sellars’s rules of material inference discussed above). Pure pragmatics can therefore be seen as a linguistified version of Kant’s transcendental project of inquiring into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge.⁴⁰

Even though Sellars does not speak of pure pragmatics anymore after publishing his first three essays, aspects of his early project are continuous with his later thought. Sellars’s earlier essays are a first attempt to give a functional account of language.⁴¹ What is still lacking are the formal instruments Sellars develops later, e.g. dot-quotation and the functional metalanguage with constants for functional sortals.

In some respects, pure pragmatics has affinities to the pragmatist aspects of Sellars’s

⁴⁰ Olen (especially Olen 2016) has recently criticized Sellars’s use of the term “formal” as inappropriate and ambiguous. Some authors, e.g. Brandom in his 2015 book, claim that Sellars’s term “formal” announced a Kantian transcendental approach to language. When I use the term here, I will use it in this latter sense while having in mind that this usage does not coincide with the usage at the time when Sellars wrote his first essays and that he possibly wanted to pack more into the term than this.

⁴¹ For example, his distinction between functional, rule-determined types, token-classes (classes of instances of sign-designs) and tokens (instances of sign-designs, see ENWW, §15).

thought, even though these two must not be equated. Pure pragmatics is a formal, reconstructive project, and as such it is more part of the analytic tradition than of pragmatism. But nevertheless, there are aspects of pure pragmatics parallel to what I described as Sellars's pragmatism in the last subchapter. First and foremost, in his early essays Sellars is concerned with what he calls pragmatic predicates: e.g. "verified", "confirmed" or "meaningful" (the logical empiricist legacy in this list is apparent).⁴² These predicates are bound to the user of the respective language similar to the truth-predicate discussed in the last subchapter. In pure pragmatics, we understand language as used in a world from a certain perspective, i.e., from the point of view of a user placed in spatial and temporal surroundings. Sellars's claim is that we cannot understand what an empirically meaningful language is and how some of the predicates troubling philosophy ("true", "meaningful", "confirmed") work without taking this user-boundness into account.

For Sellars, all the verified and confirmed sentences of a language make up the "world-story" of that language. Each world-story designates its "world", that means it is about a world. Therefore, any language which exhibits the structures that Sellars describes in his pure pragmatics is empirically meaningful and about the world it purports to be about. So, "world" itself is a predicate which is user-sensitive. What is comprised by this predicate, what "belongs to the world", can be stated by looking at the given language from a metalinguistic perspective.

This conclusion has, however, consequences for our understanding of what philosophy can say about the adequacy of different conceptual schemes to "the" world. Sellars states this very clearly in many passages of the early essays:

We make the concept of *reality* a purely formal one, and say that each empirical language speaks about its own "reality" or world. (RNWWR, §72; Sellars's emphasis)

Just as the notion of *the* world is a mistake, so is the notion of *the* set of true sentences. (ENWW, §21, Sellars's emphasis)

Thus, epistemological predicates, even "verified" and "confirmed," have no intrinsic tie with any single world, with "THE" world. (PPE, §42)

The first step consists in examining the role of the definite article in the expression "*the*

⁴² In addition to these, pure pragmatics is also concerned with such indexicals as "here" and "now".

world.” Since the very function of the definite article is to imply a set of entities from which one is distinguished, must we not say that the distinction between *the* world and the other worlds is a descriptive one? “But surely,” it will be said, “the others don’t exist!” Here is the germ of the ontological fallacy. It is now time to realize that every world-story means a world; that the basic grammar of the term “world” is brought out by the statement, “A world-story in a language means a world.” (ENWW, §14)

All this seems to clash straightforwardly with Sellars’s statement in *Science and Metaphysics* that we are “haunted by the ideal of *the* truth about the world” (SM, ch. V §55).

However, it is not as if Sellars wanted to say in his early essays that it is meaningless to speak about connections between language and “the” world. Rather he is interested in what philosophy can say about the matter, and this is little according to him. Philosophy has only limited resources to speak about the adequacy of conceptual schemes or languages to “the” world. It can only speak about the structures any language must exhibit in order to be about the world it purports to be about. From its perspective, philosophy can only say, according to Sellars, that any empirically meaningful language is adequate to “a” world, i.e. to the world designated by its world-story. Philosophy could not, therefore, say anything about whether some language is more adequate to “the world” than some other.

I captured the type of realism I am concerned with by saying that for a realist there is some ultimately adequate description of the world. This is an idea which frequently makes its way in Sellars’s writings after his first productive period. Concerning the notion of adequacy, we find this passage in *Science and Metaphysics*:

There is a sense in which it is correct to say that truth does not admit of degrees. A statement in our conceptual structure is either S-assertible or it is not. [...] On the other hand, one conceptual framework can be more “adequate” than another, and this fact can be used to define a sense in which one proposition can be said to be “more true” than another. (SM, ch. V, §54)

Prima facie, this stands in glaring opposition to what Sellars claimed for the concept of adequacy in his earlier essays. One way of understanding this change is to say that in his early essays Sellars countenanced a notion of adequacy which was to be completely explicated on a metalinguistic level and on which every language is adequate to “its world”. Later, he came to adopt a second notion of adequacy (based on picturing) that allows us

to compare different languages and ascribe different measures of adequacy to them. From this point of view, Sellars started out with one notion of adequacy and later admitted a second one (and then, of course, struggled with how to put these two notions together). But this would be to overlook that even in his earlier essays Sellars was aware of the fact that we actually do choose between different languages and can give reasons for our choice. In real life, we do not react to the question what language to choose (i.e. what laws/rules to accept etc.) by saying: “This is all the same, for from a formal point of view any language designates its world anyway.” However, these real-life considerations do not fall into the scope of philosophy:

any special privilege which belongs to one history must be a status which stems from outside the Conceptual Realm and which consequently cannot be penetrated by the *a priori* Science of Structures [philosophy as the pure theory of empirically meaningful languages]. (CIL, §52)

“Are you not saying that, after all, the pragmatist has the last word?”, I shall be asked. In a sense this is true. But the pragmatist must take the bitter along with the sweet; for the “last word” is not a philosophical proposition. [...] The recommendation of formalisms for their utility is not philosophy. (PPE, §49)

This “last word” which Sellars speaks about in the last passage is the choice between different languages and he explicitly says that philosophy has nothing to say on this matter.⁴³ His later pronouncements on truth and reality evoke the impression, however, that philosophy does not have to leave this “last word” about which conceptual schemes are more or less adequate completely to practice. Whether and how these two positions can be made to fit together remains to be seen.

The straightforward reading

We could wonder what happened to Sellars’s position between his early essays and his middle period with essays expounding the notion of picturing, e.g. *Being and Being Known* or *Truth and “Correspondence”*, and with *Science and Metaphysics*, where

⁴³ The claim that “every conceptual scheme is about a world” but that we cannot give a philosophical account of our choice between worlds is not completely absent from Sellars’s later work. In *Naturalism and Ontology*, he returns to his concept of a world-story and writes that this concept is an epistemic concept, that every conceptual scheme generates such a world-story, and that it is causal aspects which account for the choice between stories, i.e. conceptual schemes (NAO, ch. 5 sec. V).

picturing appears as an instrument for comparing conceptual schemes, as well as all the other texts (PSIM, SRIL, PHM, etc.) where Sellars claims the superiority of one conceptual scheme over another (i.e., the scientific scheme over the commonsense scheme). In all these texts, Sellars seems to speak about the second notion of adequacy from a philosophical point of view. Provided it is right that he did not shift his understanding of what the adequacy of a language to “a” world or “the” world amounts to, there must have been some change in his views on which questions philosophy is capable of treating.

Sellars’s later thoughts on truth as S-assertibility “by us” parallel his earlier notion of truth and adequacy where he explicitly says that “truth is relative to calculi (languages in the normative sense)” (RNWWR, §44). His account of S-assertibility is a successor to his formal understanding of adequacy: any language is adequate to its world as much as any language must have a set of sentences assertible according to the rules of the language, i.e., a set of true sentences, on pain of not being a language at all. However, this understanding seems hostile to any idea of an ultimate truth about the world. The tension between Sellars’s pragmatism and realism surfaces here as the tension between the claim that any conceptual scheme is adequate in its own terms and that there is one conceptual scheme which is ultimately adequate while others are not. From this point of view, Sellars wants to eat his cake and have it, too, and the fact that he countenances two conflicting notions of adequacy is simply a symptom of this.

This understanding of the changes in Sellars’s notion of adequacy is part of one common reading of Sellars, which I shall call “the straightforward reading”. It is a reading that we can find in particular in Rorty’s writings. According to it, Sellars has strong pragmatist tendencies: he sees that our use of the predicate “true” is always bound to our language and linguistic community and that it is unintelligible to speak of transcending this community. This comes out, as we have seen, in Sellars’s claim that the truth-predicate functions to flag a sentence as S-assertible. At the same time however, according to this reading, Sellars has not rid himself of a realist urge, an urge to answer the skeptic by devising a mechanism by which we can get at the world as it really is and break free from ever changing systems of assertible sentences to ultimate truth. In order to do this, according to straightforward readers, Sellars introduces his notion of picturing. He envisages it as a means of comparing our conceptual schemes in a neutral, scheme-independent way, and thus to ensure a notion of our conceptual schemes’ getting closer and more adequate to reality.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty writes

These men [Sellars and Jay Rosenberg] *do* identify “true” with “warranted assertible by us” (thereby allowing truth about nonexistent objects) but they then proceed to describe “picturing” as a nonintentional relation which supplies an Archimedean point by reference to which we may say that our present theory of the world, though to be sure *true*, may not picture the world as adequately as some successor theory. (Rorty 1979, 296; Rorty’s emphasis)

But, according to Rorty, the tension between these two notions of adequacy is irresoluble. Following Putnam, he claims that our only way to capture the “nonintentional picturing relation” is to assess it from within our existing conceptual framework. The idea that we could have access to some means of evaluating the adequacy of conceptual frameworks in a way neutral between all frameworks would therefore be wrong. Given that Sellars himself provides the grounds for judging it wrong in his account of truth as S-assertibility, the tension between his two “poles”, the pragmatist and the realist one, cannot be resolved.

From this point of view, Sellars tries to combine two conflicting notions of truth (S-assertibility and ultimate picturing), of adequacy (one bound to a certain conceptual scheme, the other independent of any conceptual scheme), and of reality (a meta-linguistic one and ultimate reality as described in the completed scientific image of the world). According to this Rortean way of seeing things, Sellars is committed to all of these claims:

1) Our generic notion of truth (and therefore reality and existence) is the concept of S-assertibility by us.

1.1) What is S-assertible/true in a language is determined by the rules of this language.

1.2) Therefore, our language is always satisfactorily adequate by its own lights. There is no sense in talking about more adequate languages, save we want to express by this that we consider changing our language.

1.3) We know that languages or conceptual schemes are historically, contingently evolving entities. Our language is a changing thing. But seeing this as a change to “the better” or towards more adequacy is just assessing this development in a wiggish way from our point of view here and now, not from some neutral standpoint.

2) We can conceive an ultimate conceptual scheme, offering an ultimate description

of the world.

2.1) This allows us to conceive of ultimate reality. Ultimately real is what users of the ultimate conceptual scheme would talk about.

2.2) We approach to this ultimate conceptual scheme by constant causal interaction with the world. This causal relation, picturing, can be neutrally assessed. Therefore, we have a notion of our conceptual schemes evolving to a better, more adequate form, a notion which is not bound to our present point of view.

The tension between sets 1 and 2 is obvious.

It is worth mentioning that this “straightforward reading” is not only used by pragmatist readers of Sellars in order to criticize him, but that it also figures in some accounts of his work from the perspective of readers leaning to a more realist side. For example, we can find a similar reading in Johanna Seibt’s German introduction to Sellars’s work.⁴⁴ She writes that any sentence which is S-assertible with respect to a conceptual scheme has a certain degree of pictorial adequacy and that we can understand changes in our conceptual schemes as improvements in pictorial adequacy. This then gives sense to what Sellars means by a “limit” of inquiry, i.e. ultimate pictorial adequacy (Seibt 2007, 30 and 114). Seibt’s reading here coincides very much with Rorty’s, the difference being that Seibt does not think that the position they attribute to Sellars is incoherent.⁴⁵

The straightforward reading is one way of understanding Sellars. But obviously, this reading does not offer much hope to attenuate the tensions it identifies in Sellars’s work. What I will try to show, however, is that it is not the only justified way of reading Sellars and that on an alternative reading we have better prospects of negotiating between his pragmatist and realist tendencies.

I will try to dismantle the straightforward reading step by step starting from chapter 3.3. Here however, I want to point at least to one fact that should make us suspicious of it. If it was adequate, we would expect Sellars to introduce his notion of picturing only after

⁴⁴ For further instances, positive and negative, of the straightforward reading in the literature see, e.g., Kolb 1978 or Macbeth 2000. We can also find hints of this kind of approach to Sellars in deVries (2009b, 240-241), who states that Sellars faces the problem of clarifying what is ultimately real and that picturing is meant to do this job.

⁴⁵ The fact that Seibt’s reading in her introduction is similar to Rorty’s straightforward reading of Sellars may be due to the introductory character of her text. She is more guarded in Seibt 1990, and offers a very different reading in Seibt 2009.

having distanced himself somewhat from his radical remarks on the adequacy of conceptual schemes to “their” world from the early essays. In fact, however, he already hints at what later becomes his notion of picturing in these early essays. In a footnote to *Realism and the New Way of Words*, he mentions that from the standpoint of pure pragmatics linguistic expressions can also be considered as “items in the world” (his later natural-linguistic objects) and he mentions “the mapping of which Wittgenstein speaks” (what later becomes his picture theory, see RNWWR, n. 16). Only two years after the publication of Sellars’s first essays, in *Language, Rules, and Behavior*, Sellars writes that

linguistic systems of the kind we are considering center around a structure of sentences which is, so to speak, a *map*. (LRB, n. 4; Sellars’s emphasis)

Thus, he possibly toyed with some idea similar to his later notion of picturing right from the beginning of his writings and did not consider it excluded by his formal project of pure pragmatics. In the early essays, the notion is still rather vague, it took substantial form only later, but nevertheless it is present.

The straightforward reading is nourished by the fact that Sellars links the concept of ultimate reality and an ultimate conceptual scheme to what he calls “ideally adequate pictures of the world” (SM, ch. V §69). However, Sellars does not explain what is meant by “pictorial adequacy”. It might mean a detectable, objective growth in the degree of isomorphism between our system of linguistic expressions and the world, which is how Seibt reads Sellars (Seibt 2007, 28). But as critics like Rorty remark, this approach is prone to regenerate precisely the problems the notion of picturing was supposedly introduced to solve: We would never be in a position to decide whether the isomorphism we have detected between our system of linguistic expressions and the world is an isomorphism between language and what really exists or just an isomorphism between language and what we take the world to be according to our conceptual scheme.

It is true that Sellars often gestures towards the idea of structural isomorphism in connection with picturing (see for example BBK, section II; TC, 51), but he never explicitly calls it a criterion for the *ideal* adequacy of linguistic pictures. Generally, he saves on comments on what ideally adequate pictures are, how we recognize them, etc., a fact which could indicate several things:

- a) Sellars understood ideally adequate pictures to be structures of natural linguistic objects which are isomorphic to structures of natural objects. But he was neither aware of the problems generated by reading “ideally adequate” as “structurally isomorphic” nor of the problems of other attempts to evaluate the adequacy of conceptual frameworks by a neutral, framework-independent criterion.
- b) Sellars was aware of the problems, but, having no solutions to them, chose not to discuss them in his published papers (a view slightly supported by what Brandom writes in Brandom 2015, 13).
- c) Sellars had some other meaning for “ideally adequate” in mind, one which does not rely on a framework-independent assessment of conceptual frameworks.
- d) The question how to spell out what an “ideally adequate picture of the world” is did not seem salient to him.

In chapter 3.3, I will argue that we are not forced to think that Sellars adopted option a. Option b would amount to a surrender and should be adopted only when no other options seem available. In the fourth chapter, however, I hope to make a case for a blend of options c and d.

Global pragmatism and scientific realism

I would like to characterize the clash between Sellars’s realism and pragmatism from a further point of view, now focusing on the “scientific” aspect of Sellars’s realism. Sellars’s views have many affinities to the views of Huw Price, who explicitly endorses pragmatism. According to Price, it is part of a pragmatist approach to reject representationalism, i.e., a semantic theory according to which there are semantic relations of reference, designation, representation etc., between linguistic expressions and things. Price rejects representationalism because he thinks that it is not well-founded from a naturalist, scientific perspective and that it may be therefore a philosophical preconception.

Sellars arguably shares this rejection of representationalism for many types of discourse, e.g. for modal, semantical or epistemic discourse. This can be seen in his claim that many philosophers have fallen prey to the “descriptivist fallacy” as far as these discourses are concerned. The descriptivist fallacy consists in the mistake to want to understand modal, epistemic, moral and other discourses on the model of empirical,

descriptive discourse. Someone who commits the fallacy is either led to inflate the realm of what exists with modal, epistemic, moral and other kinds of objects or facts (those which the sentences in the respective discourse describe or express) or, for failure to assimilate these discourses to empirical descriptive discourse, she is led to giving them a second-rate status compared to empirical discourse, as empirical discourse is taken by her to be the primary case of meaningful language. But according to Sellars we need to avoid the descriptivist fallacy and recognize that these discourses are not inferior to empirical discourse, just different (CDCM, §79). In the last but one subchapter, we have seen what this means for the example of semantic discourse, i.e., meaning- and truth-talk.

Such an attitude, which inquires into the role of different discourses for language-using organisms without representationalist prejudice, is what Price calls “pragmatist”. Price wants to apply this anti-representationalist approach to any discourse, including empirical discourse, that is he wants to adopt, in his words, a “global pragmatism”. It is not clear but also not excluded that Sellars himself would go so far. Sellars rejects the idea of semantic relations (meaning, reference, denotation, etc.) between linguistic and non-linguistic entities.⁴⁶ If we understand representationalism as a position which needs to presuppose such semantic relations (as Price does understand it), Sellars certainly is an *anti-representationalist* and therefore a global pragmatist of the Pricean kind.

However according to Price, with this global rejection of representationalism and with global pragmatism comes the view that we can claim only from a certain perspective, but never in an absolute sense, that scientific discourse and scientific ontology is privileged over other discourses (Price et al. 2013, 21). Applied to one of the most contested concepts in the Sellarsian framework, the concept of a person, this would mean that a person is really a “bundle” of particles (PHM, §95), as Sellars claims, but also in the same sense really a knower, a moral agent and a concept-user, a claim Sellars would reject. From a Pricean point of view, these are all applicable descriptions of what persons are and they do not conflict.

It is clear that Sellars and Price part ways here. Staying with our example of persons,

⁴⁶ One may argue whether he does so for the same reasons as Price. Part of Sellars’s motivation is his naturalism, where the only relations “in the world” are spatio-temporal and causal relations. This leaves no room for relations of intentionality, reference or meaning. However, while Sellars seems to see this as an established fact, Price understands the question as one open to inquiry. For him, science may show that a representational account of language is flawed, the issue is primarily not to take such a representational approach as a philosophical datum.

Sellars claims that although it belongs to our *concept* of a person that persons know, act and use concepts, this is not what persons *really are*, for they really are what natural science says about them, i.e. bundles of particles. Thus, contrary to Price, Sellars wants to have a clear privilege for the scientific account in matters of ontology.

Price himself remarks that Sellars wants to maintain a fundamental distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive discourses (Price et al., 148). Price claims that we should give up this type of bifurcation and see all assertoric discourse (e.g. modal, moral, epistemic as well as empirical discourse) as fact-stating or descriptive in a thin sense. Under this unifying fact-stating function, each of the discourses fulfills its special function, but none of these is a “describing function”. For Price, the apparent intuitive clarity of the “fact” that there is a distinct descriptive or fact-stating discourse is just a false clarity, covering up a problem that philosophers have tended to ignore (this is the problem of stating how exactly descriptive or fact-stating discourse could be delineated from non-descriptive, non-fact-stating discourses).

Sellars would probably agree to considerable extent. For example, he does not limit the application of the truth-predicate, and therefore the fact-stating character, only to empirical discourse. He claims that there is a

ubiquitous role in discourse of the context “. . . it is a fact that . . .” and its cousin “. . . it is true that. . .”. Consider the sentence

It is true that debts ought to be paid, but Jones is in such a tight spot that

Do we really think that this should be edited with raised-eyebrow quotation marks to read

It is “true” that . . . ? (CDCM, §60)

But however close Sellars is to Price here, it seems obvious that he wants to retain at least a certain sense of describing which is limited only to empirical discourse, especially in its most developed form, i.e. scientific discourse, and this sense of describing involves ontological privilege. This is what he explicitly says in his *scientia mensura*:

in the dimension of *describing* and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things (EPM, §41; my emphasis)

The question is if Sellars can part ways with Price at this point without falling into the *prima facie* irresolvable tensions which have already been mentioned. Price claims that a position which is anti-representationalist about some discourses but keeps a privileged place for empirical discourse is unstable (Price 2003a; Price et al. 2013, ch. 2). Thus, if we state things from this perspective, we can identify the tension in Sellars as follows: On the one hand, Sellars tends to a globally pragmatist account of all our discursive behavior, understanding different discourses as different tools fulfilling different functions. On the other hand, he wants to maintain some distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive discourse. Purportedly, he does so to maintain some form of scientific realism which claims a privileged position for science as far as describing the world is concerned. But it is not clear if he can maintain realism while insisting on pragmatist anti-representationalism.

In this subchapter, I have characterized our problem from two angles: by focusing on Sellars's concept (or concepts) of the adequacy of conceptual schemes to "the" world and by asking whether Sellars wants to retain something like a representationalist privilege for a certain discourse while at the same time rejecting representationalism. Each of the two viewpoints highlights one of the two questions with which we initially started. The tensions in Sellars's account of truth and adequacy are linked to the first question: How can Sellars maintain a notion of ultimate truth and reality in the light of his pragmatist commitments? The anti-representationalist viewpoint targets the second question: even if we can countenance the idea of ultimate reality cognitively accessible to us, how can we defend the claim that science has a special privilege to lay its hands on it? Before turning to these questions, however, it will be useful to have a look at existing treatments of them with respect to Sellars's work.

3. Existing approaches

The tensions in Sellars's work have been addressed by numerous authors. Recently, attention has been focused primarily on the first of our two complementary questions from the beginning: Where can we locate normativity in a Sellarsian naturalist scheme? Still, the second question, how Sellars can defend his notion of ultimate truth and reality in the light of other commitments, has received at least some attention, too. Jay Rosenberg wrote extensively on the topic and most recently it has been treated by Brandom in *From Empiricism to Expressivism* (Brandom 2015). Brandom's criticism of Sellars on this question has already kindled new discussions (deVries 2016; Christias 2017a).

In this chapter, I will look at three authors and their ways of approaching our question: Robert Brandom, Willem deVries and Jay Rosenberg. They could almost be neatly divided by their location in a popular scheme of distinguishing Sellars's readers: the left, emphasizing Sellars's normative functionalist philosophy of language and intentionality (Brandom), the right, emphasizing Sellars's naturalism (Rosenberg) and the middle, trying to hold everything in balance (deVries). But this way of distinguishing them has obvious limits, not only concerning the question of Sellars's treatment of ultimate reality (Brandom naturalizes norms in a sense and Rosenberg stands, at least in later writings, on a pragmatist ground). My discussion shall help us to bring the main problems of my text into sharper focus, to get a clearer grip on what Sellars says about them and to discover some dead-ends which we should avoid.

3.1. Brandom, the modal Kant-Sellars thesis and ontological primacy

In the opening chapter of *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, Brandom suggests that Sellars's thought is arranged around two Kantian ideas: an interpretation of Kant's categories as metalinguistic pragmatic concepts and an assimilation of the phenomena-noumena distinction to Sellars's own scientific naturalism.⁴⁷ For Brandom, the first move is useful, but the second is not. What is more, Brandom claims that it is precisely Sellars's development of the first Kantian idea which makes the second, i.e. Sellars's scientific naturalism, unintelligible.

⁴⁷ Brandom calls "scientific naturalism" what other authors and I here call "scientific realism" in Sellars. For the purposes of this subchapter, I will go along with Brandom's terminology to ensure terminological coherence with quoted passages.

Brandom's argument

Brandom starts his discussion with Sellars's distinction between our commonsense understanding of the world (the manifest image) and the scientific understanding of the world (the scientific image). He remarks that while part of the manifest image is formed of discourses that are not descriptive, especially normative discourse,⁴⁸ what Sellars means when he speaks about the clash between the images is a conflict between their respective descriptions of the world. Brandom's criticism is directed against the parallel Sellars purportedly draws between the manifest image-vs.-scientific image distinction and Kant's phenomena-vs.-noumena distinction. He does not object to the idea that there is a world independent from us and that there is a correct way to describe this world. Rather, he attacks the claim that there is one vocabulary (in this case the scientific vocabulary) which makes our commonsense descriptions of the world obsolete and shows them to be inadequate or false.

Brandom's arguments do not amount to a direct defense of our commonsense understanding of the world. He claims, in fact, that when common sense and science conflict, we must give way to science (Brandom 2015, 88). However, his arguments aim to show that for most cases no such conflict arises. Similar to Rorty's approach, Brandom's pragmatist critical strategy against a Sellarsian scientific realism here is not to take up the challenge and champion the case of the commonsense worldview, but rather to leave the gauntlet on the ground and claim that there is nothing much to fight about. What is more, Brandom takes it that it is Sellars's own claims about the meaning of linguistic expressions which justify this tolerant position. Thus, Brandom wants to show that Sellars's position in the philosophy of language is in irresolvable tension to his scientific naturalism. If Brandom is right, Sellars himself cannot make any sense of his own claims on the ontological privilege of science because other theses he accepts reveal these claims as incomprehensible. And if this is correct, any attempt to ease the tension between Sellars's realist and pragmatist commitments would be futile.

⁴⁸ Brandom states this very much as a fact, claiming that normative vocabulary "belongs exclusively to the manifest image" (Brandom 2015, 58). But it does not seem straightforwardly clear that Sellars saw it that way. In *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, Sellars speaks of the possibility to simply join normative vocabulary and the conceptual framework of persons to the scientific image in the process of "fusing the images" (PSIM, 40). And whatever his fused image would turn out to be, it would not be the manifest image. Therefore, normative vocabulary cannot be exclusively wedded to the manifest image.

I will give a short sketch of Brandom's arguments and then assemble replies that could be given from Sellars's perspective. I will argue that Brandom leaves out of view numerous things that Sellars says about the relationship between commonsense and theoretical scientific vocabularies. Brandom's arguments may be applicable to the understanding of this relationship which he attributes to Sellars, but Sellars's actual understanding of it is arguably much more complex. What is more, I will defend that Sellars himself already recognized that the view Brandom attributes to him does not work. My argument is no defense of Sellars's actual claims about the relationship between the commonsense and the theoretical scientific worldview but at least it shows that Brandom's attack misses its target.

Brandom's aim is to show that Sellars's *scientia mensura* claim that "science is the measure of all things" (EPM, §41) is not intelligible, and this for reasons which Sellars himself provides in his philosophy of language. Brandom offers us two readings of Sellars's *scientia mensura*: a stronger and a weaker one. I will have a short look at the weaker reading and then return to the stronger one.

The weaker reading is functionalist. According to it, the claim that science is the arbiter of reality means

privileging the scientific vocabulary with respect to specifications of what, if anything, really plays the roles specified in the descriptive vocabulary of the manifest image.
(Brandom 2015, 80)

Brandom discards this idea quickly, among other things for reasons drawn from Sellars's essay *Phenomenalism*. It presupposes that the roles of linguistic expressions as once stabilized in the manifest image stay largely the same and that we only come up with better and better realizers of these roles. According to Brandom, if we leave these roles unrestricted, there would be far too many possible realizers. And if we constrain them by the requirement that it is the lawful connections exemplified in manifest image vocabulary that shall stay the same, we could not even specify these roles without using manifest image vocabulary. Therefore, for Brandom, a wholesale reduction in this functionalist sense of commonsense vocabulary to scientific vocabulary is impossible.

This kind of functional reductionism could not have possibly been Sellars's position. Sellars does not envisage the constancy of linguistic roles, but wide-ranging conceptual

change. So, what the replacement of the manifest image by the scientific image amounts to is not adopting a better realization of (however constrained) linguistic roles, but a wholesale abandoning of linguistic roles and their replacement with another system of roles.

I will therefore turn to Brandom's stronger reading of Sellars's claim that science is the measure of all things. He specifies his understanding of this claim in the following way:

I take it that this means that descriptive terms from the manifest image refer to things specifiable in the descriptive terms from the scientific image, if they refer at all. [...] So to exist, the claim is, requires being identical to some object specifiable in the language of eventual natural science (Brandom 2015, 62)

Thus, Brandom tries to make sense of Sellars's relation between commonsense objects and the ontologically primary objects of science by taking it to be an identity relation. Identity licenses mutual substitution in extensional contexts. Thus, if

Angela Merkel = the first female Chancellor of Germany

then, e.g.

Angela Merkel was born in 1954. = The first female Chancellor of Germany was born in 1954.

There is a need to exclude non-extensional contexts from the scope of this license, such as ascriptions of propositional attitudes, quotation contexts and modal contexts. In these contexts, intersubstitution of terms for which identity is claimed may fail to preserve the truth value of the respective context (it is necessary that Angela Merkel is Angela Merkel, but it is not necessary that Angela Merkel is the first female Chancellor of Germany). Brandom focuses on modal contexts as one of these contexts to be excluded and relies on what he calls the modal Kant-Sellars thesis:

This is the claim that in being able to use ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything that one needs to know how to do, in principle, to use alethic modal vocabulary – in particular subjunctive conditionals. (Brandom 2015, 26)

Brandom claims that for Sellars (and Brandom's Kant and himself) the ability to use

statements expressing lawfulness or necessity is already implicit in our ability to use ordinary empirical vocabulary. At the same time, it is explicatory of ordinary empirical vocabulary: it specifies what one must be able to do in order to count as using this vocabulary. This means that I cannot count as using any empirical predicate in a full sense if I do not have abilities which could be elaborated into the ability to use modal statements. Thus, I could not count as using the concept “dog” if I could not also use sentences like “Fido is a dog, *therefore* he barks.”, “Fido is a dog and *thus* no cat.”, “Fido likes meat *because* he is a dog.” etc. According to Brandom, these abilities can be elaborated into the ability to use subjunctive conditionals: “If Fido were a dog, he would bark.” or “If anything were a dog, it would bark.”, and into law-like statements: “Dogs (necessarily) bark.”

Because I cannot count as employing any empirical predicate whatsoever without this (at least implicit) ability to use modal statements, no empirical predicate is modally insulated. In Brandom’s words, whether I apply a certain empirical predicate correctly or not always depends on what would be true in other possible worlds. Therefore, no empirical predicate can be extensional if extensionality implies modal insulation (as it is traditionally taken to do). At least, this is so if we accept Sellars’s philosophy of language.

This has consequences for the truth and falsity of identity statements. We could argue that

Michelangelo’s David = a certain lump of marble

by saying that the David and the lump of marble share all their extensional properties (i.e., that the same and only these extensional predicates can be truly predicated of both). However, if there are no extensional predicates and all predicates are modally involved, the criterion becomes useless. If we want to uphold that identity means that two objects are indiscernible with respect to their properties, as Brandom does, we need to suggest different criteria. These will form a subset of the modally involved properties which will be salient for identity claims and according to Brandom, they will be linked to our criteria for individuating and counting different things. Thus

Angela Merkel = the first female Chancellor of Germany

will still turn out to be true because German Chancellors and people are counted in the same way (if Angela Merkel ceased to exist, the first female Chancellor of Germany would cease to exist, etc.).

However, in the case of what Brandom calls strongly cross-sortal identity claims, i.e. claims where the criteria of individuating and counting are not the same for the two things of which identity is claimed, the situation is different.

Michelangelo's David = a certain lump of marble

is a case of such a strongly cross-sortal identity claim. This claim turns out to be false now that we see that we cannot confine the intersubstitution which it allows to "extensional" or modally insulated contexts. The criteria of individuation and counting are different for the David and for the lump. The statue as a work of art may cease to exist, but the lump of marble as the material out of which the statue is made need not.

Brandom uses this to attack the ontological privilege which Sellars wants to ascribe to the ultimate scientific vocabulary. As Brandom reads him, Sellars claims that if a piece of commonsense descriptive vocabulary refers at all, it refers to objects correctly referred to by a piece of the scientific vocabulary, i.e. both refer to the *same* thing. This means that identity statements would have to hold, e.g.:

commonsense object *a* = (complex) scientific object *b*

Brandom is obviously justified in reading these as strongly cross-sortal identity claims. Sellars himself repeatedly emphasizes that the adoption of the ultimate scientific conceptual scheme and the abandonment of our commonsense conceptual scheme involves wholesale shifts in the fundamental categories we employ (from macrophysical colored objects to microphysical particles and finally to pure processes, see e.g. PSIM, PHM 100-105; FMPP, ch. III). Their criteria of individuation and counting do not coincide: there is a large number of microphysical structures which could successively "be identical" to my kitchen table. Brandom concludes that claims about the identity of commonsense and scientific objects can never be true and that we therefore cannot make sense of Sellars's *scientia mensura* thesis. And this is so because of Sellars's own core thesis in the philosophy of language, the modal Kant-Sellars thesis (provided that Brandom is correct in attributing it to him, but the case he makes is very convincing). Therefore, Brandom claims to have uncovered a fundamental tension between two of Sellars's core tenets and urges us to drop the ontological privilege of science in favor of the modal Kant-Sellars thesis.

Reference and co-reference

In order to get clear about the force of Brandom's argument, I will accept Brandom's ascription of the modal Kant-Sellars thesis to Sellars as well as his account of identity⁴⁹ and see whether this is enough motivation to reject Sellars's scientific realism. I shall start with Brandom's attempt to understand Sellars's *scientia mensura* claim. As already stated, according to Brandom this claim says

that descriptive terms from the manifest image refer to things specifiable in descriptive terms from the scientific image, if they refer at all. [...] Coreference of terms is identity of objects. (Brandom 2015, 62)

It is not initially clear how to understand the claim that manifest image and scientific image terms corefer in Sellars's terms. What is crucial is the sense of "reference" involved for arguably there are at least two senses in which Sellars uses this term. First, we find a functional explanation of what it means to say that "a" refers to the object a:

"a"s (in L) refer to a =_{df} (∃S) S ⊂ INSENSE & "a" ⊂ S & S materially equivalent to •a• (SM, ch. V §30)⁵⁰

Sellars expresses here that when we use a reference statement we say that two functional roles, more specifically two individual senses, are materially equivalent, i.e. tokens of the functional linguistic types can be interchanged in extensional contexts. In the case where we say that "a" refers to a, the reference statement is trivially true, for the two functional roles are one and the same. The triviality vanishes if we state, e.g., that "Praha" refers to Prague or that "morning star" refers to Venus.

The second Sellarsian notion of reference is a causal notion. Sellars develops it under the heading "reference" in *Naturalism and Ontology* (NAO). This second notion of reference goes hand in hand with Sellars's picturing. Contrary to the first take on reference statements, which was a case of stating the material equivalence of two linguistic roles,

⁴⁹ Nevertheless, I think that there are problems with Brandom's account of identity. He does not make sufficiently clear just what subjunctive conditionals or modally involved properties underwrite true identity statements. Brandom claims that criteria of individuation and counting are decisive, i.e. subjunctive conditionals specifying under what circumstances a thing would still be the same thing. But he does not explicitly make clear what these are. He seems to assume that our criteria of individuation and counting for different types of entities are sufficiently intuitive to us. But philosophical discussions on the identity of persons, things, mental states etc. show that this is not so.

⁵⁰ INSENSE stands for "individual sense" or "individual concept". For an explanation of dot-quotation see chapter 2.2.

this second notion of reference is the notion of regular causal relations which hold between linguistic objects (as natural-linguistic objects and not, as in the first notion of reference, as linguistic role players) and non-linguistic objects. What Sellars actually does after stating his intention to give a causal account of reference is to develop his theory of picturing. As the picturing-relation is not new to us, at this point we can simply say that

“*a*”s refer to *a* =_{df} “*a*”s picture *a*.⁵¹

We could call these two senses of reference “reference_F” for functionally understood reference and “reference_C” for causal reference. (Unfortunately, Sellars does not distinguish them in some such way, for his stance on “reference” should be that classical referential theories of meaning run together these two senses, much like the classical correspondence theory of truth runs together two notions of correspondence, see BBK).

Of course, reference_F and reference_C need to be interconnected on Sellars’s account as there is a connection between the picturing-role of language as a natural phenomenon and the rule-governed aspect of language even though Sellars does not say many clear things on this. Each seems to be in some sense a necessary condition for the other (if “*a*”s did not refer_C to *a*, “*a*”s would not be •*a*•s, and therefore also not materially equivalent to •*a*•s; if “*a*”s do not refer_F to *a*, they do not refer_C to *a*, thus picture *a*.)

Which of the two notions is the one Brandom has in mind when he claims that the only way to make sense of Sellars’s *scientia mensura* is to read it as claiming coreference for commonsense and scientific terms? For Brandom, coreference entails identity and identity is an intersubstitution license at least in some contexts. Clearly, on both of Sellars’s accounts of reference, we could claim that coreference entails identity in some sense. On the functional account of reference, coreference entails identity precisely in Brandom’s sense, as reference_F is defined as the material equivalence of two linguistic roles and material equivalence is an intersubstitution license in extensional contexts.⁵² It

⁵¹ In order to highlight that we speak about the physical features of linguistic expressions, the statement would be more precise by using Sellars’s starquotes, a device forming common nouns of linguistic expressions with the same sign design (**a**s picture *a*.) or phonetic transcription ([ei]s picture *a*), or an equivalent device.

⁵² Given the modal Kant-Sellars thesis, one could ask whether Sellars has the right to adopt a distinction between the weaker material equivalence and the stronger identity of sense (i.e. identity of functional roles) at all. As Brandom shows, the modal Kant-Sellars thesis undermines the classical distinction between intensional and extensional contexts. But as in Brandom’s account of identity, Sellars’s notion of material equivalence could be based on a subset of the rules governing the use of the terms in question which constitutes criteria of individuation and counting.

is not probable that Brandom thinks of coreference_C, for even if two terms picture the same object, this yields an intersubstitution license for them only in basic empirical statements. Apart from that, Brandom is generally suspicious of the notion of picturing.

Brandom therefore obviously has the first of Sellars's notions of reference in mind, reference_F. On this way of construing reference, reference statements claim material equivalence for functional roles. Thus, what Sellars's purported co-reference claim of manifest and scientific descriptive terms would amount to is that the functional roles of a certain individual constant or description in our common-sense conceptual framework is materially equivalent to the functional role of a certain individual constant (or a description of a complex object) in the final scientific conceptual scheme.

It is hard to see how he could have meant this. Sellars claims that our commonsense conceptual scheme and the scientific conceptual scheme have a radically different categorial structure. How could we make sense of the idea that there would somehow be the *same* sentential contexts in the two frameworks into which we could substitute? If Brandom's account was correct and Sellars wants to claim by his *scientia mensura* that commonsense and scientific terms corefer_F the two terms in question would have to have very similar functional roles. Again, it is not clear how they could have given that they are each part of a framework very distinct from the other. Maybe this is what Sellars meant, but we would need a long defense to make it even so much as conceivable. At least, these considerations should make as suspicious as to how much Brandom's reading of the *scientia mensura* captures what Sellars had in mind.

Identity and correspondence rules

In the next part, I would like to defend the claim that the simple understanding of the coreference and identity claim which Brandom uses is not what Sellars envisaged. Sellars was probably aware of the insufficiency of the approach Brandom ascribes to him and had a much more complex story in mind when he claimed the ontological primacy of the ultimate scientific conceptual scheme. It is true that Sellars sometimes seems to evoke the picture of a simple identity between commonsense objects and scientific objects, e.g. by claiming that "it is *very* plausible to say that gases *are* populations of molecules". (TE, §20; Sellars's emphasis). He therefore seems to insinuate that

gas *a* = population of molecules *b*

But we should see this as one of the typical cases where we need a longer commentary to grasp what Sellars meant. He devotes long parts of *Theoretical Explanation* (TE), *The Language of Theories* (LT) and *Science, Sense Impressions, and Sensa* (SSIS) to providing such a commentary. Brandom does not address these essays at all. However, engagement with Sellars's view demands some treatment of them. As I shall show next, Sellars himself arguably would not even quarrel with Brandom's approach and his dismissal of strongly cross-sortal identity claims on the basis of the modal Kant-Sellars thesis. Probably, he would endorse all of it but claim that precisely for the reason that strongly cross-sortal identity claims are false we must not understand the idea that science tells us what there really is in terms of strongly cross-sortal identity claims. Of course, this does not yet show that Sellars's own account is defensible. But it shows that if it is Brandom's purpose to turn one Sellarsian core thesis against another, his way of doing so misses its target.

Did Sellars understand the relationship between things talked about in commonsense vocabulary and things talked about in scientific vocabulary as identity? A look at Sellars's programmatic essay *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* shows that the answer cannot be a simple "yes". In a famous passage, Sellars proposes three possibilities for answering Eddington's two-table-problem, i.e. the problem how to relate commonsense and scientific descriptions of things. There he considers the possibility that

manifest objects are identical with systems of imperceptible particles in that simple sense in which a forest is identical with a number of trees. (PSIM, 26)

As is well known, Sellars dismisses this possibility on the basis of his grain argument. He claims that systems of microphysical particles cannot have the ultimately homogenous qualities of perceptible objects (colors, smells, etc.) whether we conceive these qualities as possessed by perceptible objects themselves or as "in" the perceiver. Thus, Sellars obviously did not understand the relation between commonsense and scientific objects to be identity in a simple sense. What is more, when Sellars explains the kind of identity he has in mind, he is often very cautious, putting the "is" into quotation marks or adding other qualifications, like here:

a gas is—in some sense of "is"—a cloud of molecules (LT, §41).

Thus, obviously there is more involved for him than straightforward identity.⁵³

In *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, Sellars tells us much about how not to conceive of the relation between commonsense and scientific descriptive terms, but he does not say many things about how we should understand it. There is more to be found in the three essays mentioned above. There, Sellars bases his account of the relation between manifest (observational) and scientific (theoretical) vocabulary on the notion of correspondence rules:

Puzzles about the meaning of theoretical terms and the reality of theoretical entities are so intimately bound up with the status of correspondence rules that to clarify the latter would almost automatically resolve the former. (LT, §8)

Correspondence rules are a device to establish verbal bridges which lead us from the observational into the theoretical vocabulary and back. The point of seeking such bridges into theoretical vocabulary and back is to have the ability to explain observable events by the help of theory. This role of correspondence rules is temporary: as long as science is developing, correspondence rules are only tentative (TE, §30).

What do correspondence rules do? According to Sellars, they play an important role in the theoretical explanation of observable events. The basic schema of this explanation is the following:

Molar objects of such and such kinds obey (approximately) such and such inductive generalizations because they *are* configurations of such and such theoretical entities. (LT, §45; Sellars's emphasis)

Right afterwards, he claims that all questions about the relation between theory and observation are concentrated in the italicized "are" in the passage above. The word expresses some kind of identity here, but it is not clear how we have to understand it. To elucidate this, Sellars looks more deeply into what work correspondence rules do in our language. He gradually closes in on the answer by considering several possibilities to

⁵³ Still, some kind of identity claim is involved (see below), otherwise Sellars would not phrase his statements in terms of identity or "identity" at all. Christias 2017a asserts that Brandom's analysis of Sellars's *scientia mensura* as an identity claim is wrong. In my view, however, Brandom is not wrong as such, it is only that the identity claim which Sellars is concerned with is not as simple or straightforward as Brandom presents it. To claim that Sellars had no identity claim in mind would be to disregard all the occasions on which Sellars actually makes such claims (even if guarded by uses of "in some sense" or quotation marks).

capture the role of correspondence rules. First, they could simply be a device of replacing the observational framework by the theoretical framework (this would be close to Brandom's reading of Sellars's *scientia mensura* as implying simple identity claims). This does not do, according to Sellars, because we could then not anymore express the observational facts which the theory was meant to explain. Second, they could function as redefinitions of observational terms in theoretical terms. This does not do because theoretical terms need not be wholesale redefinitions in order to do their job for us. Theoretical terms function without the need to assume that we covertly redefine commonsense terms when we relate theory and observation. That would be unnecessarily ambitious. Finally, he arrives at the claim that correspondence rules are

statements to the effect that certain redefinitions of observation terms would be in principle acceptable (LT, § 51)

Thus, in Sellars's view, rather than making a simple identity claim, correspondence rules suggest how to redefine or reconceptualize commonsense terms. They convey that we could accept a certain identity claim, but it is not (in the case of the theoretical treatment of gases)

gas *a* = complex theoretical object *b* (a cloud of molecules)

but

gas *a* reasonably reconceived in theoretical terms = complex theoretical object *b* (a cloud of molecules).

The latter identity statement is obviously true provided that gases *are* reconceived scientifically as clouds of molecules. It is crucial that Sellars's view does not commit him to the first identity claim but only to the second. Thus, he need not commit himself to the substitution license for "gas *a* (as conceived in commonsense terms)" and "cloud of molecules *b*" which is the kind of substitution Brandom's criticism was directed against. Brandom does not take into account as much as he should what Sellars himself says on the relationship between commonsense and scientific terms.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ DeVries claims something similar in his reaction to Brandom's criticism. According to him, Brandom interprets Sellars's approach and his claims about the clash between the manifest (commonsense) and the scientific understanding of the world in an overly static way and overlooks that behind Sellars's claim about the superiority of the scientific image there is a dynamic picture of scientific inquiry (deVries 2016, 123).

In fact, Sellars expresses quite clearly himself that his view of correspondence rules is not that of simple identity claims. Towards the end of *The Language of Theories* he says that

According to the view I am proposing, correspondence rules would appear in the material mode as statements to the effect that the objects of the observational framework *do not really exist—there really are no such things*. They envisage the *abandonment* of a sense and its denotation. (LT, §52, Sellars’s emphasis)

And one paragraph before, he speaks about

the peculiar character of correspondence rules as expressing more than a factual equivalence but less than an identity of sense. (LT, §51)

Judging from these passages, Sellars himself would not have adopted the view which Brandom ascribes to him to make sense of the *scientia mensura*, and probably he would have even rejected it for similar reasons as Brandom. In the last passage quoted above, he claims that the relation between commonsense and theoretical descriptive terms cannot be understood as identity in the sense of material equivalence and neither in the sense of synonymy. Unfortunately, in this passage Sellars’s way of expressing himself insinuates that the identity stated by correspondence rules must be somewhere in between a factual identity and an identity of sense. This is misleading for it evokes the impression that we are looking for a third kind of identity in order to characterize what correspondence rules say. But actually, we are not. For what correspondence rules, on Sellars’s own account, say is that commonsense entities if they are reconceived in theoretical terms are identical to certain theoretical entities, identical simply in the ordinary sense and not in some purported third sense. His claim that correspondence rules express “more than factual equivalence but less than an identity of sense” is a rather clumsy formulation of what he says much more clearly elsewhere:

the “manifest” ice cube is “identical with” a system of micro-physical particles in the complicated sense that in this successor framework, the ice cube concept would be defined in terms of micro-physical particles, so that ice cubes *as thus conceived* would be *literally* identical with systems of microphysical particles. (SSIS, 407; Sellars’s

emphasis)

Thus, according to Sellars when we say that something really is something else, as in “gases are *really* clouds of molecules”, we endorse a correspondence rule in the sense explained. And what we express by this is not in the first place a coreference claim or a simple identity claim, as Brandom would have it, but rather that it would be in principle reasonable to reconceptualize commonsense gases as clouds of molecules. After having endorsed such a reconceptualization, the identity claim in question would turn out to be true trivially. Therefore, what matters about a correspondence rule is not this implicit identity claim but the claim that a certain reconceptualization of a commonsense term would be reasonable. As Sellars’s writes in the passages from *The Language of Theories* quoted above, we thereby “abandon a sense and its denotation”. Therefore, there is no motivation and not even an opportunity for an identity claim in Brandom’s substitutional sense. There is no second relatum (the commonsense term with its sense and denotation has been abandoned). The only identity statement involved is that of the trivial form “ $a=a$ ”. If Brandom wants to take issues with Sellars’s *scientia mensura*, he should attack this more complicated position.

Sellars’s and Brandom’s different strategies (Sellars’s account of the relation between commonsense vocabulary and theoretical scientific vocabulary and Brandom’s account of Sellars’s account) are arguably rooted in diverging presuppositions. We could ask from the Brandomian perspective why we should envisage Sellars’s “abandonment of a sense and its denotation” for our commonsense vocabulary at all. In his criticism of Sellars’s position, Brandom tries to express that there actually is no motivation for a wholesale abandonment of commonsense terms in favor of scientific terms. This is because strongly cross-sortal identity claims between commonsense and scientific descriptive terms are false. A general conflict between these two vocabularies on the ontological level therefore does not even arise, for each speaks about different things. With the help of other important Sellarsian theses, he tries to defuse what he probably regards as Sellars’s motivation for claiming science’s ontological privilege over common sense. But he overlooks that this supposedly unintelligible account of the relationship between commonsense and theoretical vocabularies could not have been Sellars’s motivation. For, as we have seen, Sellars himself makes clear that he does not have any such account in mind.

Sellars's real motivations for claiming science's ontological privilege must lie somewhere else. Brandom only addresses them in a footnote, however, (Brandom 2015, 79 n. 43) where he criticizes Sellars's notion of an ideal Peircean vocabulary as unintelligible and claims that Sellars stuck to an outdated ideal of hierarchical explanation (Brandom 2015, 85). These are certainly criticisms against which Sellars would need to defend himself. But unfortunately, Brandom leaves them in underdeveloped form.

Why should Brandom reject the idea of the “abandonment of a sense and its denotation” for commonsense terms? At first glance, the phenomenon is not unfamiliar. Actual cases of such an abandonment abound, especially in science, “phlogiston”, “caloric fluid” or “ether” being just some examples. There are also examples in the philosophical literature, for example the early Rorty's eliminative materialism with respect to mental entities. Rorty claims that talk about mental entities is not *per se* excluded from possible replacement by scientific talk about brain states. He justifies this by giving an account of those qualities of mental entities which seem to make them distinct from anything falling into the category “physical”. For Rorty, these qualities, especially incorrigibility, fall out of our currently existing epistemic practices (Rorty 1970). But these practices may change. If we started to ascribe a higher authority to cerebroscope reports than to our first-person introspective reports, the only distinguishing quality of the “mental” as against the “physical”, i.e. incorrigibility, would have disappeared, and there would be no obstacle in principle against identifying the two. According to Rorty, this would amount to our stopping to speak about distinctively mental entities for a mental entity just was the object of an incorrigible report. Thus, as Rorty himself claims, this would vindicate an identity theory of the mental and the physical. But this identity would neither be synonymy or Sellars's “identity of sense” of mental and physical terms nor a factual equivalence. It would be a case of Sellars's abandoning a sense and its denotation, that is reconceiving what we formerly conceived as mental in other, physical terms and then making a trivial identity claim. Sellars's claim that commonsense entities do not really exist may be interpreted similarly, i.e. as imagining a situation where we have stopped to speak about such entities with good reason.⁵⁵

Thus, Sellars's account of the “identity” of commonsense entities and theoretical entities need not clash with his philosophy of language, at least not for the reasons that

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, Rorty himself wrongly classes Sellars with those claiming that a contingent identity between mental events and brain states would be enough (Rorty 1970, n. 6).

Brandom offers. The relationship between our commonsense vocabulary and the scientific theoretical vocabulary in Sellars is not, as Brandom interprets it, one of coreference or one expressed in simple identity claims, but rather one of conceptual succession and replacement of predecessor conceptual frameworks by successor frameworks.⁵⁶ This raises many new questions as to how exactly Sellars conceived of conceptual succession and how the shift from a predecessor to a successor framework may be justified. I will return to these problems in the next chapter. What is important for now is that Brandom's attack on what he calls Sellars's scientific naturalism with the help of Sellars's pragmatist treatment of language fails. If it had been successful, Sellars's pragmatism and realism could not be reconciled. But as Brandom does not take issues with Sellars's account in sufficient complexity, we must conclude that his attack does not target Sellars's actual position.

3.2. DeVries, objects and practical reality

Willem deVries has been constantly concerned with how Sellars treats the relation between our conceptualizations of the world and this very world itself. In doing this, deVries has occupied a middle position (between the "left-wing" and the "right-wing" of Sellars's readers). This means that he is (or maybe was) one of those interpreters who do not want to sacrifice any of Sellars's fundamental tenets, i.e., neither his insistence that human social and conceptual activity is irreducibly normative nor his insistence on a radical scientific naturalism. In more recent writings, however, deVries has left the middle ground to turn to a more "leftist" position.

My main preoccupation here will be deVries's earlier views, for one reason: In his 2005 introduction to Sellars's philosophy (and with less emphasis in deVries 2009b), deVries presents his reading of Sellars as a conciliatory reading which attenuates the tensions that we can find in his work. This makes contact to the project in which I am engaged here. In subsequent publications, starting from a 2012 essay⁵⁷ and continued for

⁵⁶ This account needs to be much more complex, of course. What we would actually find in a Sellarsian scheme is not the straightforward gradual development of our commonsense conceptual framework into a perfected theoretical scientific framework. Rather, we keep our commonsense framework largely in place and link it with a series of successively evolving theoretical frameworks by tentative verbal bridges, the correspondence rules.

⁵⁷ Starting from these writings, the shift in deVries's approach to Sellars is evident, it might, however, have begun earlier. In 2009, 225-226, deVries writes that

Sellars essentially accepts the ontology of the reductivist and the ideology of the non-naturalist. We

example in a paper in Barnbaum; Pereplyotchik 2016, deVries offers a more critical reading of Sellars and is prepared to drop some of Sellars's claims about ontology and ultimate reality. Thus, he focuses more on what Sellars should have said and not, as before, on what Sellars actually says. On my account, this will come out as an advantageous shift, for deVries's former conciliatory reading is flawed in several respects. However, seeing why it is flawed can prove useful for us in developing an alternative conciliatory account. In this section, I will focus on deVries's notion of "practical reality" put forward in his 2005 book, criticize this notion and look for the underlying motivation for introducing it.

Practical reality and textual evidence

In the last chapter (entitled *The Necessity of the Normative*) of his introduction to Sellars, deVries introduces the notion of "practical reality" and attempts to connect it to Sellars's work. According to deVries, practical reality pertains only to the objects of our commonsense conceptual framework, such as hammers, but not to objects belonging to the ultimate scientific ontology. These latter (and only they) are empirically real in a full sense. DeVries bases this idea of practically real objects on Sellars's notion of semantic assertibility. As explained in chapter 2, Sellars holds a generic notion of truth where the predicate "is true" has the function of signaling that a certain sentence is assertible in accordance with the rules of our language. But S-assertibility does not only apply to descriptive or empirical statements but also, for example, to normative and practical ones. As truth and reality are connected, deVries claims that in Sellars's framework there is room for the notion of "practical reality":

a framework or object is practically real iff there are *categorial prescriptive truths* with respect to that framework or object. A framework is practically real iff there are within the framework intentions that are warrantably assertible, that is, intersubjectively reasonable and universally applicable. (deVries 2005, 272, deVries's emphasis)

DeVries does not give examples of such categorial prescriptive truths with respect to commonsense objects. In the case of artifacts, such as hammers, he refers to a typical

can recognize truths that cannot be expressed in the vocabulary of physicalist science without accepting the existence of supernatural objects.

However, his argument for practical reality from 2005 depends, as we will see, precisely on that we do not disconnect Sellars's "ideology" from his "ontology".

function they are intended to have. Thus, one such truth might be

If one wants to drive a nail into a wall, one ought to use a hammer.⁵⁸

For the sake of argument, we can accept that this claim yields “intersubjectively reasonable and universally applicable” intentions to act in certain circumstances (e.g. facing the task of putting a picture on the wall) in certain ways (e.g. fetching a hammer and driving a nail into the wall with the help of it). But deVries acknowledges that this is not all that is required to defend the exclusive practical reality of commonsense objects. He admits that there is no reason in principle why scientific concepts could not figure in such true prescriptive claims (deVries 2005, 273). However, what distinguishes commonsense objects from scientific objects is, he says, that prescriptive claims figure in the identity and individuation conditions of commonsense objects but not of scientific objects. That means for example that something which could not be used to drive a nail into a wall also could not be a hammer. This reminds one of Brandom’s approach discussed in the chapter before according to which commonsense and scientific objects have radically different conditions of identity and counting and can therefore not be identical. DeVries makes the additional claims that on this basis we are entitled to claim “reality” for commonsense objects, namely practical reality, and that such a view is congenial with Sellars’s thought.

Nevertheless, deVries’s and Brandom’s approaches differ in their intention. Brandom’s approach is directed against Sellars’s *scientia mensura* claim. DeVries, at least in his 2005 account, does not attack Sellars at all but rather wants to uncover some surplus value supposedly hidden in Sellars’s work. This surplus is a combination of the ultimate empirical reality of scientific objects with the practical reality of commonsense objects.

However at least in the text discussed here, neither Brandom nor deVries take into account Sellars’s more complex approach of reconceptualization. Of course, one could ask: How could objects with normative and practical identity conditions ever come to be reconceptualized as objects without normative and practical identity conditions? But there obviously is room for some such claim in Sellars’s framework. For although he does not allow normative and practical concepts to be used in the scientific descriptions of the

⁵⁸The question is why deVries’s focus is prescriptive statements and artifacts, when a much more natural rendering, in the case of artifacts, would be a recommendation, e.g.: “If one wants to drive a nail into the wall, it is convenient to use a hammer.”

world, he still allows science to mention them (see PHM, 101).⁵⁹ Thus, identity conditions of what it is, for example, to be a hammer could come to be reformulated as identity conditions mentioning practical statements by language users. Therefore, one could ask why deVries draws such a sharp line between commonsense objects and scientific objects. He leaves out of sight that the former could be reconceived as the latter and thus leaves out of sight a solution to the existence of manifest objects which might be preferred by Sellars himself (see SM, ch. V §102). For deVries, it seems to be foregone conclusion that the reality of commonsense objects is endangered in Sellars's scheme as it stands and that this reality needs to be saved. This assumption is not the main target of my discussion but still, I will say something more about it later.

DeVries claims that the notion of practical reality is congenial to Sellars's thought. He calls it "a revealing concept to add to their [Sellars's and Kant's] arsenals" pointing to "the true depth of Sellars's pragmatism" (deVries 2005, 271). But Sellars himself never speaks of practical reality. When we look at the textual support deVries offers, we find him referring to a single footnote in *Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism*. This footnote says:

This aspect of the situation [the need to enrich the scientific conceptual framework with practical discourse], which is not stressed by Feyerabend, is illustrated by the practical dimension of such common sense concepts as that of what it is to be a hammer. (SRII, n. 24)

Still, in the propositions to which this footnote belongs, Sellars claims at the same time that commonsense physical objects do *not* exist (i.e., they have "no reality", he explains that this claim means that at some point of time it will be reasonable to abandon the commonsense conceptual framework in favor of the scientific one). It is not a solid approach for deVries to ground a wide-ranging claim about the practical reality of commonsense objects on just a footnote without defending this claim against what Sellars himself says in the passage the footnote is attached to.

DeVries could try to defend his claim by suggesting that Sellars uses the term "reality" equivocally. Sometimes, he even seems to acknowledge this himself, particularly in the many passages where he speaks of mental entities, abstract entities and the like as

⁵⁹ Thus, "Things ought to be thus-and-so." is not a scientific statement, but "Subject S uttered: 'Things ought to be thus-and-so.' " might be.

real in some sense but not really real in another, e.g. here:

although there are attributes, there *really* are no attributes. (NAO, ch. 3 §1; Sellars's emphasis)

But the sense which Sellars gives to such passages indicates that he is not actually talking about different ways of being real. What he means is that we are justified in talking about mental entities, abstract entities and the like, but that from a philosophical and reflected point of view they are not real. DeVries obviously intends something stronger than this "real-in-some-sense-but-not-really-real" for his practically real objects.

Apart from these remarks about "real but not really real" entities, we do not find any indication in Sellars's text that he might endorse a heterogenous notion of reality with reality coming in different modes (a practical mode, an empirical mode, and maybe even more). One could argue that this is because Sellars usually speaks about matter-of-factual, descriptive ontologies and sees these as homogenous (not coming in different modes). This would not exclude that we can find some place in his work for modes of reality not linked to descriptive discourse (in deVries's case, prescriptive discourse). But it seems forced to claim that whenever Sellars speaks of what is real he means "descriptively" real but does not say so explicitly. And it would be even more implausible to argue in this case, as deVries does, that the notion of different modes of reality is *clarifying* in connection with Sellars's work.

Thus, the textual support for deVries's practical reality is rather thin and there are reasons to doubt that Sellars would endorse the notion. But there are even further reasons why it is not a good strategy to adopt deVries's view. If we want to come up with a conciliatory reading of Sellars, deVries's approach establishes unnecessary obstacles. To explain why this is so I would like to establish a link between deVries's approach and my main concern. The introduction of the concept of practical reality is targeted primarily at a variant of our first question from the beginning: what place to find for commonsense, practically and normatively characterized objects in Sellars's scientific realism. Liberalizing the notion of reality by linking it to truth as semantic assertibility is one way of reacting to this question. Objects with a generally accepted practical or norm-governed use will then be real in a sense which does not conflict with the empirical reality of scientific objects. As a consequence, their ontological place in Sellars's scheme will be saved. Still, this approach has negative consequences for how we can go about treating

the second question which is the one of interest here: How can we defend a notion of ultimate reality and truth in Sellars given his pragmatist commitments?

DeVries bases the concept of practical reality on Sellars's generic concept of truth as S-assertibility which is applicable not only to descriptive but also to prescriptive and practical statements, among others. Thus, according to DeVries, there is a notion of practical truth, and therefore there are (practically) real entities which practical statements are true of. But the same type of reasoning can be employed for further types of propositions. S-assertibility does not only apply to descriptive and prescriptive discourse but also, e.g., to mathematical discourse, alethic modal discourse or to semantic discourse. These all are open to correct assertibility as much as practical discourse. Therefore, we would have to posit even further modes of reality, e.g. "mathematical reality" for mathematical objects, "semantic reality" for semantic objects (i.e. linguistic functions) or "modal reality" for modal statements (e.g. law-like statements) if we followed DeVries's reasoning. And it is not in line with Sellars's thought (especially not with his nominalism) to posit such a multiplicity of different "modes" of reality, all of which come, moreover, in different degrees (for DeVries claims that commonsense objects are *less* empirically real than scientific objects and *more* practically real). In the multitude of different modes of reality that DeVries's approach makes possible Sellars's emphasis on an ultimate conceptual scheme that captures how things really are becomes invisible.⁶⁰ Thus, even if DeVries could defend his approach because it offers a solution to our first question from the beginning, it still blocks answers to the second.

We might say that even though DeVries's aim was a conciliatory reading of Sellars, his approach itself hinders us in achieving such a reading. For, it simply reaffirms our question with new urgency: Given that we can construct an S-assertibility-based notion of reality from Sellars's texts, how come that Sellars insists on the notion of ultimate reality? Thus, we have made no progress at all in solving the question, and, as I will argue next,

⁶⁰ There is a different reading which we can give to DeVries's account of practical reality. What he means is maybe that parallel to a Peircean "descriptive" reality there is a Peircean "practical" reality. What is ultimately practically real, are those entities which occur in the practical statements of an ultimate community. However, such a reading would require answering many questions untouched by DeVries: What ultimate community are we talking about? Is it the same as the ultimate scientific community? Can things "lose" their practical reality? Imagine that members of the ultimate community would cease to use hammers, and cease to speak about hammers in practical statements, but still exhibit hammers in museums. Would hammers be unreal? If they were, what about their status here and now?

deVries's approach makes it even harder to find a good answer to it.⁶¹

Motivations for practical reality: Kant

What will interest me now is deVries's possible underlying motivation for introducing practical reality into Sellars's scheme. Searching for this motivation can help us see difficulties which need to be avoided when addressing the topic of ultimate reality in Sellars. As already indicated, the textual support for deVries's contention is rather thin and therefore makes the impression of an ad-hoc move. We do not make such moves just like that, thus, there probably is some stronger motive for it in deVries's case.

There seems to be a certain unease behind deVries's considerations. What seems to worry him is a Sellarsian picture in which commonsense objects do not exist at all. DeVries describes this problem as that of the status of the objects of the commonsense conceptual framework and the scientific conceptual framework respectively. He puts it, as follows, in Kantian terms:

The *objects* of the manifest image are transcendently ideal, whereas the *objects* of the (culminating) scientific image are transcendently *real*. Thus there is an apparent paradox: the *objects* of the scientific image are real, even though the framework is ideal. (deVries 2005, 270; deVries's emphasis)

In a later essay, he reiterates this way of approaching the issue:

Objects, therefore, are also framework- or language-dependent. That is clear from the fact that Sellars tells us outright that the objects of the manifest image are merely phenomenal in the Kantian sense. (deVries 2009b, 240)

and then goes on:

If objects in general are framework-relative, then scientific objects are also framework-relative and mind-dependent. The realism of science is as thoroughly internal as the realism of the manifest image. And a merely internal realism is just another name for

⁶¹ In this context, the shift in deVries's position effected after his 2005 book when he adopted a more critical stance towards Sellars's thought (e.g. deVries 2012) becomes understandable. He now criticizes Sellars for not making enough room for persons and normativity in his ontology of the scientific image and for his rigid picture of what ultimately exists. If it is true, as I have claimed, that the introduction of the concept of practical reality was not a very Sellarsian move in the first place, deVries's shift is only consistent.

idealism, no? (deVries 2009b, 240)

It does not take much to identify a variant of our question from the beginning in these passages: Given that all our conceptual frameworks are creations of human imagination, how can we ever come to speak about an ultimate conceptual framework which captures reality as it is? In both cases, in the book as well as in the essay quoted, deVries claims that picturing is Sellars's solution to this problem. He does so, however, without making clear what relation picturing has to our "free" creation of conceptual systems, as if the invocation of arbitrarily precise linguistic pictures of the world in itself threw light on how a conceptual system could be ultimately adequate.⁶²

I shall concentrate on picturing in much of the next subchapter and the next chapter where I argue that we need to be very careful what we mean when we want to attribute this role of measuring the adequacy of conceptual schemes to it. Now, I would like to criticize the underlying picture present in the passages quoted above, a picture which might be at the root of deVries's problem. This underlying picture may give rise to deVries's worries about commonsense objects in a Sellarsian framework (and thus lead to his introduction of the concept of practical reality). At the same time, it puts us in an unfavorable position as far as the question of ultimate reality in Sellars is concerned. This is not to say that there is no problem to be solved at all. To the contrary, in the passages quoted above deVries is obviously concerned with the same general problem on which I focus here. But it is his way of bringing this problem to light which is not advantageous. I will criticize deVries on two grounds: first, for his framing Sellars in overly Kantian terms and second, for his notion of "objects of a conceptual framework".

Before putting forward his considerations on practical reality, deVries takes some time to situate the status of the commonsense conceptual framework and the ultimate scientific conceptual framework in a field of Kantian distinctions. According to him, both of these conceptual frameworks are transcendently ideal, while the objects of the commonsense framework are transcendently ideal as well (though empirically real) and the objects of the scientific conceptual framework are transcendently real (and more empirically real than commonsense objects). This amounts to a wholesale application of

⁶² In any case, this invocation of picturing brings deVries into the proximity of what I have called the straightforward reading (see chapter 2.3).

a Kantian scheme to Sellars.⁶³ The question is, first, whether this is warranted and, second, whether this is helpful.

There is no doubt that Sellars has close affinities to Kant and that he understands his own work as a development of the Kantian project. Therefore, it seems to lie close at hand that Kant's distinction between the world of appearance and the in-itself becomes the distinction between the commonsense image of man-in-the world and the scientific image in Sellars. Sellars himself highlights this parallel at some places, e.g. in *Phenomenalism*:

the perceptual world is phenomenal in something like the Kantian sense, the key difference being that the real or "noumenal" world which supports the "world of appearances" is not a *metaphysical* world of unknowable things in themselves, but simply the world as construed by scientific theory. (PHM, 97; Sellars's emphasis)

or in *Science and Metaphysics*:

If, however, [...] we replace the static concept of Divine Truth with a Peircean conception of truth as the "ideal outcome of scientific inquiry," the gulf between appearances and things-in-themselves, though a genuine one, can in principle be bridged. (SM, ch. II §51)

Thus obviously, Sellars at least sometimes characterizes the problem space set up by the distinction between the two images in Kantian terms. But it is not clear whether this amounts to a wholesale adoption of the Kantian framework merely accompanied by the caveat that the in-itself must be conceived as empirically knowable. Why should we read passages like the two quoted above as Sellars's adoption of a Kantian framework rather than as Sellars's application of his own framework to Kant (indicating what Kant could also have said or should have said)?

Sometimes, Sellars adopts the terminology of a position he wants to engage with only to adapt this position to his own thought system. Sellars's resulting commitments need not coincide with those of the initial position (see his treatment of the logical empiricist understanding of theoretical explanation in TE). This probably serves to anchor the discussion of his own views in existing terminology in order to better situate them in

⁶³ In a recent critical note, deVries expresses himself in a more guarded fashion. He writes that Kant was a model for Sellars's distinction between the manifest image and the scientific image, but that he is not the only relevant model (deVries 2016, 123).

the landscape of philosophical positions already mapped. Why could that not be the case for Sellars's adoption of the Kantian terminology of appearances and the in-itself?⁶⁴

We should be cautious before pressing Sellars's views on ultimate reality too tightly into a Kantian scheme. We cannot simply take it for granted that such a move is enlightening, or even appropriate, only because Sellars often engages with Kant. There are good reasons to challenge the idea that in the two passages quoted above Sellars expresses a straightforward transfer of the Kantian appearance vs. in-itself distinction to his own philosophy. In the case of the quotation from *Science and Metaphysics*, one should be aware that it appears in a context where Sellars interprets, adapts, and criticizes Kant from the viewpoint of his own position. Of course, he highlights aspects of his own thought from a Kantian perspective, but that does not amount to a simple adoption of Kantian distinctions. As far as the passage from *Phenomenalism* is concerned, we should notice that Sellars's comparison is very cautious: he speaks of “*something like* the Kantian sense” and puts quotation marks around “noumenal” as well as “world of appearance”. This does not look like a straightforward adoption of Kant but rather like a guarded analogy. Furthermore, in the preface to *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars announces that he will defend the thesis that the manifest image is phenomenal in the Kantian sense, however with reservations.⁶⁵ So before we can express Sellars's position through Kantian terminology, we need to be clear about these very reservations, otherwise we risk misreading Sellars.

There are also reasons with respect to the content of Sellars's and Kant's distinction for not taking the analogy them to be a deep one. We cannot simply align Sellars's manifest image with Kant's world of appearances and Sellars's scientific image with Kant's realm of the in-itself. The differences are not exhausted by the fact that for Sellars the in-itself is knowable empirically while for Kant it is not. For Sellars, the home of normativity and of

⁶⁴ The view that Sellars treats Kant's philosophy as something to “rethink” is expressed by McDowell (2009, 3) and Sicha in his introduction to *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics* (Sicha 2002, §1-10).

⁶⁵ It is fair to say that there is a passage in *Science and Metaphysics* where Sellars is less cautious:

a consistent scientific realist must hold that the world of everyday experience is a phenomenal world in the Kantian sense, existing only as the contents of actual and obtainable conceptual representations, the obtainability of which is explained not, as for Kant, by things in themselves known only to God, but by scientific objects about which, barring catastrophe, we shall know more and more as the years go by. (SM, ch. VI §61)

But given further cases where “phenomenal” appears in quotation marks (e.g. SM, ch. V §79), this passage seems to be an exception and not the rule.

morality, of our self-understanding as agents and therefore as persons is the manifest image,⁶⁶ whereas for Kant these aspects cannot be ultimately rooted in the phenomenal world. Furthermore, for Sellars the scientific conceptual scheme is delimited from the commonsense conceptual scheme by the theoretical postulation of unobservable entities. Kant does not say much on this, but we can find at least one passage in the First Critique where he implies that postulated unobservable entities still belong into the world of appearances:

Thus we *cognize* the existence of a magnetic matter penetrating all bodies from the perception of attracted iron filings, *although an immediate perception of this matter is impossible for us* given the constitution of our organs. (Kant 1998, A226/B273; my emphases)⁶⁷

On the basis of this passage, Jay Rosenberg compares Kant to contemporary scientific realists (Rosenberg 2005, 238). But it is important to see that even if we can call Kant a scientific realist here, his scientific realism does not reach out towards the in-itself but operates in the realm of appearances. As McDowell writes, for Kant the scientific image would be itself phenomenal (McDowell 2009, 42 n.30).

Thus, in many aspects the distinctions between Kant's world of appearance and the in-itself and between Sellars's manifest and scientific images cannot be superposed. A straightforward assimilation of these two distinctions may be even disadvantageous. It insinuates that Sellars imagines something like a transition or "jump" from the world of appearances to a world of things-in-themselves, between two "worlds" that are in sharp opposition. That is because, at least on one common reading, the distinction is a very radical one in Kant: objects cannot be experienced as they are in themselves (see, e.g., Kant 1998, A 42/43, B 59/60). But what Sellars envisages is, if we want to use Kantian terminology at all, a coming together of the world of appearance and the in-itself. He says that this ideal end state would amount to our making the scientific image "our world" and that we would overcome the dualism of the two images (PSIM, 40), or that the world of observation and theory would be one (TE, §30). But this is possible only if we reject the

⁶⁶ This is not to say that these aspects need to be wedded forever to the manifest image. In any case, on this point, Sellars's distinction between the commonsense and the scientific conceptual framework is much closer to Husserl's distinction between the *Lebenswelt* and the scientific world-picture (see Husserl 2012) than to Kant's distinction between appearances and the in-itself. One can only speculate why Sellars never mentions Husserl in this respect.

⁶⁷ I use the Guyer-Wood translation.

sharp Kantian distinction between the world of appearances and the in-itself as a wholesale model for Sellars's distinction.

We should rather emphasize what deVries only hints at when he parallels the Kantian and the Sellarsian distinctions: our commonsense image of the world has a claim to empirical reality, but the scientific image has a greater claim to empirical reality. DeVries's exposition makes the impression that when we say that commonsense objects are transcendently ideal whereas scientific objects are transcendently real we point to some further aspect over and above this differing degree of empirical reality. But what justifies, if anything, calling scientific objects "transcendently real" against the "transcendently ideal" objects of commonsense is just the scientific objects' claim to greater empirical reality (whatever that will turn out to mean). This is how Sellars departs from Kant: he claims that "the in-itself" is empirically knowable. But this does not simply add a feature to Kant's distinction between appearances and the in-itself, but it changes the whole character of this distinction.⁶⁸

Thus, we have two ways of formulating our problem: we can see it as the problem of how Sellars can "jump" from Kantian transcendently ideal appearances to the transcendently real in-itself, or as the problem of how he understands claims to the greater or lesser empirical reality of objects. The latter way clearly has greater prospects of success than the former. Therefore, we should not phrase Sellars's position from the outset in overly Kantian terms. Such formulations set up obstacles where there need not be any. If we want to use Kant as a foil for Sellars, which is of course not inappropriate in itself, we should carefully analyze where Sellars and Kant part ways and not simply assimilate the Kantian and the Sellarsian framework.⁶⁹

Motivations for practical reality: objects of conceptual schemes

The second problematic aspect in the picture which might underlie deVries's attribution of the concept of practical reality to Sellars concerns the notion of "objects of conceptual schemes". DeVries uses this notion to express his worries about Sellars's approach. He

⁶⁸ See also Seibt 2007, 20 where she claims that naturalism, one of Sellars's core tenets, transgresses the simple distinction between the "for-us" and the "in-itself".

⁶⁹ This criticism might also be voiced towards Brandom's *From Empiricism to Expressivism* (see chapter 3.1). But in contrast to deVries, Brandom uses the Kantian analogy with respect to Sellars's manifest-vs.-scientific-image distinction as a device of exposition and nothing substantial in his arguments hinges on it.

does so in a compact way in an essay from 2009, where he says that the objects of the commonsense image are transcendently ideal whereas the objects of the scientific conceptual scheme are transcendently real. As he states in the essay, objects are always objects *of* some conceptual scheme, i.e. they are framework-dependent (deVries 2009b, 240). But that goes for the objects of the scientific conceptual scheme as well:

If objects in general are framework-relative, then scientific objects are also framework-relative and mind-dependent. (deVries 2009b, 240)

Probably we can give a defense of each of these claims with the help of Sellars's text. Still, put together in this way they immediately give rise to a vexing question: How can it be that scientific objects which are "merely" framework-relative are the very transcendently real, i.e. framework-independent, objects? This is obviously a variant of our own question from the beginning, but again, it is formulated in such a way as to block good answers. It implies that we demand of some objects that they be both framework-dependent and framework-independent. Not only will it be hard to give a conciliatory reading of Sellars when we start from this ground, but we are also left to wonder how Sellars himself could not have seen this flagrant problem in his account.

I would like to argue briefly that this way of formulating the question rests on an equivocation of the term "object" in "object of a conceptual scheme". Sellars himself is not innocent in conjuring up this equivocation for he does not always use his words with the greatest care in this respect. But there are places where he is clear on it. I will argue that deVries's idea of "objects of a conceptual scheme" is a cross-bread which cannot be understood if we accept other Sellarsian theses. As the notion of "objects of a conceptual scheme" may be at the root of deVries's worries about Sellars's position, these worries can be dispelled when we see that this notion does not fit into Sellars's scheme.

What actually is an "object of a conceptual scheme"? We could answer that objects of a conceptual scheme are what the sentences generated by this scheme are about or what is represented by sentences in the conceptual scheme. But we know, thanks to Sellars himself, that we must be careful with the ideas of "aboutness", intentionality and representation. According to Sellars claims like

His thought was about a cat.

or

This sentence refers to Kant.

are not, in the first place, to be interpreted as stating relationships between a conceptual item (a thought or a linguistic expression) and a non-conceptual item (cats, Kant or states of affairs in which they occur). Rather they are to be conceived as classifying the conceptual items in question according to their conceptual role (where, often, the item could not play its role if it did not stand in certain regular, causal relations to non-conceptual items, but these relations are not what constitutes the “aboutness” of the term in the classical sense). Thus, the sentences above say

His thought was a [•cat•] PRECON.⁷⁰

and

This sentence is a •Kant•.

What “aboutness” comes to here is conceptual classification. If we understand the term “object of a conceptual scheme” on the basis of aboutness in this sense, an object of a conceptual scheme is itself simply a concept.⁷¹ But, and this is the crucial point, if we understand the term in this sense there will be no problem at all about “objects of a conceptual scheme” being framework-dependent. As concepts, they trivially are. And there is no anxiety to be stirred when we speak about the possible non-existence of the objects “of” our commonsense conceptual framework. This will be a discussion only about the reasonableness of abandoning certain concepts, there is no threat of something cherished by us suddenly “going out of existence”.

Sellars uses the term “object of a conceptual scheme” himself in some places, particularly in *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* (PSIM). Here, he employs the term in his discussion of the basic objects “of” a certain conceptual scheme (especially the manifest image). But it is not problematic to reformulate this question and ask instead what the basic concepts of some conceptual scheme are. So Sellars’s own use of the term does not vindicate the use deVries makes of it, if we can show that deVries deviates from its simple reading as “concept”.

⁷⁰ This means that his thought was a token of the conceptual type •cat• concatenated with the token of some conceptual type of the predicate kind (“PRECON” stands for “predicate constant”), e.g. •white•, •fluffy•, etc. For an explanation of dot-quotation see chapter 2.2.

⁷¹ Sicha makes the same point in his introduction to *Kant’s Transcendental Metaphysics*, where he calls objects “contents” (Sicha 2002).

In his 2005 book, deVries speaks about the objects “of” the scientific conceptual framework as also being transcendentally real, i.e. as something existing independently of our conceptualization. Such a characterization cannot be applicable to any concept. At the same time, Sellars himself writes about things existing in-themselves and he often uses the category of object in this context. This is the case, for example, when he explains his notion of picturing as a causal relation between objects (see TC). This seems to be a sense of “object” different from “object of a conceptual scheme, i.e. concept”. Sellars is often not as clear on this as he could be, but there is at least one place in which he brings out that there is an important difference between these two uses of “object”. In the fifth chapter of *Science and Metaphysics*, he distinguishes between O (an object) and the •O• (what would here be the “object of a conceptual scheme”, i.e. a concept):

The objects which are pictured by a linguistic picture can thus be genuinely extra-linguistic (though, of course, linguistic episodes as items in *rerum natura* can also be pictured). *The concepts* of these objects are, of course, relative to a conceptual scheme, but the form of these concepts is not

O (in our conceptual scheme).

On the other hand, the “O” of

“a” (in L) denotes O

has the form “•O•”, which, by virtue of the considerations advanced in the above discussion of truth, does have the form

INSENSE (in our conceptual scheme). (SM, ch. V §61; Sellars’s emphasis)⁷²

Sellars then claims that a mixing up of these two is the root-mistake of Berkeley’s idealism.⁷³ O’s can be said to exist independently from concept-using organisms, while •O•’s cannot. What Sellars expresses, among other things, is that the notion of “O (in a conceptual scheme)” is a mixing up of two ideas: that of simply O and that of an individual sense (a concept) in a conceptual scheme. His point is that although which concepts of objects we have will always be framework dependent, our concept of an object is not the

⁷² INSENSE stands for individual sense or individual concept.

⁷³ This chimes in nicely with the concern of deVries’s essay from 2009, which is whether Sellars can “get beyond idealism”.

concept of a concept (i.e. of something framework dependent). But de Vries's use of "object of a conceptual scheme" is precisely that of "O (in a conceptual scheme)" rejected by Sellars. We see, therefore, that deVries's implicit way of putting forward our question, i.e. "How is it possible that the objects of a certain conceptual framework (the ultimate scientific one) are, as objects of a conceptual scheme, framework-dependent and, as existing in-themselves, framework independent?" rests on blending two ways of understanding the term "object", a blending which Sellars himself does not want to allow for. The question should rather be phrased in the form "How and in what sense can the individual senses of a certain conceptual scheme be adequate to the objects which exist independently of us as concept-users?". This is still a difficult question but it does not have the paradoxical character of deVries's approach.

We said that "object of a conceptual scheme" can be read most straightforwardly as "what sentences generated by a conceptual scheme are about". The tendency which I attributed to deVries of blending Sellars's "O" and "the •O•" may arise from (maybe implicitly) still understanding aboutness or intentionality as a peculiar kind of word-world relation. Thus, deVries's worries, or his way of formulating them, may rest on a quite un-Sellarsian tacit assumption of some sort of semantic or quasi-intentional relations between linguistic expressions and items in the world. For Sellars, the space of reasons (of concepts, contents or "objects of conceptual schemes") and the space of causes (the space of "objects in the world") is to be kept apart. If we use an idea of "object of a conceptual scheme" that blends Sellars's two notions of object we also run these two spaces together. And what was traditionally meant to bring them together are intentional relations between conceptual items and natural objects, relations which Sellars rejects.

Even if this was not in fact deVries's case (maybe I am merely imputing this tendency to him), it is still clear that any such residual assumption of quasi-semantic word-world relations would frustrate attempts to give an account of Sellars's notion of ultimate reality acceptable from a pragmatist point of view. We would then need to invoke some notion designed to capture the different degrees in semantic word-world adequacy. In Sellars, this role would probably be assigned to picturing. But doing this we would open ourselves to all the criticism from the pragmatist camp according to which picturing, too, would have to be a framework internal notion and there is no sense in supposing that we could reach some neutral standpoint for comparing different conceptual schemes with the help of it. If we want to keep the Sellarsian spirit of rejecting semantical relations, we must

also refrain from trying to understand his notion of adequacy of a conceptual scheme in these terms.

I want to close this subchapter with one last question. A few paragraphs before, I said that Sellars distinguishes “Os” and “•O•s”, thus conceptual items trivially dependent on our conceptual scheme from items not dependent on it in this way. But how can we have the right to this distinction when all we ever have is our current conceptual scheme constituted by rules which tell us which sentences are semantically assertible and therefore which objects can be correctly talked about in what way? How could we come to have the notion of objects independent of our conceptual scheme on that basis?

I will postpone this problem for the while and pick it up again in the next chapter. It is connected to more general questions about how Sellars conceives of conceptual change, the relation between predecessor and successor concepts and our sense of conceptual continuity. For now, I want to summarize the results of this subchapter. I focused initially on deVries’s notion of practical reality in connection with Sellars’s thought. As I showed, it is doubtful whether this notion has a place in Sellars’s scheme. I went on to ask what might have motivated deVries to introduce this notion. A possible reason was a certain anxiety for the existence of some objects, namely commonsense objects. This anxiety is fostered by deVries’s overly Kantian mold for Sellars’s manifest-vs.-scientific image distinction and by an equivocation in the term “object of a conceptual scheme”. These factors establish unnecessary obstacles to accommodating the question how Sellars can defend a notion of ultimate truth and reality. Therefore, we should reject both. Fortunately, as I have pointed out, Sellars’s does not seem to be committed to either of them.

3.3. Rosenberg, picturing and the ideal limit of inquiry

In exploring the theme of ultimate reality in Sellars’s thought, there is no way of going around Jay Rosenberg’s work. He is the only author who has given the question an intensive and repeated constructive treatment from a Sellarsian point of view.

In his inquiries, Rosenberg tries to defend realism as a position according to which we must distinguish between the existence of things and their being represented, i.e. thought of or spoken of (Rosenberg 1980, 28). What is especially interesting about his approach, particularly in Rosenberg 1980, is that he wants to do so while also incorporating many pragmatist themes. Although Rosenberg’s texts on these matters offer

very useful material, he conducts his inquiry not so much as an exegesis of Sellars's own writings but rather from a broadly conceived Sellarsian position. Thus, Rosenberg's aim is not to show how Sellars himself possibly accommodated the notion of reality but rather how we can approach it in general from a Sellarsian point of view. This is especially true of his two books in which the topic features centrally, *Linguistic Representation* (Rosenberg 1974) and *One World and our Knowledge of It* (Rosenberg 1980). Together with two essays (Rosenberg 1975; Rosenberg 1988), they are critical adaptations of Sellars's thoughts. Many theses which Rosenberg advances there can be traced back to Sellars in a rather straightforward way. Nevertheless, Rosenberg refers explicitly to Sellars only in a very little number of cases in his books.⁷⁴

I want to take up two themes connected to the problem of ultimate reality in Sellars already introduced in the last chapter and also addressed by Rosenberg. The first is Sellars's notion of picturing. Rosenberg's understanding of the role of picturing changed very radically from his 1974 book *Linguistic Representation* to his last treatment of the topic in his late essay *Sellarsian Picturing* (Rosenberg 2007b). I will argue that this change is a positive one. The second theme is the Peircean idea of a limit to which inquiry approaches. Rosenberg's treatment of this second issue has become more refined over time, as his attempt to mathematize the concept of a limit of inquiry became embedded into a pragmatic account of conceptual change. I will indicate where Rosenberg and Sellars part ways on this matter.

Picturing and the illusion of an external point of view

Rosenberg's overall aim is to defend the Peircean-Sellarsian idea that talk about "ultimate reality" or "ultimate truth" can be understood with reference to an imagined ideal limit of scientific inquiry. In his earlier writings, Rosenberg took picturing to be a central part of Sellars's project. In some of his statements from these texts, he comes rather close to the straightforward reading introduced in chapter 2.3, as he ascribes the following view to Sellars:

the "fit" between systems of natural-linguistic objects and systems of non-linguistic

⁷⁴ This is not problematic in the sense that Rosenberg would falsely claim Sellars's ideas to be his own. Quite to the contrary, he openly avows Sellars's strong influence on most of what he says in his introductions. Nor do I want to claim that there are no exegetical texts on Sellars by Rosenberg, for there are many (e.g. Rosenberg 1982, 2000 or 2009).

objects, like any correlation of relational structures, is one which admits of degrees [...] while the so-called “absolute” sense of “true” – and the *ultimate* cash value of “S-assertibility” – remains assertibility in *our* conceptual structure, here and now, it makes sense to view our conceptual structure as merely one stage in the evolution of a series of conceptual frameworks which are, in the picturing sense adumbrated above, increasingly adequate (Rosenberg 1975, 161; Rosenberg’s emphasis)

However, Rosenberg sees from the beginning that picturing cannot provide us with a neutral measure of the adequacy of conceptual systems to the world:

proto-correlational [pictorial] isomorphism is the *outcome* of the evolution of representational systems, but cannot be the *grounds* upon which a choice among representational systems is predicated (Rosenberg 1974, 121; Rosenberg’s emphasis)

Thus, more adequate picturing is a by-product of rational conceptual change which is itself driven by something else. What this driving force is, Rosenberg will explain in his account of explanatory convergence and of our motives to seek this convergence.

Rosenberg himself rejects the notion of a neutral justificatory matrix as unintelligible and thereby joins the pragmatist critics of this idea. However, at least in his earlier texts, he seems to assume that Sellars’s motive for introducing the notion of picturing is precisely to achieve such an “external” and neutral point of view upon all our conceptual schemes. He writes:

Sellars’ requirement, that the adequacy of the semantical rules themselves ultimately be measured by the adequacy *as pictures* of the first-level assertions which they license, suggests that we need a standpoint which is *neutral* among diverse conceptual structures from which we can judge the degree of fit between a system of natural-linguistic objects and a system of non-linguistic objects in a way which does not *presuppose* that one conceptual framework is more adequate than another. (Rosenberg 1975, 167; Rosenberg’s emphasis)

Thus, he reads Sellars and picturing in what I have called the straightforward way in chapter 2.3. The question is whether we are forced to do so. What I want to suggest further is that we need not understand Sellars in this way and that there are reasonable alternatives to the straightforward reading.

Before I turn to this question, I want to point out that the development of

Rosenberg's approach to picturing follows quite naturally from his initial position. When we reject the idea of a neutral standpoint and recognize that more adequate picturing cannot provide a criterion for progressive conceptual change, the question arises why we need picturing at all to explain the notion of an ultimate conceptual scheme. This is what happens in Rosenberg between *Linguistic Representation* and *One World and Our Knowledge of It*. In the former book, Rosenberg explains convergence of conceptual schemes towards a limit as explanatory progress. This growth in explanatory resources runs parallel with the growing pictorial adequacy of successive conceptual schemes. However, it is not clear how these two processes, i.e. growing explanatory power and growing pictorial adequacy, are linked. The former receives a detailed defense by Rosenberg while the latter does not. Picturing seems like a component without any clear purpose. Therefore, it is a natural move for Rosenberg to shove picturing to the background in 1980:

We may, of course, say of it [the ideal conceptual scheme] that it would be a representational system which is ideally adequate to the world which it represents, which it corresponds to or fits the world, or which pictures the world (absolutely) correctly, but such characterizations would, in an important sense, be idle. (Rosenberg 1980, 186)

Here, Rosenberg adopts the Rortean stance that justification comes first, i.e. that we do not accept new conceptual schemes because of their better "picturing" or "representing" the world but because we can justify the change with respect to standards or values internal to the scheme. Claiming that this new conceptual scheme fits the world better or pictures it more adequately is trivial.⁷⁵ This is because such claims are framework internal, i.e. made by the lights of the framework which we currently operate in, and from this vantage point it is trivial that former conceptual frameworks did not "fit" or picture the world as well as the current one. Thus, to say that a framework pictures the world more adequately than a predecessor is just to say that the transition from one to the other was justified from our current point of view. In this sense, the claim that an ultimately justified scheme would picture perfectly does not say anything. This explicit claim by Rosenberg is a direct consequence of his earlier claim that picturing is not a neutral criterion for progressive

⁷⁵ Although Rorty commends this shift in Rosenberg in his 1988 essay on Sellars and Davidson, there are still large differences in their respective positions. Rosenberg claims that even if justificatory processes, and nothing else, ground rational conceptual change, what counts as acceptable justification is constrained in such a way that conceptual change necessarily converges to a limit, i.e. a final conceptual scheme. Needless to say, Rorty does not agree.

conceptual change.

Our question above was whether Rosenberg is right to read Sellars in the straightforward way. I think that there is an alternative reading of Sellars on picturing, one that brings him in line with Rosenberg's understanding of the issue. What are the reasons for attributing the desire for an "Archimedean point" to Sellars, i.e. the desire for a neutral criterion to assess the adequacy of conceptual schemes? There are passages where Sellars at least *prima facie* commits himself to this view. Many of them can be found in *Science and Metaphysics*.⁷⁶

It is a truism that we don't speak a more adequate language than we do. On the other hand, it makes sense to speak of people who speak a more adequate language than we do. The putative concept of a linguistic structure which permits a more adequate picturing of objects than we are able to do raises the question: In which framework are these objects conceived? (SM, ch. V §65)

Peirce himself fell into difficulty because, by not taking into account the dimension of "picturing," he had no Archimedean [sic] point outside the series of actual and possible beliefs in terms of which to define the ideal or limit to which members of this series might approximate. (SM, ch. V §75)

[...] the concept of a domain of objects which are pictured in one way (less adequate) by one linguistic system, and in another way (more adequately) by another. And we can conceive of the former (or less adequate) linguistic system as our current linguistic system. (SM, ch. V §67)

At first sight, these passages are reasonable textual evidence for the view which both Rosenberg and Rorty attribute to Sellars. But we can give them a reading which diminishes the motivation to do so.

Although the three passages quoted above create the impression that Sellars holds the indefensible position ascribed to him by straightforward readers, other passages speak against this view. In the sections of *Science and Metaphysics* where Sellars develops the diachronic aspect of picturing, only one thing is beyond doubt: He intends his notion of

⁷⁶ And curiously, almost only there. Sellars does not return explicitly to them after *Science and Metaphysics*, not even in *Naturalism and Ontology*, the next and last book-long synopsis of his system. There, he also speaks extensively about picturing, but he does not address the diachronic dimension of the concept any more.

picturing to provide us with some standard of comparison between conceptual schemes. This is the only way to read his claims about more and less adequate picturing. However, he insinuates neither that this standard is a fixed and neutral one nor that it is inaccessible for us or at best only accessible for users of an ultimate conceptual scheme.

In the fifth chapter of *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars develops an intricate apparatus based on picturing and designed to allow for comparison between different conceptual schemes. However Sellars intends this apparatus to work, it need not involve an “external” standpoint. It is intended to help us understand what we mean when we say that users of other (former and later) conceptual schemes still speak about the same objects as we do, although they may say or may have said different things about them. It also helps us understand how we can extend truth claims from our conceptual scheme in a diachronic dimension to other schemes. Thus, picturing and the apparatus of comparison build on it shall give us a way of comparing our scheme to other schemes and to imagine that there will be schemes differently, and maybe better equipped, although truth and existence claims are bound to our conceptual scheme here and now.

Sellars offers a set of principles and definitions that shall allow such comparison. It is not necessary to go into all of them, but I would like at least to pick out one pair and make several points about it:

(a) If a proposition in CSO is true its counterpart in CSP is true *quoad* CSO, and true *quoad* CSP. (Roughly, if a system of natural linguistic objects tokening a proposition in CSO pictures certain objects, then tokens of the counterpart proposition in CSP also picture these objects.)

(b) If a proposition in CSP is true *quoad* CSP its counterparts in such frameworks (CS_i) as contain a counterpart are true *quoad* CSP, but not necessarily true *quoad* CS_i, though not false *quoad* CS_i. (SM, ch. V §74)

“CSO” and “CSP” are our conceptual scheme and the Peircean conceptual scheme respectively. “Being true *quoad* a CS” is Sellars’s expression for being semantically assertible according to the rules of the conceptual scheme in question (now not necessarily our scheme). A counterpart is the result of conceptual development where one concept evolved out of another, i.e. where we can relate these concepts as predecessor and successor (e.g. the concept of mass in Newton and the concept of mass in the theory of

relativity). Thus, principle a) says that if a proposition is true in our conceptual scheme, a proposition having developed by rational conceptual change out of it will be true, i.e. assertible, in the Peircean conceptual scheme.⁷⁷ Principle b) says that if propositions which are semantically assertible in the Peircean framework have a counterpart in a different conceptual scheme, these counterpart propositions need not be assertible according to the rules of this scheme, but in any case, the negation of the proposition is not assertible by the rules of this scheme.

The phrase in parentheses in the first principle makes it obvious that in Sellars's eyes the concept of picturing gives us the means to compare different conceptual schemes. But to say that such comparison is possible does not mean that we must envisage a neutral standpoint from which we compare. In Sellars's diachronic principles, of which the principles above are two examples, the comparison is not made from some "neutral point of view", but always from the standpoint of some conceptual framework, mostly our own or, in imagination, from the Peircean scheme. We always consider some proposition which is true according to some framework and then ask what this implies for other frameworks.

Thus, picturing need not provide us with a neutral measure for the adequacy of conceptual schemes to the world. But picturing would be equally unacceptable from a pragmatist point of view if it was a measure of the adequacy of conceptual schemes which we could apply only from the viewpoint of an ideal conceptual scheme. The idea would be that picture adequacy is not meant to be a neutral measure, that it is scheme-internal, but that the only scheme in which someone can apply it usefully is the Peircean scheme. We would never be justified in claiming for an existing conceptual scheme that it pictures the world. As we cannot reach this ideal conceptual scheme, anything which can be done only within this scheme cannot make a difference to actual human practice. This is what Rosenberg accuses Sellars of still in 1988 when he writes

that a proposition is correct-qua-picture is not something which we could ever be warranted in asserting from our perspective within the historical sequence of theories. That a proposition is correct-qua-picture, in other words, is something we could know only if we had already arrived at the "limit theory" [the Peircean conceptual scheme].

⁷⁷ This statement takes out the sting of Sellars's often harsh way of speaking about our commonsense conceptual framework, e.g. about its being "radically false". As long as there are conceptual counterparts for our commonsense concepts, our commonsense conceptual scheme cannot be completely inaccurate. Sellars himself qualifies the attribute "radically false" by giving it the meaning "to be replaced by a better conceptualization" (see, e.g., SRII, n.23).

(Rosenberg 1988, 172)

According to Rosenberg, what Sellars wants to say is that only the natural linguistic objects generated by the Peircean conceptual scheme picture in a primary sense, all other conceptual schemes can be said to picture only by courtesy and in a second-rate way.

I think that this is wrong on general grounds and that it was not Sellars's view either. Sellars says that

the *criterion* of the correctness of the performance of asserting a basic matter-of-factual proposition is the correctness of the proposition *qua* picture, i.e. the fact that it coincides with the picture the world-cum-language would generate in accordance with the uniformities controlled by the semantical rules of the language. (SM, ch. V §57; Sellars's emphasis)

According to some authors, e.g. Macbeth (2000) and possibly Rosenberg in his 1988 essay, this passage states that Sellars introduces picturing as a relation between language and the world which anchors our linguistic practices in objective reality. This interpretation is based on Sellars's claim from the quoted passage that the correctness of a sentence as a picture is primary and its correctness as a linguistic performance secondary. This can conjure the feeling that there is something like an antecedent correctness, i.e. pictorial correctness, that the world "labors" to impose on us and that we come to live up to step by step by adapting our semantic rules in order to match this antecedent correctness. Only in the ultimate Peircean conceptual scheme, this process would be completed and no other conceptual scheme would "really" picture.

But that need not be Sellars's view here. He emphasizes that it is the "world-cum-language" which generates linguistic pictures. The idea is that linguistic rules are efficacious on a causal level. The linguistic training children receive when learning their first language is conducted in accordance with the rules obeyed by the "trainers", i.e. adults competent in the respective language (see, e.g., MFC). This training instills dispositions in the child to react with a certain linguistic token (an utterance or a thought) to a stimulus, e.g. to have the disposition to utter "This apple is red." when they are confronted with a red apple.

In this way, the linguistic rules of a language contribute to generating and maintaining causal regularities between objects and events in the world and natural

linguistic objects. A set of rules other than the rules of our language would generate different linguistic patterns, that is pictures differing from the pictures generated by our language. But there is no straightforward way of saying that one linguistic picture, say ours, is correct while the other is incorrect, if the second picture is generated in the same causally flawless way as ours but on the basis of different dispositions. As it is the “world-*cum*-language” which generates linguistic pictures, picturing seems to be relative to a language in the same way as S-assertibility. As a consequence, it is only from the viewpoint of a certain language that we could say what a correct picture is. If this is so, picturing is no straightforward means to resolve our initial problem which was, formulated in the context here, to explain how we can have the idea of an ultimately adequate conceptual scheme when all we have is a succession of S-assertibilities equally acceptable in the light of their respective conceptual scheme. At least in this respect, picturing and S-assertibility are in the same boat.

On this reading, it is dubious that for Sellars the only language which actually pictures is the ultimate Peircean language. Of course, we cannot completely exclude the possibility that he thought in this way, but this seems unlikely. When we look at the examples of picturing he presents us with, we find: an android (BBK), a smart missile (NAO) and rats (MEV). None of these is a user of a Peircean conceptual scheme, and what is more, all of them are “language-using” entities only if we extend our notion of a human language to include artificial and animal representation systems. Sellars’s only picturing system which involves something like perfection is a “super-inscriber” from *Truth and Correspondence* (TC). But even this super-inscriber uses our commonsense conceptual scheme, e.g. our ordinary color concepts (he inscribes things like “green at place x,y,z and time t ”), so he is not a user of Peirceish either. Sellars does not insinuate that these systems, which he uses as illustrations, picture only in a second-rate sense of the term.

Thus, it is unlikely that he thought that picturing actually happens only in a Peircean scheme. Rather, as the examples given by Sellars imply, picturing takes place already in organisms and systems not even possessing a language in the human sense. Therefore, picturing the world seems not even to be a very demanding process for Sellars, compared to full-fledged language use. What changes for organisms possessing human languages is the scope in which they picture. Their complex inferential apparatus allows us to picture objects beyond our immediate environment or our observational capacities more powerfully than for example rats can do. But that does not mean that the picture a rat

representational system generates of its environment would be incorrect by default, or not actually a picture. To make sense of Sellars's examples we must give up the idea that for him only one language, i.e. Peirceish, pictures in a full-fledged way. It makes more sense to say that for him any empirically applied language needs to picture reasonably well.

As we have seen, pictures are generated partly by the linguistic dispositions of language users which developed because of the rules of the respective language. That is, in normal circumstances, a basic empirical statement which is a correct picture will also be S-assertible and *vice versa*. If this was not the case, there would be an internal incoherence in the language. The rules which determine what sentences are S-assertible are the same rules which are causally efficacious in the picturing relation. If a "language" pictured badly these two would fall apart. Therefore, a language cannot generate mostly false pictures. The only thing we might say is, when looking from a purportedly more developed conceptual scheme on a different, purportedly less developed one, that the second scheme's way of picturing the world is not as good as ours (e.g. not as fine-grained, not as useful, see chapter 4.3).

We should not ascribe the view to Sellars that we are in some way "out of touch" with the world when using a less than ultimate conceptual scheme and that the only conceptual scheme "in touch" with the world is the ultimate Peirceish one. When we take Sellars seriously on picturing, any conceptual scheme which is usefully applied in the world, as well as any functioning natural or artificial representational system, is "in touch" with the world by default. Picturing may be a process Sellars introduces to highlight how our being "in touch" with the world works, but not in the sense that this contact to the world could be achieved only in an ideal conceptual scheme.

When Rosenberg comes back to picturing for a last time in 2007, he gives it a reading similar to the one presented in the last paragraphs. In contrast to his earlier criticism, he writes that "most of what Sellars said about picturing admits of a defensible interpretation" (Rosenberg 2007b, 126). On Rosenberg's reading and my reading here, Sellars does not introduce picturing as a criterion for choosing conceptual schemes progressing to an ultimate limit. Rosenberg, too, emphasizes that picturing is bound up with S-assertibility and that, therefore, the correctness of basic matter-of-factual statements trivially is their correctness as pictures. Provided that we accept this interpretation, the notion of picturing becomes much less momentous than it might have

initially seemed. Rosenberg writes:

Since (as we are assuming) “a is red” belongs to *our* representational system, its picturing, so to speak, takes care of itself. In order to determine whether “a is red” is a *correct* picture, and hence S-assertible (i.e. true), then, the only thing that we need to *find out* is whether a *is* red – but that hardly comes as a surprise. (Rosenberg 2007b, 120; Rosenberg’s emphasis)

It is clear here that Rosenberg’s reading of picturing underwent a substantial shift, and I think a positive one.

At this point, there are two questions which should be addressed: First, provided that global pictorial correctness falls trivially out of the fact that a language is empirically applied, why does Sellars need the notion at all? What is its role? And second, why does he speak of picturing providing an Archimedean point outside the series of actual and possible beliefs (see quotations above), a claim which more than any other fosters the impression that he is looking for a neutral assessment criterion?

I will address the first question only briefly. As I will further argue in the next chapter, picturing is one means of showing how language use is connected to action in the world and it also seems that Sellars wanted to ground our notion of objects stable through conceptual change on the notion. Furthermore, if we take Sellars’s examples at face value, picturing is a process not only in language-using organisms, but also in non-human organisms and artificial systems. The notion therefore provides resources for a naturalistic account of human language, where language is understood as continuous with other forms of representational systems. Also, if picturing in non-human organisms can be linked to weaker forms of normativity, as for example Seibt (2009) argues, picturing can figure in a naturalistic account of normativity. It can therefore be part of a scientific theory of representation and language which will be an element in Sellars’s scientific image of man in the world.

But why does Sellars speak of picturing as an “Archimedean point”? Let us once more have a look at the respective paragraph from *Science and Metaphysics*:

Notice that although the concepts of “ideal truth” and “what really exists” are defined in terms of a Peircean conceptual structure they do not require that there ever be a Peircean community. Peirce himself fell into difficulty because, by not taking into account the

dimension of “picturing,” he had no Archimedean [sic] point outside the series of actual and possible beliefs in terms of which to define the ideal or limit to which members of this series might approximate. (SM, ch. V §75)

Seibt (2009, 268) claims that, contrary to first appearance, Sellars rejects the idea of an Archimedean point in this passage. According to her reading, Sellars claims that if we had such a point, we could elucidate the idea of an ultimate conceptual scheme, but as there is no such point, we cannot use it and thus Peirce could not, either. Picturing, on Seibt’s account, is an alternative to the idea of an Archimedean point for Sellars, but it does not provide an Archimedean point. This is not a natural reading of the passage quoted above, given how the passage is constructed – Sellars writes that it is *by* not taking into account picturing that Peirce lacked an Archimedean point. So rather Sellars actually seems to have identified picturing with some kind of Archimedean point. Therefore, we need to find an acceptable reading of Sellars’s “Archimedean point outside the series of actual and possible belief”.

The passage cited above is very compressed. Sellars begins by stating that the Peircean community need not be an existing community (something which is in line with Peirce) only to follow-up by the claim that he can provide an Archimedean point which Peirce lacked. It is not clear how these two statements are to be connected. Sellars insinuates that Peirce could not elucidate what the limit of inquiry consists in. Peirce frequently emphasizes that truth is ultimately what a community of rational inquirers would finally settle on. Maybe what Sellars wants to tell us here is that basing the idea of a limit of inquiry on the settlement of beliefs does not help us to conceive of an ultimate conceptual scheme. Notions like doubt and the settlement of belief may be too closely linked to specifically human psychology. And settlement of belief does not provide us with any comparative criterion by which we could assess other conceptual schemes from the viewpoint of our own. For later inquirers, the beliefs of former inquirers will also be settled to a high degree very much like their own, although these beliefs of earlier inquirers may be false by the lights of the later inquirers. In other words, if we take settlement of belief to be Peirce’s criterion for progressive scientific development, his account does allow merely for the recording of belief change without comparative assessment. And we need at least to have the possibility of comparative assessment from our own point of view (“an Archimedean point”) in order to develop the notion of a final conceptual scheme. Picturing grounds such a comparative assessment in Sellars’s eyes but the Archimedean point it

provides is not neutral between schemes but internal to our own. In this way, we may discharge Sellars's "Archimedean point"- claim which would otherwise fit only badly with the more modest reading of picturing put forward here.

Conceptual convergence

With respect to picturing, it would be good news and bad news at the same time if the approach given above is defensible. It would be good news in the sense that picturing would turn out to be much less controversial than it may initially appear. Thus, we could eliminate at least one point where the pragmatist and realist lines of Sellars's thinking seem to clash openly. The straightforward reading of Sellars introduced in chapter 2.3, the reading which highlighted the tensions between Sellars's pragmatism and realism, would then be merely optional.

However, it would also be bad news at the same time, for now we are again left without any elucidation of how to conceive of an ultimate conceptual scheme, and thus of ultimate truth and reality. A comparative measure relative to some conceptual framework does not provide us with such an elucidation. In the next chapter, I will sketch what further resources Sellars offers to construct such an account. Before doing so, however, I will have a short look on how Rosenberg tackles this question after having shoved aside the idea that picturing could be of help here. I want to show at what point his account departs from Sellars's.

Whether we take picturing to be a completely unintelligible notion or whether we give it a modest reading, we are still faced with our initial problem of how to defend the conception of an ultimate conceptual scheme. On both positions, picturing cannot do this job, at least not on its own. Our conceptual systems develop, but can we give any sense to the idea that they develop towards a limit, towards an ultimate conceptual scheme? To answer this question, Rosenberg's strategy is to establish generally acceptable constraints on which changes in conceptual systems are warranted or rational. We may then hope that these constraints entail a necessarily convergent development of our conceptual systems.

Rosenberg repeatedly claims that we cannot justify conceptual change by referring to relations between our conceptual systems and the world. These relations are accessible to us only from within some conceptual scheme. Therefore, he shifts his focus to something which does not refer straightforwardly to a relation between language and

world: explanation. What is interesting in Rosenberg's approach is that he tries to reconcile his realist outlook taken from Sellars and Peirce with a pragmatist approach, arguably also inspired partly by Sellars. Rosenberg's idea (see Rosenberg 1980, ch. VIII) is the following: we can retrospectively justify conceptual change as warranted if we can establish that a successor conceptual scheme has greater explanatory power than its predecessor. "Greater explanatory power" has a qualitative and a quantitative dimension. As to quality, it means that the successor conceptual scheme (or simply theory) must be able to explain why its predecessor, reconstructed in terms of the new conceptual scheme, provided successful explanation in the cases it did and failed to provide explanations in the cases where it failed. On the quantitative level, growing explanatory power is reflected in changes of theoretically postulated values, in a diminishing deviation between measured and predicted numbers etc. According to Rosenberg, this gives us a means of capturing what "limit" means with respect to conceptual schemes. If in each step of conceptual change, the differences between old and new values diminish, we can say that our conceptual schemes converge to such a limit. Even if we cannot define this limit numerically "from without", the diminishing differences between the conceptual schemes we successively adopted indicate convergence. Rosenberg argues further that if we adopt new theories only if they can be retrospectively justified as having greater explanatory power, the values predicted by theories will converge as a by-product.⁷⁸

But even if such a conceptual development is conceivable, is there any reason why it should be necessary and the only warranted? Why should it be compulsory for us to gain ever growing explanatory power? In the 1970s, Rosenberg reverted to the idea that we are natural knowers and explainers, i.e. that it is part of human nature to pursue better and better explanations. He conceived of explanation and knowledge as a good in itself, something we pursue not in order to achieve other goals, but for the happiness which explaining and knowing as such yield (Rosenberg 1975, §70). This approach is open to many attacks. First, it is a matter for empirical inquiry if we are "natural explainers" and if having good explanation fosters happiness. Second, even if explanation was an end in itself, it is not clear why it should carry the day in the justification of conceptual change

⁷⁸ Of course, this is a highly controversial claim that needs substantial defense which Rosenberg 1980 tries to give. It is also not clear whether it would survive confrontation with the history of science. It does not seem impossible that new theories replaced older ones because of their greater explanatory power but did at least not initially lead to convergence on the quantitative level (the replacement of the Ptolemean world view by the Copernican world view being one such example). I will not defend Rosenberg's account here, as I am concerned primarily with Sellars.

over all the other ends we pursue.

Later, Rosenberg gives a much more sophisticated answer. His idea is still that it is by our very nature that we pursue the end of giving ever more encompassing explanations. But now the idea gets a transcendental twist: If we are to be rational agents at all (and we need to be if we are to be capable of conceptual activity), we necessarily pursue the end of finding better and better explanations. Rosenberg claims that as concept-using beings we are necessarily committed to achieving a coherent and determinate conceptual scheme (Rosenberg 1980, ch. 2).

The question is what could provide for a justification of conceptual change. It cannot be the practices before conceptual change, for it is precisely these which are to be abandoned, and it cannot simply be the new practices because then any conceptual change could be justified and the idea of justification would become empty (Rosenberg 1980, 173). Still, the change could be justified retrospectively from the new standpoint in a non-arbitrary way if we could find a constraint on justified conceptual change which does not depend on any contingent and shifting aims but on our very status as concept-users. In other words, this would be an aim any concept-user would need to pursue to count as a concept-user, no matter what precise conceptual framework she uses and what individual or communal aims are considered desirable in this framework. In Rosenberg's words, the aim is non-optional, it is a constitutive end.

For Rosenberg, this end is the achievement of a determinate conceptual scheme. This end becomes salient when there are failures of explanations, when phenomena appear which our current best theories cannot account for and when the coherence of our scheme is at stake. These are moments when the respective conceptual scheme reveals itself to be indeterminate. In this case, we can, according to Rosenberg, retrospectively justify conceptual change, if new theories considered for adoption are able to account for the phenomena the older ones were not able to account for, explain the older theory's success and explain why it failed in the cases it did. As any new scheme needs to be able to retain and explain all explanatory successes of any predecessor and because it must make good on and explain at least some failures of its predecessor the result will be convergent development. For Rosenberg, to countenance the idea of an ultimate reality, of one world, is simply to accept that conceptual change is convergent in this sense (Rosenberg 1980, 187). Maybe it would be better to say "ought to be convergent" for what Rosenberg speaks

about here is not an actual development (even if he comes sometimes close to stating it this way), but a regulative ideal, a norm that our practices should aspire to. Speaking of one reality or world is accepting this commitment. And given that without accepting it we could not count as concept-users, all of us do accept it at least implicitly.

Rosenberg's approach is in some respects close to Sellars's, in others it differs. By "Sellars", I mean Sellars read in the way indicated up to now, i.e. a Sellars who does not claim that specifying an ultimate conceptual scheme implies specifying a certain language-world relation, who does not countenance a controversial notion of picturing and does not search for a standpoint neutral between all conceptual schemes. If we want to hold this position and still defend the idea of an ultimately adequate conceptual scheme and ultimate reality captured by it, we will need some constraint on rational conceptual change. Rosenberg attempts to give us such a constraint while operating on ground often claimed by pragmatists: justificatory practices established in specific communities. As I will defend in chapter 4.3, this, too, is Sellarsian in spirit.

However, Larry Laudan has suggested that Rosenberg's account of convergence by growing explanatory power actually *is* Sellars's account (Laudan 1981, 43) – a claim which is not substantiated by much of what Sellars says. Sellars never claims anything specific about the details of theory succession, and he never mentions the rational constraints on theory succession which Rosenberg builds on. He does hold that the purpose of scientific theories is to explain observable events and that the ultimate scientific conceptual scheme can claim to capture reality because it is better at explaining observable events than our commonsense scheme. But this is not an account of convergent theory succession based on growing explanatory power. Even though the theme of explanation is important for Sellars we do not find anything like Rosenberg's account of theory succession in him.

Sellars's account differs from Rosenberg's in these details of what the notion of an ultimate conceptual scheme amounts to. They agree in that the notion belongs essentially to our capacity of concept use, that without it, we could not be concept users. But Sellars differs from Rosenberg in that he does not attempt to ensure convergence on a single, universal scheme by reverting to the idea that we are necessarily explainers and hoping that convergence will follow from that. Rather, Sellars ultimately bases the notion of one ideal, universal conceptual scheme on the idea that we are moral beings. I will discuss this

idea at the end of the next chapter.

4. A conciliatory reading – pragmatism and realism

In the previous chapter, I examined three examples of how one could deal with the tensions in Sellars's thought. Brandom prefers to eradicate these tensions by rejecting one part of Sellars's system, his scientific realism. DeVries attempts a conciliatory reading by introducing the concept of practical reality. Rosenberg tries to come up with a genuine resolution of the tensions we find in Sellars. Although his solution is inspired by Sellars, however, it is hard to say to what extent it would be Sellars's own solution as Rosenberg provides his own, explanation-based account of the convergence of conceptual schemes.

Part of my motivation for discussing these three approaches was to learn about their drawbacks. When discussing Brandom, we saw that Sellars's claim about the ontological superiority of the scientific conceptual scheme should not be read as stating co-reference or identity between scientific and commonsense objects but as involving the more complex notion of reconceptualization. As for deVries's approach, we saw that it is not advantageous to read Sellars too much on a Kantian model as far as his notion of an ultimate conceptual scheme is concerned. We should also resist the temptation to understand Sellars's ultimate conceptual scheme and its adequacy to the world in terms of some quasi-intentional relations between our conceptual scheme and the world.

Rosenberg urged that we give Sellars's picturing a limited role and do not understand it as a neutral measure of the adequacy of conceptual schemes. The discussion of Rosenberg highlighted the need to explain what the adequacy of a conceptual scheme to the world is supposed to be, given that we always evaluate things from the involved point of view of the user of some conceptual scheme. To do this, Rosenberg reverted to an account of his own, rather than to Sellars's account. What I will try to give in this chapter is one possible construal of the latter. I will emphasize once again that the Sellarsian adequacy of a conceptual scheme to the world is not to be understood as a specific relation between language and world. Rather, there is a way of understanding adequacy which is based on Sellars's pragmatist commitments and can therefore raise the prospects of reconciling Sellars's realism and pragmatism, even though, as we will see, many problems remain.

In this chapter, I will simply assume that the ultimate conceptual framework is a scientific framework, i.e. that the ultimate vocabulary in which the world is to be described is a scientific vocabulary. How we can defend this claim in a way which does not conflict

with Sellars's pragmatist commitments will be the topic of the next chapter. In this chapter here, I want to suggest how we can reconcile Sellars's pragmatism and his realism as such. I will do so in several steps. First, I will look at two possible threats to Sellars's account, incommensurability and relativism. The aim of discussing these is to get more insight into Sellars's take on conceptual change and the comparison between conceptual schemes as these are essential parts of Sellars's account of ultimate reality. In the next subchapter, I will focus on the predicates "is real" and "exists". I will argue that like the predicate "is true" these predicates speak about conceptual items and what we are permitted to do with them. Then, I will turn to the status of the imagined endpoint of the process of conceptual change, the ideal, Peircean scheme. I will argue that rather than being a removed ideal, we can conceive of the Peircean conceptual scheme as a perfect embodiment of the principles we already need to accept in order to count as concept-users. In the last part of the chapter, I will try to clarify the notion of adequacy that a Peircean scheme would have to the world since we must not understand this adequacy in terms of word-world relations. I will show that we can understand this adequacy as practical adequacy. This leads to the question whether there is a unified, universal understanding of practical adequacy. I will locate this unifying element in Sellars's moral philosophy and discuss the problems which such an account gives rise to.

4.1. Incommensurability, relativism and conceptual change

At the beginning, I will discuss two threats which may assail Sellars's account. These are incommensurability between successive conceptual schemes and relativism about truth. These two concerns arise naturally from what we know about Sellars's approach so far. My aim in discussing them is to clarify how Sellars conceives of conceptual change and the relationship between conceptual schemes, a topic which is crucial in understanding what he is committed to in his realism. As we saw in chapter 3.1, Sellars's approach has a strong dynamic component and I want to say more on this component now.

Incommensurability and conceptual succession

Conceptual change is a core element in Sellars's approach. His ultimate conceptual scheme is the imagined endpoint of the process of rational conceptual change, so to understand what Sellars is committed to in his realism, we need to understand his views

on conceptual change. To make sense of his approach we need to assume that conceptual change is not disruptive, at least not most of the time. It has to be mostly continuous, i.e., users of a successor scheme need to be able to understand users of predecessor schemes. Otherwise, we could not tell a story about how objects in one conceptual framework are reconceptualized in another, which is what Sellars wants to do. Continuity is also necessary for the comparison between conceptual frameworks. No such comparison would be available if it were impossible that users of a later conceptual scheme understand users of earlier conceptual schemes.

However, Sellars's holistic account of meaning and language acquisition (see, e.g., EPM, §19 and footnote) seems to imply that understanding across conceptual schemes is impossible. The meaning of an expression is determined by its functional role in the linguistic system. This role can be made explicit by stating the semantic rules governing the use of the expression. An essential part of these rules are rules governing material inferences, such as

That something is a whale implies that it is a fish.

Thus, the roles of "whale" and "fish" are interconnected. The adoption of a new material rule of inference, such as

That something is a whale implies that it is a mammal.

changes the meaning of the term "whale" as well as of the terms "fish" and "mammal". Users of the old conceptual system, where whales were thought to be fish, and users of the new conceptual system, where whales are considered mammals, do not mean the same when they use the words "mammal", "fish" and "whale". One could even go so far as to say that they speak about different things. How, given this situation of mutual misunderstanding, can we compare different conceptual schemes?⁷⁹

Unless we have an answer to this question, we cannot even understand what it means that some conceptual scheme is a successor to another conceptual scheme, for talk about

⁷⁹ Note that we do not need to assume radical meaning holism to generate this problem. For radical meaning holism, the role of every expression in a language is linked to the roles of every other expression, therefore the change of one inferential role would change all inferential roles in a language. Sellars's picture is probably more restricted, as he limits the inferential role of non-logical terms to material inferences (to inferences, which are in a very specific sense underwritten by the analytic and apriori claims we accept, see ITSA). But even so, in our example the problem remains how the users of successive conceptual schemes could understand each other's talk about mammals, whales and fish.

successor and predecessor schemes implies that there is some relationship between the respective schemes which can be reconstructed. Sellars often works with the notions of predecessor and successor schemes but he never explains how we are to conceive of them. It is clear that the relation between a predecessor and a successor scheme is not a merely temporal relation. To understand that one conceptual scheme is the successor of a former conceptual scheme, we must be able to see how the latter evolved from the former by retaining some of its features and changing others. That is, we need to relate the roles of expressions in these schemes and in order to do so we need to be able to understand users of the predecessor scheme at least to some extent.⁸⁰

Sellars acknowledges that the question how to conceive of successor and predecessor schemes is important but refrains from developing the issue further (see SSIS, 407). As far as I know, apart from Rosenberg's attempts to spell out the notion of a warranted successor conceptual framework, there is no account in the literature of how Sellars might have conceived of the predecessor-successor relation.⁸¹

It will help to compare the problem of diachronic understanding to the synchronic case of two coexisting languages. Contrary to Quine, Sellars never says much about translation as a process. Rather, he works with the products of an already accomplished process of translation, i.e. with meaning statements (see chapter 2.2).⁸² Sellars is clearly not skeptical about the possibility of translation as such, but neither does he discuss whether there are limits to mutual understanding. His examples of interlinguistic meaning statements come from languages historically close to each other (English, French and German) and concern unproblematic cases such as "red" or "and". He does not consider cases where the match is obviously not as neat. Consider, for example, the German word "Himmel", which can be translated into English in at least two non-equivalent ways, as "sky" or as "heaven". Such cases may still be handled smoothly with Sellars's apparatus

⁸⁰ This also remains unresolved in Rosenberg's quasi-Sellarsian account of our notion of ultimate reality. Rosenberg accepts the idea that new and old theories (i.e. parts of conceptual schemes) may be incommensurable. Still, he claims that we can compare new and old theories from the viewpoint of the new theory for we can come up with a reconstruction of the old theory in terms of the new theory (Rosenberg 1988). That is, we can reconceptualize what the old theory spoke about in terms of the new theory. But in order to compare the two theories or conceptual systems we need to get a grip on which of our new concepts reconceptualizes what was meant to be captured by some old concept. Before we can reconstruct the old scheme in the new scheme, we need to be capable of understanding what users of the older conceptual scheme were talking about. Rosenberg does not say anything about this problem.

⁸¹ Sicha claims in his introduction to *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics* that he has given such an account in Sicha 1988, but the paper he refers to offers only a metaphorical sketch.

⁸² For a possible Sellarsian account of the details of translation see Seibt 1990, ch. 2.4.

(e.g. as “Himmel”’s in German are •sky•s or •heaven•s).⁸³ But how Sellars would handle the case of conceptual schemes further removed from ours is not clear.

For Sellars, the ability to use meaning statements like the statement that “rot” means red, is a mark of understanding at least part of the second language.⁸⁴ As explained in chapter 2.2, such statements can be used only by persons who already understand the base language. When a person is capable of relating uses of expressions in a different language to uses of expressions in her own language correctly, she understands. What, however, is the criterion for such a meaning statement to be true? If we can list truth-conditions for meaning statements across languages or conceptual schemes and show that they can be at least sometimes fulfilled, we must say that it is possible for two users of the respective schemes to understand each other. Sellars claims that a meaning statement is correct if the two expressions at issue are used, in their respective languages, in the same or a relevantly similar way (e.g. ME, §30).

The first thing to note is that according to Sellars for the correctness of a meaning statement only similarity (not sameness) of use is required. This similarity needs to be relevant in the given case. The second thing to note is that Sellars does not spell out to what extent the uses of the two expressions need to overlap in order to count as similar enough for the meaning statement to be correct.⁸⁵ Nor does he answer the question for what or whom this similarity needs to be relevant. However, he suggests that “relevant” means what is “deemed” relevant by users in a specific situation (MFC, 428 and n.12). Thus, users of meaning statements will decide what they regard as relevant in a given context and this is nothing one could sort out in general for any given situation whatsoever. I will argue that this non-committedness on Sellars’s part is a general trait of his approach. When he is non-committal about a specific question, this indicates that there is nothing which, for him, one could usefully say from the point of view of a philosopher on that

⁸³ For an explanation of dot-quotation see chapter 2.2.

⁸⁴ It is not a necessary mark of understanding. My understanding of a second language can be exhibited simply in my ability to use this language successfully without producing explicit meaning statements.

⁸⁵ But he is very clear that such a partly overlap in two linguistic roles must be sufficient for meaning statements to be correct, and he sees this as crucial for his realist account:

provision can be made for degrees of likeness of function—indeed *must* be made [...] if the evolution of conceptual frameworks is to be taken into account, and, hence, the “identity” of our framework with the more adequate frameworks of the future, which must be an element in any penetrating account of truth. (SM ch. IV, n. to §12; Sellars’s emphasis)

question.

Thus, although Sellars's approach to meaning has a holistic element, he also allows for flexibility. For a meaning statement to be correct, the expression classified and the expression in my home language need not coincide exactly in their function, and what the user of a meaning statement deems relevant about the function of a certain expression is one factor in determining whether the meaning statement is correct. Thus, for Sellars our understanding of linguistic expressions can extend to other languages the expressions of which are not used in a way that precisely matches up with the use of expressions in our home language. But if we want to grant Sellars his notion of synchronic translation, we also have to grant him diachronic translation.

Fodor and Lepore (1992, chap. 1) identify something like our incommensurability problem for holistic approaches to meaning but claim that it cannot be solved by appeals to similarities in meaning because any notion of meaning similarity depends on a robust notion of meaning identity (and this cannot be had in holistic accounts). However, they seem to rely on a very literal understanding of meaning as the content of expressions or mental states, an understanding Sellars arguably would not share (for a discussion of the content metaphor see the beginning of BBK). Apart from that, Fodor and Lepore attack approaches which reject the analytic/synthetic distinction. Sellars, however, relies on an attenuated form of this distinction (see ITSA). Thus, criticism of holistic approaches like that by Fodor and Lepore do not show that Sellars cannot help himself to a notion of meaning similarity. Still, it must be granted that he also does not explain where our capability for spotting meaning similarities comes from, he simply seems to assume that we can do so.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, there is a different objection towards explaining diachronic understanding between users of different conceptual schemes by analogy with synchronic understanding. Synchronically co-existing languages, at least in the rather limited group of languages Sellars considers, normally embody the same state of knowledge about the

⁸⁶ It is not clear that this assumption is problematic (as Fodor and Lepore think it is). We are all capable of spotting the similarities between tokens of the letter "a", spoken or written, although these normally differ much from each other. It is not clear why we should problematize this ability from a philosophical point of view, e.g. claim that we only think that we are able to identify different tokens of "a" all as "a" but that actually we could not do so because not all tokens of "a" are identical. Also, we would not criticize a philosophy of language on the ground that it does not account for our ability to spot similarities between different tokens of "a". So why should we criticize a philosopher for not giving an account of how we can spot similarities between German "oder" and English "or"?

world. English and German speakers (at least scientists) do not hold different things about motion, space or time simply because they are speakers of different natural languages. But in the case of diachronically developing conceptual schemes, and especially when we want to understand this development as cognitive progress, we see predecessor schemes as embodying different, often inferior, knowledge of the world compared to our own scheme. Therefore, it is harder to defend that users of former conceptual schemes spoke about the same things that we do now, given that for Sellars there is no clear distinction between what linguistic expressions mean and what we know about the world.

Here again, we can draw on our ability to spot similarities which are relevant to us. According to Sellars, when we try to make sense of former conceptual schemes, we often form more generic functional sortals that include the former expressions and our current expressions as special cases. Thus, if we want to highlight the similarities between the different concepts of motion developed over time we can form the generic functional sortal •motion• characterized by only those functional aspects which all the studied concepts of motion have in common, and then distinguish the different concepts of motion by adding the functional features that make each of the concepts specific. Thus, •motion_{Aristotle}•s are •motion•s and •motion_{Newton}•s are •motion•s. For Sellars, what determines the content of a concept is the way in which it is caught up in material inferences. When we classify both •motion_{Aristotle}•s and •motion_{Newton}•s as •motion•s, we say that these two concepts are caught up in the same way in one subclass of material inferences. This subclass of inferences will then determine the content of the generic concept, i.e. •motion•.⁸⁷

Sellars illustrates this idea by the following example classification (the classification concerns qualities, but it could be applied to other types of concepts as well):

Thus, as the historian of science looks back he can, on the one hand, make statements of the form

‘- -’ (in L₁₈₀₀) stood for f-ness, i.e., were •f•s

‘- -’ (in L₁₈₆₀) stood for f-ness, i.e., were •f•s

⁸⁷ It is not clear whether this hierarchical approach in terms of more and less generic concepts serves Sellars’s needs best for all cases. Maybe it would be better to strive for an even more flexible account based on Wittgensteinian family resemblance.

‘- - -’ (in L 1966) stood for f-ness, i.e., were •f•s

and, on the other hand, introduce qualifiers corresponding to the ‘Euclidean’ and ‘Riemannian’ of our previous example. (SM, ch. V §45)⁸⁸

The question is, however, why we should emphasize these similarities between concepts at all. What they have in common may be very thin indeed, as in the case of •motion_{Aristotle}• and •motion_{Newton}•. Why should we not opt for strong incommensurability here and claim, e.g., that •motion_{Aristotle}•s are so different from •motion_{Newton}•s that to class both as •motion•s is simply to deceive ourselves or to project our own understanding of motion without warrant onto a past conceptual scheme.

I think that we understand Sellars best if we take at face value what he says in the passage cited above. He writes that it is the historian of science who comes up with such classifications, it is not the philosopher. There is no general line a philosopher could draw to specify which concepts can still be seen as •motion•s and which cannot. Rather, this is a question to be discussed by the history of science. In some context of inquiry, historians of science may regard •motion_{Aristotle}•s and •motion_{Newton}•s all as •motion•s while in other contexts they may prefer to regard them as distinct. That is, what we regard as a successor concept to a predecessor concept in some contexts will appear as the abandonment of one concept and the introduction of a whole new concept in others. This is the force of the user-dependent term “relevantly” in “relevantly similar roles” which Sellars introduced for translation statements. Therefore, the fact that from our point of view former conceptual schemes embody different knowledge claims and maybe less knowledge of the world than our own conceptual scheme does not matter too much as long as we want to highlight continuity. Sellars’s philosophical ambition here is not to show that conceptual schemes are actually developing continuously, but rather that we, or experts such as historians, have the ability to tell such a continuous story. However, what precise verdict we will issue in a concrete case of concepts studied is nothing that philosophers can say much about.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Sellars’s example is from the history of geometry. The generic concept is •triangular•, the more specific concepts are •Euclidean triangular• and •Riemannian triangular•.

⁸⁹ An example of such a historical inquiry is Thagard 2014. Thagard’s criterion for conceptual continuity is continuity in phenomenal description. But we could also imagine other such criteria, e.g. continuity of explanatory role. It does not seem that there is something like a “right” criterion, here, which we could discover by philosophical inquiry.

As an advantage, Sellars’s flexible, non-philosophical approach to conceptual continuity may cover

But if philosophers relinquish the endeavor of setting up normative constraints on what should count as a successor concept to what, would this not mean that anything is possible, including the wildest stories about the development of concepts? I do not think that this is a real threat. Denying that we can come up with useful normative constraints on this issue from a philosophical point of view does not mean that there can be no normative constraints at all. The scientific communities concerned with inquiring into past concepts are as self-checking, self-correcting as any other. In this case, there seems to be no need for Sellars to put up extra philosophical normative constraints besides the normative constraints already constituted within the respective groups of scientists. We should also remember that Sellars does not make any empirical claims, i.e. he does not claim that science actually develops in a continuous way, that it actually converges, etc. Rather, he wants to illuminate our concept of ultimate reality. For such an endeavor, it seems misplaced to ask whether there is a fact of the matter which decides whether conceptual development is continuous or not; all that is needed is our ability to conceive of it as continuous.

We can further highlight Sellars's philosophically non-committal approach to constraints on continuous conceptual change, by looking at an informal notion he introduces in *Science and Metaphysics* when he puts forward several definitions which relate different conceptual schemes to each other. These definitions rest to a large part on the notion of a *family* of functional roles, i.e. families of propositions, families of concepts etc. For example:

PROP_j (in CS_i) is true ↔ for some PRFAM and for some PROP, PROP belongs to CSO,
 PROP_j (in CS_i) ⊂ PRFAM, PROP ⊂ PRFAM, and PROP is true. (SM, ch. V § 52)

“PRFAM” stands for a family of propositions. The definition says that a proposition in any conceptual scheme (CS_i) is true if and only if this proposition belongs to the same family of propositions as a proposition in our own conceptual scheme (CSO) which is true. This extends our use of the truth predicate from our own scheme to other, related schemes, for now we can apply the predicate “true” to propositions in other conceptual schemes provided they belong to the same family of propositions as a proposition in our own

phenomena which cannot be included as easily by more rigorous approaches. We might think, for example, of the split of a conceptual role into two or more successor roles. Rorty envisages the case of the concept of demons as the cause of disease being replaced both by the concepts of hallucination and of germs (Rorty 1965).

scheme.

Thus, what relates two schemes to each other are families of propositions or families of concepts. These are sets of concepts or propositions from different conceptual schemes which can be related to each other functionally as counterparts, or as successor and predecessor, in the way outlined above. Sellars's definitions above and others like it in *Science and Metaphysics* rely heavily on this notion of families of propositions or concepts. But again, he does not explain what criteria of similarity concepts need to fulfill to belong to one family. Instead, he calls it an "informal and intuitive notion" (SM, ch. V, §62) and leaves it at that. On my reading, this indicates again that Sellars does not feel it necessary to specify criteria from a philosophical point of view for concepts or propositions to belong to one family. Which concepts and propositions form a family will be a matter of what we, or experts, will deem appropriate. One could also say that as far as this question is concerned practice sets the tone for Sellars.

For the historian of science, the aim of making cross-scheme classifications may simply be to tell a plausible story of how our own conceptual systems came into being and of understanding past conceptual schemes. And even if philosophy cannot set up constraints on these classifications itself, the fact that we can make these classifications across conceptual schemes is philosophically interesting nevertheless. They allow us to understand a past conceptual scheme as something to which the rules of our own conceptual scheme apply. And as we know from chapter 2, these rules state what is semantically assertible by us, i.e., what is true. A cross-scheme classification of the meaning of linguistic expressions allows us to extend our epistemic notions to the past scheme. To stay with our example, classifying $\bullet\text{motion}_{\text{Aristotle}}\bullet\text{s}$ as $\bullet\text{motion}\bullet\text{s}$ commits us to consider some things which users of the Aristotelean scheme claim about motion as true (those things that lead us to classify $\bullet\text{motion}_{\text{Aristotle}}\bullet\text{s}$ as $\bullet\text{motion}\bullet\text{s}$). Other things which Aristotle said about motion will be, from our perspective, merely semantically assertible according to his conceptual scheme, but not according to ours. What we can achieve by relating the concepts of former schemes to our own according to Sellars is to loosen the connection of epistemic notions with our own scheme and expand them to other schemes, past or present (SM, ch. V, §63). As we want to understand what place to give the notion of ultimate truth and reality given that for Sellars truth is semantic assertibility in our scheme, this possibility to apply the truth-predicate across conceptual schemes is essential (however, the condition for applying the predicate is not loosened, it is still semantic

assertibility according to our scheme, we only broaden the scope of items to which it may be applied).

Before returning to this theme and to the threat of relativism, I would like to address briefly an objection to Sellars that focuses on meaning holism. Sellars operates with some picture of an ideal language where meaning is perfectly determined, i.e. where, in his setting, it is precisely clear and uncontested in each and every case what follows from what.⁹⁰ The status Sellars ascribes to the ideal itself, however, cannot be pinned down easily. Probably, the ultimate, Peircean conceptual scheme would be such an ideal. Thus, the notion of an ideal language may function as a regulative ideal which language aspires to. I will return to this point later in the chapter. What I would like to remark now is that Sellars does not deny that we can use language meaningfully even if the roles of linguistic expressions in actual language are not determined in the demanding way described above. He states this in this remark:

It is characteristic of human thought that we are constantly making sensible use of concepts which we are not able, at the time, to explicate. (APM, §5)

If we can use language meaningfully without linguistic roles being determined for each case into each detail, the objection that Sellars's semantic holism implies the impossibility of understanding users of other conceptual schemes will seem less threatening. We actually do understand each other, even though linguistic roles are not perfectly determined. Therefore, we have no reason to think that such understanding is impossible when relevantly similar roles are concerned.⁹¹

What is more, Sellars claims that this kind of indeterminateness is built into some linguistic roles and that it is part of scientific methodology to keep concepts flexible. For example, he writes that

scientific terms have, *as part of their logic* a “line of retreat” as well as a “plan of advance”—a fact which makes meaningful the claim that in an important sense A and B are the “same” properties they were “before.” [before conceptual change changing the

⁹⁰ Brandom, too, accepts some such idea of an ideal language (see Brandom 2000, 73).

⁹¹ Of course, one might object that the fact that we do understand each other even though linguistic roles are never perfectly determined shows that a role semantics like Sellars's is untenable. I will not counter this objection, but I think it is built on too demanding a notion of meaning.

meaning of “A” and “B”]. (CDCM, §86; my emphasis)

In this place, Sellars speaks of properties, but generally he emphasizes this flexibility especially for what he calls thing-kind terms (such as •salt•, •mammal• or •black hole•).

The adoption of a new law-like statement, that is, the adoption of a new inference pattern, as in our case of whales above, is a change in the meanings of the terms concerned for Sellars (see also CDCM, §86). But we can still say that even after such a substantial change as from “Whales are fish.” to “Whales are mammals.” we are still speaking about whales. The idea is that the possibility of change of this kind is already internal to the kind-terms themselves and that it is a mistake to see conceptual development as a succession of distinct conceptual systems which is each static on its own and each perfectly determinate, i.e. a system of perfectly determined concepts. These “conceptual schemes” are just a here and now snapshot of a continually evolving linguistic system, “the momentary crystallized content of the language at a cross section of its history” (CDCM, §105), i.e., they are abstractions. And even these momentary snapshots do not provide us with perfectly determinate meanings (concepts have a “line of retreat” and a “plan of advance”, i.e. there are some inferential moves involving them which are not settled). Built into our language, there is a demand for “modification, revision, in short, development, in accordance with rational procedures” (CDCM, §105). Someone who claims that we need to have a philosophical defense of continual conceptual change, i.e., of some relation of continuity between two distinct conceptual schemes, overlooks two things: that “a conceptual scheme” is an abstraction of an evolving linguistic system, and that even in the form of such a temporary snap-shot this system is not stable. This would amount to reifying an abstraction which we introduced for the sake of philosophical theorizing and to project the “problems” we can construct around these abstractions into real-life practices, practices which then come to seem puzzling when actually they are not. It is not in doubt that there are many clear-cut cases where speakers in a later phase of the development of a language understand language as it was produced on an earlier stage, and there are clear-cut cases where they do not. But maybe it is no help to try to explain these phenomena on the model of a series of static, determined conceptual schemes and ask whether their relation is continuous or discontinuous.

Relativism and dogmatism

We had a second worry, that of relativism about truth. Relativism about truth would not be reconcilable with Sellars's realist outlook. It claims that the truth predicate is always used relative to some background system, e.g. theories, languages or conceptual schemes, and that there is no possibility to adjudicate between the ways in which the truth predicate is applied in these different systems. Thus, with respect to linguistic systems A and B claims made correctly in A are true-in-A, claims made correctly in B are true-in-B, and even should these claims conflict, there is no way of resolving which one is "simply" true. Therefore, there is no use for the concept of being "simply" true. We can only use the concepts of truth relative to A and truth relative to B. This is not reconcilable with the idea of one Peircean conceptual framework embodying "the" truth about the world.

One source of relativism is the strong incommensurability we have already talked about. If there is no way of making sense of what users of other conceptual systems say, there is no way of adjudicating between what is correctly claimed in different conceptual schemes. The result will be either dogmatism, i.e., that truth is what users of our conceptual system (or, in extreme cases, I) claim to be true, or relativism, i.e., that truth is relative to conceptual schemes (or in extreme cases, to speakers). As we have seen, Sellars is not necessarily committed to this strong form of incommensurability.

However, some aspects of Sellars's position still seem to lean towards relativism.⁹² This is especially apparent in his account of truth as semantic assertibility. One could argue that if truth is semantic assertibility by users of a conceptual scheme, then semantically assertible claims in conceptual scheme A will be true in scheme A and semantically assertible claims in conceptual scheme B will be true in scheme B and there is no reason to prefer one scheme over the other. To construe truth as semantic assertibility according to the rules of a conceptual system seems to lead directly into relativism.

There are two things to remind ourselves of to see that Sellars can avoid this relativistic threat. First, Sellars does not give a definition of what truth is. When he claims that truth "is" semantic assertibility, he expresses that the predicate "is true" is used to signal which sentences in our language are correctly assertible. That is, Sellars gives a functional account of the truth-predicate. Second, in contrast to relativism Sellars endorses a concept of being "simply" true, or what he calls the absolute sense of truth. And this

⁹² Sellars himself recognizes this, see, e.g., SRLG §76.

concept is to be understood as semantic assertibility *by us* (SM, ch. V §48).

According to a relativistic stance, one has to acknowledge that sentences uttered correctly by users of other conceptual schemes, i.e. in accordance with *their* rules, are true relative to their scheme as much as sentences uttered correctly by us are true relative to our own scheme. But this is not Sellars's view. The truth-predicate is used to signal sentences which are assertible by us. Initially, it is not applicable to sentences uttered by users of other conceptual schemes. The only way to apply the truth-predicate to sentences uttered by users of other conceptual schemes is to see their system as a functional variant of our own system. "Grass is green." is a sentence correctly assertible by us. If we see that in a different language "Das Gras ist grün." is functionally equivalent to our "Grass is green.", i.e. that

"Das Gras ist grün."s are •Grass is green•s.

we can extend our use of "true" to "Das Gras ist grün.". Sellars formulates this as following:

[the] explicitly language relative concept [of truth] is to be explicated by means of the schema

'---' (in L) is true \leftrightarrow '---'s (in L) are •...• and •...•s are true,

i.e. in terms of what is misleadingly called the "absolute" sense of true (SM, ch. V §48).

In a different context, he claims that

In general, when I commit myself to

(iv) S is a true sentence (of L),

I am committing myself to asserting either S itself (if I am a user of L) or a translation of S into the language I do use. (SLRG, §78)

Thus, for Sellars, concepts of truth relative to a conceptual scheme are depended on the concept of "absolute" truth, where the truth-predicate signals sentences that can be correctly asserted according to our rules.

One could object that in *Science and Metaphysics* Sellars sometimes applies the

truth-predicate to expressions in different conceptual schemes not simply as an extension of our own use of the notion but where it means “is semantically assertible in the respective (not necessarily our) conceptual scheme”. He says that we can introduce

a concept of “true *quoad* CS_i” (SM, ch. V §53)

which we have already encountered and where CS_i is any conceptual scheme whatsoever. Does this not amount to admitting a relativistic understanding of truth? I think it does not, even though it is fair to say that Sellars’s use of “true” in this context is misleading. He does not even explain the force of “*quoad*” in “true *quoad* CS_i” (he gives a definition, but the definition is recursive, i.e., the “*quoad*” is used again in the definiens). That Sellars uses the word “true” here is awkward. It would be more straightforward to use “semantically assertible” in its place. Thus, “true *quoad* CS_i” would simply mean “semantically assertible according to the rules of CS_i (but not necessarily semantically assertible by us)” and therefore would not have the meaning of “simply true” (which is “semantically assertible by us”).

On the other hand, Sellars makes clear that “true *quoad* CS_i” is not on the same level as “true” short and simple:

Notice, however, that however many sophisticated senses of “true” may be introduced, and however important they may be, the connection of truth with *our current conceptual structure* remains essential, for the cash value of S-assertibility is assertion by us *hic et nunc*. (SM, ch. V §53; Sellars’s emphasis)

Choosing to call his concept “true *quoad* CS_i” instead of “semantically assertible by users of CS_i” may be simply an inappropriate way of expressing oneself on Sellars’s part.

Sellars makes a parallel, and possibly clearer, point about law-like statements and material inference and this point can be carried over to his treatment of truth. For Sellars, to assert a law-like statement is to adopt a certain material inference as valid. Thus, to use our example once more, to say that whales are (necessarily) mammals, is to adopt as valid the inference from “This is a whale.” to “This is a mammal.”. As truth “is” semantic assertibility for Sellars, lawfulness “is” valid inferability. The inverted commas around “is” are meant to express that we are not speaking about a definition of law-fulness or truth, but about the function of the predicates “is true” and “is a law-like statement” (to say that

a statement expresses something lawful is to endorse an inference as valid). Assertibility as well as inferability are, in this case, assertibility and inferability *for us*. Thus, I can claim that users of some other language validly infer “This is a fish.” from “This is a whale.” according to the rules of their language, but that does not mean that I adopt the law-like statement “Necessarily, whales are fish.” In chapter 2, we saw that meaning statements and truth statements are user-sensitive for Sellars, and this applies to law-like statements, too. Sellars expresses this in the following way:

Obviously, if I learn that in a certain language I may make a material move from “x is C” to “x is D”, I do not properly conclude that all C is D. Clearly, the language in question must be the language I myself use, in order for me to assert ‘All C is D’. (SRLG, §29)

Similarly, I can learn or claim that users of a different language assert a sentence correctly according to the rules of their language, but that does not mean that I endorse this sentence as true in doing so.⁹³

So, we do not need to ascribe a relativistic notion of truth to Sellars, but there is another objection lying very near. If truth means semantic assertibility *by us*, i.e. if the sentences *we* correctly assert are true, is this not dogmatism?⁹⁴ The answer lies in emphasizing again that Sellars does not want to give a definition of truth while dogmatism is a position which does give such a definition. Thus, there is no place in Sellars’s scheme of thought for theses like “Truth is what we claim to be true.” or “A sentence/proposition is true iff we claim it to be true.” which are the core of dogmatism.

While, for Sellars, the “truth-predicate” is a means of signaling which sentences can be correctly asserted in our conceptual scheme, it is not excluded that we change our scheme and thus change the set of sentences to which the truth-predicate can be applied. This is not to fall back into relativism and it does not violate our intuition that what is true once must be true for all time. When we change our scheme and stop calling a sentence true which we formerly called true, then this does not mean that a sentence which once

⁹³ Similar as for truth (see chapter 2.2), this does not mean that language determines what is lawful or makes a statement lawful. Sellars discussion is not concerned with what makes a statement lawful, it is an account of the function of the predicate “is lawful” and does not touch on metaphysical questions such as whether laws objectively exist in nature (even though Sellars as a nominalist with partly empiricist leanings denies that they do, see CDCM).

⁹⁴ Dogmatism, or at least substantial conservatism, is a charge also often leveled against positions like Rorty’s ethnocentrism (e.g. Brown 1994, 31), a stance which has affinities to Sellars’s insistence that “true” means “S-assertible by us”.

was true now ceased to be true only because we changed the rules constituting our conceptual scheme. In such a situation, we would rather say that we used to call a certain sentence true but that we were wrong. That is, we take up a fallibilist stance not only towards empirically descriptive sentences but also to ascriptions of the predicate “true”.

But, Sellars’s critic may continue, how is it possible for us to envisage change in our conceptual practices given that we call precisely those sentences true which we may correctly assert? How could we come to be in a position to wonder “Sentence S is a sentence we have been correctly asserting until now. But should we do so, i.e., is it really true?”. The question thus is whether Sellars is committed to an overly conservative position, so conservative as to preclude conceptual change.

It is not clear that we could ever be in a position where we express our doubts about a certain sentence’s S being true in the terms above. At the moment we start wondering, we already put some critical distance between ourselves and the rules of our language. At that point, we cease to accept the rules of our language uncritically, i.e., sentence S, which we are pondering upon, is not a sentence which can be correctly asserted by us at that very moment. Sellars expresses this in a similar form in one of his earlier essays:

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.) (LRB, §43; Sellars’s emphasis)

Someone charging Sellars with dogmatism or conservatism fears that on Sellars’s account we can never ask “This sentence is assertible by us, but is it true?”. The objector takes it to be necessary for conceptual change that we have the possibility of asking this. But it is not clear that we do need to be in a position to ask this. The moment we envisage a possible conceptual change, we do not unconditionally accept a certain sentence as assertible by us anymore (we operate in “another framework of living rules”) and tentatively think about adopting a different set of sentences as assertible. At that moment, we regard the sentences we used to take to be correctly assertible in the same way as we would regard sentences correctly asserted by users of a different conceptual scheme according to the rules of their scheme. Thus, the question posed when conceptual change is at stake is not “This sentence is assertible by us, but is it true?”, but “This sentence once was assertible according to rules we had, but *should* we take it to be correctly assertible, i.e. true?” Of course, that does not explain how we get into the situation of doubt about

sentences we took to be assertible nor how we decide on how to change our rules and conceptual schemes (more on this later) but it does show that situations like this are not excluded by Sellars's approach (which was what the critic claimed).

These considerations show on what lines Sellars could react to the two threats discussed in this subchapter: incommensurability and relativism. In what follows, I will take it for granted that these two charges can be successfully met.

4.2. Objects, existence and reality

We have already heard much about Sellars's general, pragmatist approach in connection to truth: truth is not to be treated as an entity or a property which can be described or the essence of which can be captured. Truth-talk is a useful device in our language which helps us to signal which sentences may be asserted or the negation of which sentences may not be asserted. This Sellarsian approach to the problem of truth (and to others) is characterized by two elements: First, it is targeted not at "truth itself" but at the concept of truth. Second, concepts are functionally characterized. An inquiry into the concept of truth therefore means describing the functions of truth-talk. In this chapter, I would like to argue that Sellars's approach to the concepts of existence and reality as well as to the concept of an object is similar. Sellars's most concise statement of science's privilege, the *scientia mensura*, is given in terms of existence, but I have conducted my discussion in terms of truth so far as this topic is more elaborated in Sellars's writings. So, we need the upcoming discussion to link the topic of truth to the topic of existence.

The idea of an ultimate, independent reality is usually discarded by pragmatists. According to straightforward readers such as Rorty, Sellars endorses this notion of ultimate reality and introduces his mechanism of picturing to establish a way for us to get into contact with it. We have already seen in chapter 2.3 that this notion is in tension with Sellars's pragmatist commitments. One of the central claims I would like to defend is that Sellars does not conceive of ultimate truth as a certain relation between our conceptual schemes and the world nor that he understands the concept of reality as applying in the first place to whatever it is our conceptual schemes need to be "true to" to count as the ultimate, ideally adequate scheme. In this chapter, I want to add more details to this view.

Reality and existence-talk

When pondering about the question of reality and the ultimate Peircean conceptual scheme, Sellars does not speak about reality itself but about our concept of it:

the *concepts* of “ideal truth” and “what really exists” are defined in terms of a Peircean conceptual structure (SM, ch. V §75; my emphasis)

Sellars does not even speak about the concept of *reality* here, but about the concept of “what really exists”. He does not target the concept of a certain kind of entity, say, of the sum of all things existing independently of us. Rather, he asks what it means to say that something “really” exists and what function statements like these have in the overall economy of our language.

The concept of reality is not an empirical concept. It is not as if we could, after a long process of inquiry, come to the conclusion that reality is or is not what Sellars (or any other philosopher) said that it is. Even at the fictional ideal end of inquiry we will not be in a position to say: “Do you see? Now that we have arrived at the ideal end of inquiry, we can confirm that reality actually is what Sellars and Peirce claimed it to be and that, for example, Berkeley was wrong.” Such a statement is obviously absurd. This is because the concept of reality is not an empirically descriptive concept, i.e., what reality “is” or “is not” is nothing we could find out by empirical inquiry (in contrast to finding out “what really exists” which can be a question of empirical inquiry).

The alternative is that our concept of reality like the concept of truth is metalinguistic or metaconceptual, i.e. that it helps us to characterize our conceptual scheme. The concepts of reality, existence and truth are closely connected. Only things spoken about in true descriptive sentences can be said to be real. Thus, the concept of reality will probably serve a similar signaling function like the concept of truth. However, this time the question is not which sentences in our language are assertible but which expressions we are permitted to use in statements of a certain form in our language. Sentences signaling this for kind terms would be for example:

Lions exist.

Lions are real.

There are lions.

For individual constants, this would be:

Wilfrid Sellars exists.

The philosopher who wrote *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is real.

Or for stuff terms:

Water exists.

Water is real.

There is water.

If we give these statements a signaling role similar to truth-statements, we could get, for example:

Some sentences of the form “x is a lion.” are correctly assertible.

Some sentences of the form “Wilfrid Sellars is f.” or “Wilfrid Sellars is a k.” are correctly assertible.

Some sentences of the form “x is an amount of water.” are correctly assertible.⁹⁵

As in the case of truth, the frame with respect to which these sentences can be correctly asserted is our own language.

Of course, this is not enough to capture what the predicates “is real” or “exists” do. There are many expressions for which we can correctly assert sentences of the forms above but where we would not say that the entities talked about are real especially when the asserted sentences are negations. These are, for example, fictional entities (Pegasus, unicorns), discredited scientific posits (ether, dephlogisticated air), and, if we are nominalists like Sellars, abstracta (whiteness, beauty). Thus, our initial rendering of what sentences like “Lions are real.” signal needs to be restricted, for example in the following way:

Statements of the form “x is a lion.” where x stands in spatio-temporal and causal

⁹⁵ Using more Sellarsian devices of rendering these sentences, they would read:

Some INDCON •lion•s are correctly assertible.

Some •Wilfrid Sellars• PRECONs are correctly assertible.

The INDCON •amount of water• is correctly assertible.

INDCON takes dot-quoted names as its values and PRECON dot-quoted predicate expressions.

relations to other things are correctly assertible.⁹⁶

The restrictions may take different forms depending on which entities we want to exclude. Most philosophers would want to exclude fictional entities. Sellars as a nominalist also wants to exclude abstract entities. He therefore argues against attempts to understand existence talk simply on the basis of quantification, as Quine does, and for a more restricted criterion (see, e.g., NAO, ch. 1 and 2, GE):

only those existentially quantified statements in which the quantified variable takes *names of objects* as its substituends have the force of existence statements. (LT, §28; my emphasis)

For the sake of my text, I will assume that statements such as

Some sentences of the form “x is a lion.” are correctly assertible.

can be conveniently restricted to exclude entities which do not qualify as real. I will also assume that Sellars can give a defensible nominalist criterion for restricting the set of sentences which make a genuine ontological commitment. As already stated in the introduction, I will not venture into Sellars’s nominalism as I focus on his general treatment of the concepts of existence and reality and not on how he justifies his restrictions on our ontological commitments.

For Sellars, existence claims are, like truth claims, tied to the framework we are using here and now. We see this when we express what existence statements say by means of Sellars’s dot-quotation, e.g.:

Some INDCON •lion•s are semantically assertible.

Therefore, as we have for truth (see chapter 2.2)

That grass is green is true. ↔ •Grass is green•s are semantically assertible.

we have for existence and reality claims

Lions exist. ↔ Some INDCON •lion•s are semantically assertible.

⁹⁶ This particular restriction may provoke the objection that now we are not operating on a metalinguistic level anymore because we speak directly about things which stand in spatio-temporal and causal relations (why shouldn’t we then just say that reality is the sum of all things standing in spatio-temporal and causal relations?). However, Sellars’s approach allows us to give a metalinguistic formulation also to this restriction, namely in terms of a subset of the material inferences governing the use of the respective expression (see, e.g., CDCM).

In this feature, Sellars's approach is reminiscent of Rudolf Carnap's essay *Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology* (Carnap 1950). Carnap distinguishes two kinds of existence questions. The first are internal questions, internal because they are made without calling into doubt an accepted framework. Internal questions can be answered either by empirical inquiry (e.g. for the existence of albino grizzlies) or by looking at the rules of language (e.g. for numbers greater than 1). Existence questions of the second, external type usually carry with them an emphasizing "really" as in: "But do numbers/micro-physical particles/physical objects *really* exist?" For Carnap, these are disguised questions about whether our current framework is convenient or whether we should change it and they can be answered on pragmatic grounds. Metaphysical questions are thereby deflated into pragmatic questions about which framework suits us best.

Sellars's stance on existence claims is similar to Carnap's. He claims for example that a good reason to accept a theory is to have a good reason to accept the entities postulated by the theory as real (PHM, 91). This good reason, as we saw in chapter 2, is displayed in a practical argument for the acceptance of a theory. Thus, to accept existence claims for new types of entities (Do electrons *really* exist?) is to accept a theory on the basis of practical considerations in one sense of this term. I will return to these later in the chapter.

The concept of truth and the concepts of reality and existence are closely linked but there are also differences in their use. Employing reality talk, one can make cross-framework statements which cannot be made employing truth-talk. Thus, I could make the following controversial claim:

Dephlogisticated air really is oxygen.

Sellars himself makes claims of a similar form, for example when he writes that "persons may 'really be' bundles" (PHM, 101).

I claimed that when Sellars speaks about what is ultimately real and ultimately true this is not to be read in terms of a special relation between our conceptual scheme or language and the world. But does a sentence like the one above not presuppose that we use such a relational model? Do we not say that our predecessors in the 18th century referred to the same piece of independent reality in using the term "dephlogisticated air" as we do when we use the term "oxygen", the difference being that we know much more about this piece of independent reality than our predecessors? Thus, in allowing for

statements about something's really being something, Sellars might be committed to such a relational view after all.

One could answer this question both with a “Yes.” and a “No.”. The affirmative answer, however, would be a clumsy way of expressing something about the function of “really is”. We can reformulate the sentence in a way which does not *prima facie* rely on the idea of reality as a mind-independent whatever-it-is to which our conceptual scheme stands in a relation of higher quality compared to 18th century conceptual schemes. We could render the sentence

Dephlogisticated air really is oxygen.

as

•Dephlogisticated air•s in the 18th century CS are similar to our •oxygen•s, and our CS is more adequate than the 18th century CS.

What we have is a functional classification across conceptual schemes⁹⁷ accompanied by the claim that our conceptual scheme is more adequate than the predecessor scheme mentioned. The only possible reference to a relation between our conceptual scheme and the rest of the world lies in the term “adequate”. At the end of this chapter, I will return to adequacy and try to give it a reading which does not depend on such word-world relations. What is important now is that claims as to what “something really is” need not commit us straightforwardly to such relations.

Above, I said that for Sellars there is still a way of understanding our sentence

Dephlogisticated air really is oxygen.

as the claim that “dephlogistated air” and “oxygen” refer to the same thing. Everything depends on how we understand the term “reference”. In the chapter on Brandom (3.1), we encountered two different Sellarsian notions of reference which must not be run together. The first was a causal relation between linguistic expressions and other objects in the

⁹⁷ Again, with all the flexibility mentioned in the last subchapter. For one could also argue that viewed from different angle, •dephlogisticated air•s are rather dissimilar from •oxygen•s and that therefore the sentence “Dephlogisticated air really is oxygen.” is not true (see, e.g., Chakravarty 2007, 55). But we actually do find cases of such bold classifications. Psillos, for example, claims that “luminiferous ether” and “electromagnetic field” referred to the same thing (Psillos 1999, 286).

On this view, it is a matter of choice, not a matter of fact, whether we should say that “xs (free actors, commonsense objects, consciousness, etc.) do not exist, there are only ys.” or adopt the Dennettian position that “of course there are xs, there are just not what we thought they were.”.

world. Reference in this causal sense was simply a different term for picturing. In the second sense, reference is a special type of functional classification. In this sense, claims like

“Praha” refers to Prague.

are to be understood roughly as

•Praha•s and •Prague•s are materially equivalent.

Thus, a reference claim does not speak about a relation between linguistic expressions and objects in the world, but says that two linguistic roles are materially equivalent. Some causal word-world relations need to hold for tokens of “Prague” as well as tokens of “Praha” in order for such a co-reference claim to be true, but the claim itself does not speak about these relations (see SM, ch. 3 §61-68). Therefore, we might say that “dephlogisticated air” and “oxygen” refer to the same stuff, purportedly oxygen. But on Sellars’s understanding this would not mean that we speak about relations of two linguistic expressions to one piece of independent reality. Rather the claim that “dephlogisticated air” really refers to oxygen would still amount to a functional classification such as

•Dephlogisticated air•s in the 18th century CS are relevantly similar to our •oxygen•s (i.e. materially equivalent to some extent), and our CS is more adequate than the 18th century CS.⁹⁸

Understanding claims as to what something posited in an earlier conceptual scheme “really is” in this way throws light on this remark in *Science and Metaphysics*:

We must distinguish carefully between saying that these [commonsense objects] do not really exist and saying that they do not really exist *as conceived in this* [commonsense] *framework*. For they do really exist as conceived in what [...] we have called the Peircean framework, the framework which is the regulative ideal which defines our

⁹⁸ In her German introduction to Sellars’s philosophy, Seibt (2007) proposes still another way to understand claims which diachronically compare two concepts. She uses the device of double dot-quotation. The rendering of our sentence in her approach would be

The ••dephlogisticated air••s is relevantly similar to the ••oxygen••s.

This amounts to saying that the second-order roles of two concepts are similar. In our example, this would be that •dephlogisticated air•s fulfilled a function relevantly similar to that of •oxygen•s, e.g. playing a similar role in the explanation of combustion. However, this is open to a criticism advanced by Laudan that similarity of explanatory role does not warrant the claim that the two expressions refer to the same thing (Laudan 1984, 160).

concepts of ideal truth and reality. (SM, ch. V §95; Sellars's emphasis)

Applied to our case of combustion theory, we could claim that dephlogisticated air does not really exist. What we mean by this, according to Sellars, is that it does not exist as conceived in its original conceptual framework. However, as long as we can defend the claim that there is a conceptual successor to “dephlogisticated air” in our own framework, we can say that the expression “dephlogisticated air” latched onto something which really exists, but that it is better conceived in the way we do now, i.e. as oxygen.⁹⁹ As these cross-framework classifications are flexible and sensitive to what we find relevant at the given moment, there is no one-and-for-all answer to whether the concept of dephlogisticated air captured something that really exists. Whether we answer affirmatively to this question or not will depend on whether we are prepared to make and defend the respective functional linguistic classification.

We can extend this to situations where we do not look back at past schemes and compare them to our own, but where we compare our commonsense and scientific conceptual schemes. Thus, Sellars's statement that gases are really clouds of molecules does not say that the words “gas” and “cloud of molecules” stand in the same relation of reference to the same piece of independent reality. Rather, it says something about the similarity of the respective roles of these expressions in their frameworks, and it claims that the scientific framework is more adequate.

My account of Sellars's approach to “what something really is” is backed up by a claim he makes in *Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism*. There he claims that commonsense objects do not exist (for what exists are the theoretical objects of science, ISR 48). But he immediately qualifies this claim in a footnote, where he says that it means that there are theoretical successor concepts replacing our concepts of commonsense objects. For further clarification, he refers to passages of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, where he writes about the continuity of commonsense and science (I will exploit these passages in the next chapter). Obviously, however, Sellars implies that the claim that commonsense objects really are scientific objects needs to be understood in the first place

⁹⁹ See also Brandom's account of representational or “aboutness” talk in Brandom 1994, ch. 8/I and Brandom 2000, ch. 4. Brandom explains this kind of talk as a means of endorsing only part of the commitments we ascribe to someone, or of ascribing to someone only a part of our own commitments. It is similar to the position outlined here in that it explains certain statements which seem to be about relations between words and things as a means of comparing between my or our use and someone else's.

as a claim about the relation between the commonsense and the scientific conceptual scheme, not as a claim about their respective relation to the world.

Objects

Even if so far, we have avoided reading Sellars's concept of reality and ultimate truth in terms of special relations between our conceptual scheme and something existing independently of it, there remains a problem. There still is a certain presupposition in talking in this way which is based on the idea that we and a user of an 18th century chemistry conceptual scheme speak about the same world. We already encountered this assumption when we spoke about the role of picturing in Sellars's scheme in the last chapter. There we said that pictorial adequacy can serve as one means of comparing conceptual schemes from our own point of view. But this can only make sense if we have the notion of a world which does not change simply because our conceptual schemes change. In chapter 3.2, we said that Sellars uses the term object in two different ways which need to be distinguished: as "object of a conceptual scheme", i.e. concept, and as object short and simple, i.e. something not dependent on a conceptual scheme. Thus, we need to have a notion of the world or of objects independent from us which are stable during conceptual change and to which we have access. But how can we have such a concept when all our talk about reality, so far, has turned out to be talk about features of our conceptual scheme or about cross-scheme classifications? Where do we get such a concept if we stick with Sellars's early view that all we can say from a philosophical point of view is that each language designates *a* world?

Sellars's views on this matter definitely underwent changes after his early essays with their project of explicating the concept of an "empirically meaningful language". In chapter 2, I claimed that it is best to assume that Sellars extended his understanding of what it is to explicate the concept of an "empirically meaningful language". What is remarkable is that this extension, which is marked by broader discussions of picturing, comes at the same time with intensive discussions of Kant. Sellars later thinks that having the concept of independent objects is a precondition of our having a meaningful, empirically applicable language. Here is a passage from *Some Remarks on Kant's Theory of Experience* where this comes out well:

Kant's agnosticism, however, if taken seriously—i.e., construed as the view that we have

no determinate concepts of how things are in themselves—means that no conceptual response can be evaluated, in the above manner, as correct or incorrect. Rules of the form

(*Ceteris paribus*) one ought to respond to ϕ items with conceptual acts of kind C

could never be rules in accordance with which people criticize conceptual responses; for, on his official view, the *esse* of any item to which any empirical predicate applies is already *to be a conceptual response*, not something that is responded to. (KTE, 43; Sellars's emphasis)

What Sellars says is that in order for rules-of-criticism (ought-to-be rules, see chapter 2.2) to work we need the idea that we respond to objects in the world which are not themselves conceptual, i.e. which are not themselves dependent on our conceptual schemes. Without ought-to-be rules language would not be possible, for it is these rules which underwrite linguistic regularities, transmission from language-trainer to language-learner as well as our notions of truth and falsity.

In the passage above, Sellars insinuates that the sort of objectivity needed amounts to having “determinate concepts of how things are in themselves”, something that according to him Kant denies we can have. What Sellars seems to get at is that the concept of Kantian appearances, Kant's focal points of objectivity, is the concept of something which is itself partly conceptual. Our concept of objects in the world, however, is not the concept of something conceptual. According to the passage above, something conceptual could not serve as a hinge point for our ought-to-be rules for Sellars. As ought-to-be rules are essential to our having a language, we need to have concepts of things in themselves if we are to be language-users at all.¹⁰⁰

Thus, for Sellars our *concept* of objects in the world is the concept of things-in-themselves. Of course, we may be wrong about how we take these things-in-themselves to be or we may conceptualize them in inconvenient ways. This, after all, is Sellars's claim with respect to our commonsense conceptualizations of the world: what we take to be things-in-themselves really are not things-in-themselves, for there is the offer of more powerful conceptualizations of the world, i.e., scientific conceptualizations which are

¹⁰⁰ From this point of view, Brandom's reading according to which Sellars updated Kant's distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves into his distinction between the manifest and the scientific image of the world becomes even more questionable. I have already attacked this idea in chapter 3.2.

inconsistent with our commonsense conceptualizations. But in seeing this, we do not try to jump from a concept of mere appearances which we formerly took to be all that could be known to the concept of things-in-themselves. Rather, we retain the concept of things-in-themselves we have been operating with all along and only come to see that these things-in-themselves are not what we took them to be. Thus, we are not getting into contact with things on a whole new ontological level but we are simply correcting mistakes.¹⁰¹

Someone might object that conceiving of empirical objects as things-in-themselves does not “make” them things-in-themselves, i.e. that there always will remain a “gap” between our conception of things and what things are really like. But here we have a further point where Sellars is not so much following Kant as he follows pragmatism. For him, the only situation where we could wonder whether our conception of things as they are in themselves is not adequate to things as they are in themselves is when we entertain the idea of adopting a new and possibly better way of conceptualizing the world. Any generalized doubt disconnected from our here-and-now situation would be Peirce’s “make-belief” doubt.

Still, our sense of the constancy of objects through conceptual change remains a sensitive point, at least Sellars himself seems to have regarded it that way. Even though our concept of an object in the world is not the concept of something conceptual, what we take these objects to be is a conceptual matter. Thus, any conceptual change affecting our empirical concepts might lead us to say that the objects we formerly conceptualized do not exist and that we now know which objects exist, namely those we are currently talking about. In short, we might say that the things our conceptual ancestors talked about do not exist. But this is not what Sellars wants and needs. He needs us to have a sense that the objects formerly conceptualized in a certain way exist in the very same way as before, only that we now conceptualize them in a different and purportedly better way. He needs to establish that we can have this notion in order to show that we can develop the idea that an ideal Peircean framework would still target the very same objects we are now, though maybe clumsily, talking about.

Two things can be found in Sellars which may address this problem. The first is

¹⁰¹ Compare the discussion of deVries in chapter 3.2. DeVries was puzzled how Sellars could jump from knowing something transcendently ideal to knowing the transcendently real. We saw that for Sellars no such jump is involved, but that the process is simply one of enhancing our empirical knowledge of the world.

connected to the role of ought-to-be rules explained above. If an organism or an artifact is trained or designed to behave in accordance with ought-to-be rules, it acquires causal dispositions and inhibitions which shape its behavior. Thus, when a child is trained to behave in accordance with the ought-to-be rule

One ought to respond “This is red.” to red objects.

dispositions are established which make the child respond “This is red.” if she is confronted with a red object (or inhibit her from responding “This is green.”). After the disposition has been established, red objects cause the child to respond “This is red.”. We have already encountered the specific form which this causal connection takes in Sellars: picturing. A system that interacts with its environment according to a set of ought-to-be rules is a system that has the right causal dispositions with respect to its environment and that therefore produces correct pictures of it.

As we have seen above, Sellars thinks that a concept of independent objects is necessary for our ought-to-be rules to work and that the idea of these rules is linked to the idea that our language is causally connected with the rest of the world. That is, our notion of an object in the world includes the idea that this object is or could be the cause of some of our conceptual responses to the world. Sellars seems to regard this as one of the bases of our conception of objects staying the same through conceptual change. In *Science and Metaphysics*, after introducing picturing as a causal relation between objects in the world and natural-linguistic objects (see chapter 2.1.), he writes:

The objects which are pictured by a linguistic picture can thus be genuinely extra-linguistic (though, of course, linguistic episodes as items in *rerum natura* can also be pictured). *The concepts* of these objects are, of course, relative to a conceptual scheme, but the form of these concepts is not

O (in our conceptual scheme). (SM, ch. V §61; Sellars’s emphasis)

Here, Sellars expresses something which was already remarked in connection with deVries: our concept of an object is not of something which depends on our conceptual scheme, i.e. it is not “O (in our conceptual scheme)”,¹⁰² but it is simply “O”.

¹⁰² “O (in our conceptual scheme)” would be precisely a case of running together our concept of objects and our concept of concepts as deVries does in his “object of a conceptual scheme” (see chapter 3.2).

So, Sellars's line of thinking seems to be the following: in order to have the concept of an empirically meaningful language we need to have the notion of stable causal (pictorial) relations between objects in the world and our linguistic utterances (otherwise, we cannot have rules of criticism or ought-to-be rules). Therefore, we need to have a concept of objects in the world as the causes of some of our linguistic behavior. To understand these objects as causes is to understand them as independent of our conceptual scheme. Sellars attacks Kant as well as Peirce for not seeing this. In a note in *Some Remarks on Kant's Theory of Experience*, he writes with reference to the picturing chapter of *Science and Metaphysics*:

The basic flaw in the Kantian system (as in that of Peirce) is in its inability to do justice to this fact. The insight that *logical* form belongs only to conceptual acts (i.e., belongs to "thoughts" rather than to "things") must be supplemented by the insight that "thoughts" as well as "things" must have empirical form if they are to mesh with each other in that way which is essential to empirical knowledge. (KTE, n. 7)

Sellars insists here that Kant and Peirce underrated the role of causal connections between language and world, and that they therefore could give no ground to the concept of objects independent of our conceptual scheme, a concept which is, however, essential to understanding language.

There is also a second line of thought in Sellars concerning our notion of objects which are stable through conceptual change. We find it in this passage:

Thus the purely formal aspects of logical syntax, when they have been correctly disentangled, give us a way of speaking which abstracts from those features which differentiate specific conceptual structures, and enables us to form the concept of a domain of objects which are pictured in one way (less adequate) by one linguistic system, and in another way (more adequately) by another. (SM, ch. V §67)

Rosenberg claims that this is Sellars's attempt of making sense of the relation between conceptual predecessors and successors and remarks that the "purely formal aspects of logical syntax" would not be enough to capture this relation. However, it is not very clear that what Sellars wants in this passage is to capture the relation between conceptual predecessors and successors. Rather, he seems to pursue the question how we can ground our concept of independent objects, for he says that he is interested in "the concept of a

domain of objects” which can be pictured more or less adequately. According to the passage right before the one cited above, this concept can be grounded in “the logical or ‘formal’ criteria of individuality” (SM, ch. V, §66). Sellars does not go on to specify what these logical or formal criteria are. Possibly they include such things as

$$(x)(y) (f(x) \text{ and } \neg f(y)) \rightarrow (x \neq y)$$

Sellars’s idea seems to be that if we can delineate a set of formal criteria of what it means to be an individual, we thereby lay open what our concept of an object comprises. As these criteria do not change, we can argue that our concept of objects as independent from our conceptual scheme stays stable through conceptual change.

Still, it is not clear how helpful the passage cited above actually is. It only says that every concept of an object we may ever have will obey the same constraints. This, however, is not enough to establish that we have the concept of objects independent from our conceptual schemes. In a similar way, we might argue that all our concepts of abstract entities will include the same logical features. But that does not make abstract entities independent from our conceptual scheme and Sellars would not want them to be thus independent.

Sellars does not say much more on the matter than has already been cited, thus it is not clear if his account could be defended. It is clear, however, that he thought that we need to give an account of how we can have the concept of objects independent of us and constant through conceptual change and that the account which, e.g., Kant offered was not sufficient. At least, the general lines on which Sellars treats the concepts of reality and existence have become visible. We have seen that the concepts of reality and existence, like the concept of truth, receive themselves a pragmatist treatment by him. Given that, I will assume that his account can be made to work and move on to the next question.

4.3. Language triumphant, practical reasoning and the moral point of view

Before venturing into the crucial part of Sellars’s philosophy as far as our topic is concerned, I would like to summarize where we stand. At the end of chapter 2, I identified possible tensions between Sellars’s pragmatist and realist commitments. These tensions are condensed in what I called “the straightforward reading”, according to which Sellars is committed to a two-fold notion of adequacy of conceptual schemes to the world: the

first is scheme-relative and centered in Sellars's understanding of truth as semantic assertibility and his early treatment of adequacy. According to the straightforward reading, however, this is only second-rate adequacy for Sellars. There is another, first-rate understanding of adequacy, ultimate adequacy of a conceptual scheme, which captures the way the world really is in contrast to capturing mere appearances. A straightforward reader then remarks that there is a gap to be bridged between these two notions of adequacy and supposes that this is the role which Sellars's notion of picturing is to play. If the reader is critical, as for example Rorty, he will point out that this approach does not lead anywhere for the reasons discussed in chapter 2.3. Therefore, on many straightforward readings, Sellars's realist and pragmatist commitments cannot be reconciled. I have tried to show that numerous things which Sellars says are not easily reconcilable with the straightforward reading. At the same time, a number of issues which the straightforward reading picks out as controversial can be given a less dramatic reading. For example, what Sellars says about picturing allows for an interpretation which does not make it the link between two conflicting notions of adequacy.

In this chapter so far, I discussed two threats, that of incommensurability and of relativism, in order to bring out features of the process of conceptual change as it is conceived by Sellars, especially how we can understand it as continuous. My main point was that, for him, there are no criteria for such continuity which could be specified from a philosophical point of view. Philosophy only establishes that we need to understand conceptual development as continuous and that we have the resources to do so. I also emphasized that Sellars's approach to reality, an ultimate conceptual scheme or ideal science is not to be explained on the basis of a qualitatively special relation between one conceptual scheme and the world, be it perfect pictorial isomorphism or something else. Talk about what is real or what exists has a similar function for Sellars as truth talk and this function is not primarily to talk about relations between linguistic entities and the world. So far, nothing in this way of understanding Sellars conflicts openly with his pragmatist commitments. In any case, we have established that the straightforward reading introduced in chapter 2.3 can be replaced by a more sophisticated understanding of Sellars.

However, we still do not have come to terms with the central tenet of Sellars's realism: that there is one ultimate description of how the world is, that there is an ideal conceptual scheme ultimately adequate to the world. The question is whether and how we can understand this claim in the light of Sellars's pragmatist tenets and whether it does

not, in the end, conflict with his pragmatism after all.

The Peircean conceptual scheme as a linguistic ideal

It is important to remind us that Sellars operates on the conceptual level. That is, he speaks about our concept of ultimate reality, not about “what ultimate reality is”. There are two questions with respect to this concept that need to be treated separately: First, there is the question whether we must have a concept of ultimate reality (because, for example, without it we could not be language-using beings, we could gain no knowledge about the world, etc.). Second, we need to ask how we can conceive of ultimate reality, i.e., what content this concept has. Radical pragmatists like Rorty argue that both questions deserve a negative answer, i.e. we neither need a concept of ultimate reality nor can we give this concept intelligible content.

I will concentrate on the second aspect, i.e. on the question whether and how we can give content to the idea of ultimate reality according to Sellars. But there are some important things to say about the first claim too. Let me focus for a moment on this aspect and consider a way in which Sellars would not answer the first question and then move on to the content of our notion of ultimate reality.

Why should we need a concept of ultimate reality, the concept of a conceptual scheme which would be the ideal outcome of conceptual development? Rorty thinks that Sellars’s motivation for insisting on this concept is to ensure that conceptual change is guided by a rational ideal which guarantees that we will approach a sublime end (Rorty 1988). At this point, we would be perfectly in touch with reality. Rorty, on the other hand, prefers to think of conceptual change as a contingent process without any envisaged end point. Readers such as Rorty think that Sellars’s motivation for insisting on a concept of ultimate reality is directed towards the future: Even if all we say today may be wrong, there is a state of being perfectly right about the world and we can at least hope to approach this state provided we act in accordance with rational procedures. On Rorty’s interpretation, Sellars’s motivation is to have something to answer to the skeptic (Rorty 1988, 220), a project which he himself sees as a waste of time.

However, skepticism does not seem to play a role in Sellars’s thought. He does not argue explicitly against skepticism and rarely mentions it at all. Nor is he prone to exhibit skeptical reasoning: he never claims that we could be completely wrong about the world.

Of course, Sellars says in some places that our commonsense conception of the world, the manifest image, is “radically false”. But viewed in context, this does not constitute a case for arguing that Sellars took skepticism seriously, as he usually adds that this means that there is a more convenient conception of the world which we should, in the end, adopt. This is our scientific world conception, a conception which has developed on the basis of common sense (see also chapter 5). Thus, using the manifest image does not mean being completely wrong about the world, for the manifest and the scientific image of the world are linked through a long chain of reconceptualizations. Second, we are never in a state of not knowing anything about the world, for the scientific image embodies knowledge about the world. Thus, Sellars does not seem to take the position of the sceptic serious or to be worthy of discussion.

Rorty’s case is also weakened by the fact that Sellars himself has some things to say about what role the notion of an ideal, ultimate conceptual scheme is to play. This role is not so much future-directed than it is important for our present use of language. The picture that Sellars uses is, in analogy to the catholic church, that of language militant, of our actual imperfect and incomplete language, in contrast to language triumphant, an ideal, complete language. “Language militant” implies struggling for perfection, which cannot, however, be achieved “on earth” because of the limitations (biological, material, practical) of human life. “Language triumphant” carries the connotation of an ideal end state which, however, can be achieved only in a situation free from “earthly limitations”, but which still informs the earthly struggle, i.e. actual linguistic practice. Sellars describes the relationship between these two in the following way:

Once the development of human language left the stage when linguistic changes had causes, but not reasons, and man acquired the ability to reason about his reasons, then, and this is a logical point about having the ability to reason about reasons, his language came to permit the formulation of certain propositions which, incapable of proof or disproof by empirical methods, draw, in the heart of *language militant*, a picture of *language triumphant*. (CDCM, §108)

This passage needs some comments. First, the idea of a perfect, complete language is a feature of rational language use characterized by our ability to “reason about reasons”. Thus, this is a stage where we cannot only draw inferences but where we can reflect on those very inferences themselves, where we can class them as valid or invalid, good or not

good. Some animals and machines draw inferences by using modus ponens, but they do not have a logic in the sense of possessing the ability to formulate modus ponens and other logical principles and reflect on them. The ability to reason about reasons includes the ability to formulate formal and material logical principles explicitly, to assess them and to compare them for relevance and priority, i.e., not only to formulate reasons but to assess their relevance and weight.

Sellars further claims that it is a necessary part of reasoning about reasons that we formulate statements “incapable of proof or disproof by empirical methods”. Sellars treats “Every change has a cause.” (CDCM, §107) as such a proposition. This is material mode of speech in the Carnapian sense, in the formal mode it would read: “Every event-statement is materially implied by another event-statement.”¹⁰³ This is not a sentence which we could confirm or disconfirm by empirical inquiry but it is a norm according to which we construct our conceptual systems. Specifically, it is the principle that rules of material inference are to govern all our empirical descriptions of events and that there are to be no inferential or explanatory gaps.¹⁰⁴

Principles of this sort come in different degrees of generality. They may govern a specific inference, as in our example that “Something is a whale.” implies “This thing is a mammal.”. But the principle Sellars mentions (“the causal principle”) is much more general. It governs inferring as such and tells us something about how we ought to go about constructing a large class of inferences. Thus, if we imagine a hierarchy according to the generality of such principles, the causal principle Sellars mentions would be much closer to the highest, most general, or “first principles” than our example governing inferences about whales.

Those principles are not exempt from change, of course, even though they change not directly by “empirical confirmation or disconfirmation”. We can expect that principles higher in the hierarchy will be more stable and immune to change than those at the lower end, i.e. the causal principle will be more resistant to change than principles governing specific inferences about whales. And it may be possible that when we go up the hierarchy towards the first principles we hit upon principles which are not open to change at all

¹⁰³ In a way which underwrites subjunctive robust conditionals (“If the match were struck, it would light.”).

¹⁰⁴ Of course, it is open to discussion how sensible this principle is.

because abandoning them would mean that we give up our status of concept-using beings.

The next remarkable thing about the quotation above is that “language triumphant”, i.e. the idea of a perfected language, operates “at the heart” of language as we actually speak it. We do not think of this ideal language as something possibly to be achieved or approached in the future, but as binding on us here and now. This is comparable to the case of morality (and as we will see soon, the connection is close here for Sellars, indeed): the ideal of a perfect moral agent is binding on us here and now for our actions, it is a standard by which we assess our actions from the point of view of morality. This ideal is not seen as something to be achieved somewhere in the future.

Having this ideal does not ensure moral improvement over time and we need not presuppose that there always is moral progress in order to defend that there is such an ideal. This offers an interesting parallel to Sellars’s notion of an ideal Peircean conceptual scheme: Sellars never talks much about a process bringing us closer to the Peircean ideal over time. He does not try to nail down that science actually makes progress.¹⁰⁵ One of the rare occasions where he mentions the topic is this one, where he speaks about

scientific objects about which, barring catastrophe, we shall know more and more as the years go by (SM, ch. VI, §61).

But it is hard to say whether this is simply the expression of a general optimism as to the development of science or whether it suggests that Sellars had a philosophically relevant theory of scientific progress. Whether it is the former or the latter, the fact that Sellars never discusses progress or convergence explicitly indicates that these notions are not central to his thoughts about reality and ultimate truth.

So, this is a first approximation of how we should conceive of Sellars’s Peircean conceptual scheme. The rough upshot is that it might be more salient to concentrate on the function that the Peircean ideal has for us here and now than to view it primarily as a removed scheme to be achieved somewhere in the far future (if ever). But this immediately generates questions. For example, one could ask how the Peircean scheme can be an ideal operative here and now and at the same time be the ideal end of an ideal process of inquiry.

¹⁰⁵ This distinguishes him from much of the contemporary debate on scientific realism, and also from Rosenberg’s *One World and Our Knowledge of It*. Rosenberg tries to establish that progressive, convergent changes in science are necessary given that we are the kinds of beings we are (i.e. rational, concept-using). “Convergence” is another expression which cannot be found in Sellars.

This end we cannot see for we do not know what perfect science would look like, what entities it would posit and what laws accept. This contrasts with the case of morality where we often have (except for moral dilemmas) quite a good idea of how a perfect moral agent would behave, we simply find it hard to live up to the ideal.

But maybe the case of morality and the case of Sellars's Peircean conceptual scheme are not so far removed from each other on this point as it might seem. What makes us moral agents is the fact that we commit ourselves to certain principles. Even if we cannot live up to these principles all the time and even if we might not be sure how to apply them in every concrete situation, we nevertheless regard them as binding on us. A perfect moral agent would embody these principles perfectly. It is possible to conceive of the Peircean scheme in a similar way. That is, the Peircean scheme would be a conceptual scheme working perfectly in accordance with the most general principles guiding our conceptual activities, which are, however, only imperfectly realized in actual language.

For example, the Peircean conceptual scheme would be a perfect embodiment of the principle that every change has a cause which was mentioned above. In the Peircean scheme, each event-statement could be inferred from premises already accepted. There are also other principles we now see as binding for our conceptual practices, such as the principle of noncontradiction, the principle that if I assert two statements I am committed to their conjunction or the principle that if the conclusion of an inference is false, I need to reject a premise or provide a further premise which explains why the initial true premises led to a wrong conclusion. Sellars's Peircean conceptual scheme would exhibit in perfect fashion all those features which are constitutive of any conceptual scheme.¹⁰⁶ This explains why it is an ideal operative here and now: these features are also constitutive of our own conceptual scheme even though it achieves to embody them only to an

¹⁰⁶ This sounds as if users of a Peircean conceptual scheme would reason much like we do. However, there is a crucial difference. As Christias (2017b, 10 n.5) remarks, Sellars envisages Peirceans to use only empirical descriptive statements, i.e., no modal discourse, no subjunctive conditionals, no statements about inferential principles, no "reasoning about reasons". I agree with Christias that this does not mean that the Peircean scheme is conceptually degenerated. The Peircean conceptual scheme is the perfect embodiment of the principles we are already committed to as concept users. However, because it is such a perfect embodiment, there is no need for Peirceans to engage in "reasoning about reasons", much as for a perfect moral agent there is no need to reflect on moral principles. This view of perfected rational agents is reflected in Dewey's claim that "pure reason" would in a sense not be rational, but a fixed habit (Dewey 1929, 350).

This implies that for Sellars our engaging in modal talk or rule-talk, our concept of concepts and of us as concept-using beings are an expression of our "imperfection" (but measured against an ideal of conceptual perfection which we ourselves created). This raises some interesting questions, e.g., whether the Peirceans would have a conception of themselves and what it would be like.

imperfect degree.

These considerations shed light on remarks in *Science and Metaphysics* where Sellars speaks about

the “identity” of our framework with the more adequate frameworks of the future, which must be an element in any penetrating account of truth. (SM, ch. IV n. to §12)

and claims that

to apply epistemic terms to Peirceish expressions we must think of it, too, as “the same game”, this time, however, in a more developed, more adequate form. (SM, ch. V §72)

For Peirceish to be relevant to us, we must think of it as “the same game” that we play, i.e. as a variant of the conceptual system we ourselves use. In order to do so, we must conceive of Peirceish as something that would evolve by conceptual succession driven by scientific inquiry out of our own scheme. Sellars’s claim that we need to conceive of the Peircean conceptual scheme as “the same game” as our own conceptual scheme indicates that in his view, the ideally adequate conceptual scheme is not simply a distant endpoint of scientific inquiry without any impact on current conceptual practice. It is a projection that we make from the standpoint of our own scheme taking into account the principles that we would require any concept user to accept.

What the perfect embodiment of these features would look like is something we cannot know. But when Sellars says that we conceive of the Peircean conceptual scheme as the ideal end of an ideal process of inquiry what he means is that we conceive of science as the means of coming up with such a perfect embodiment. I will return to the role of science in this conception in the next chapter, and for now I will take it for granted that we can see things in this way. But it is important that even if, according to Sellars, we conceive of the Peircean conceptual scheme as the ideal end of inquiry, this does not mean that it is something removed from and without impact on our conceptual practices here and now.

In ordinary life, there are, of course, limitations to how much we can live up to the Peircean ideal (this is why we have an area of culture specializing on living up to the ideal – science). However, it follows from Sellars’s inferentialist treatment of meaning that, in Brandom’s words, in order to know a concept one needs to know in what circumstances

to apply the concept and what follows from its application. Thus, if I could not give any defense of my statements when asked for it, I could not count as knowing the respective concepts.

These considerations show where Sellars's account differs from Rosenberg's approach which we encountered in chapter 3.3. Rosenberg sometimes writes as if being a realist committed us to the claim that our conceptual schemes actually converge. Sellars is more non-committal. For him, being a realist implies that we accept the claim that our conceptual practices are guided by a regulative ideal, where actual conceptual change may approximate this ideal or not. This explains why Sellars never even mentions the problem of convergence. What is more, as we have seen in chapter 4.1., whether there is continuity in conceptual change (which is a precondition for convergence) depends on what criteria we will apply, and these criteria are not provided by philosophy for Sellars. Thus, the whole question of convergence, too, does not seem to be something which philosophy could decide on but depends on the criteria which, e.g., historians of science choose to apply in studying past theories.

Still, the mere recognition that the Peircean scheme is a regulative ideal which perfectly embodies principles we already must accept is not enough to give an answer to the question how Sellars could countenance a notion of ultimate truth in line with his pragmatism. If Peirceish is conceived by us abstractly as the perfect embodiment of the structures and principles that constitute our conceptual activity, this seems to amount to the recognition that all that we have, and probably ever will have, is merely an imperfect embodiment of these structures and principles. But if our concept of ultimate truth and reality is bound to the notion of a Peircean conceptual scheme, does that mean that we as users of an imperfect scheme do not have the right to use predicates such as "real" or "ultimately true" because what these predicates apply to is something only users of Peirceish will know? Obviously, on such an account our ordinary truth-predicate which signals assertibility by us will merely have a second-rate status, and this is a conclusion we wanted to avoid as pragmatism (and Sellars himself) insist that this our primary understanding of truth. Claiming that Peirceish is "merely" a regulative ideal does not help to solve this problem.

We may find an indication of how to answer this question in one of Sellars's early essays. There, he writes that when we speak a language we speak *as if* our language were

perfect and complete (e.g. as if we could give a list of all objects we have in mind when saying things like “All swans are white.”):

it makes sense to say that while “All swans are white” does not entail “There are swans,” and consequently is not in the technical sense an existential proposition, it does none the less talk about *everything* that *is* and about *nothing* that *is not* and says of *each* item that either it is white or else it is not a swan. It has not always, however, been realized that this train of thought leads directly to the conclusion that our language claims somehow to contain a designation for every element in every state of affairs, past, present, and future; that, in other words, it claims to mirror the world by a complete and systematic one-to-one correspondence of designations with individuals. If it is obvious that our language does not *explicitly* contain such designations (and it would hardly be illuminating to say that it contains them *implicitly*), it is equally clear that our language behaves as though it contained them. (RNWWR, §6; Sellars’s emphases)¹⁰⁷

On this basis, we can try to extend our reading of Sellars a little beyond what he explicitly says. Let us attribute the idea to him that at unreflective moments where our linguistic activities do not encounter any problems (e.g. where there are no contradictions, no disagreements, no unmet challenges for explanation etc.) we do not make a difference between the very language that we speak and the ideal of a perfect language. This contrast becomes salient only in moments where we are not sure what is true (i.e. assertible) or how we should proceed (e.g. what law we should apply).¹⁰⁸

This thesis implies that we can be in different levels of intimacy with our own conceptual scheme. In contexts where there is no need to reflect on our scheme, where there is no disagreement or ambiguity, we will not contrast our scheme with a more perfect embodiment of the principles that constitute it. In the later Wittgenstein’s words, we follow the rules of our scheme “blindly” in such moments (Wittgenstein 2009, §219). For example, one of the first principles Sellars adopts as constitutive is the principle that no event should be left unexplained. As long as we do not, however, hit on actual cases of explanatory failures or gaps there is no need to call for a more perfect embodiment of this

¹⁰⁷ Surprisingly, in this passage from 1948, Sellars treats law-like statements (“All swans are white.”) differently from his “official” approach which is enunciated in an essay published almost simultaneously (CIL) and already quite well established a few years later (see, e.g., IM). In our passage, Sellars treats law-like statements not as principles of inference, but rather as descriptive or fact-stating statements speaking about every object, an idea which he explicitly rejects later.

¹⁰⁸ This is what Rosenberg calls, maybe in an overly dramatic way, “break-downs” of the conceptual framework in Rosenberg 1980.

principle. In this context, we will not distinguish between our scheme and a perfect scheme. Science can *inter alia* be understood as the systematic spotting of such failures. Some failures may be spotted even though there is no means available yet to change our conceptual scheme to accommodate them (such as the perihelion shift of Mercury before the general theory of relativity), or there may be more than one possibility to accommodate them, i.e. several candidate theories. In such situations, science keeps its own conceptual schemes, the available imperfect ones or several available theories, “at arm’s length” as Sellars says (SRLG, §87).¹⁰⁹ In these moments, we may withhold the claim that what we operate with is true even though truth, for Sellars, functions as S-assertibility by us. However, this is not an ambiguous attitude where on the one hand we endorse statements as true and on the other withhold that endorsement and see truth achieved only in a perfected scheme. Rather, it is that at such a moment we do not fully endorse any rules which would make the given statements semantically assertible. We see the old rules not to work in some circumstances but we do not have new ones which could supplant them. There is a kind of vacuum, and what guides us, among other things, in filling it are the first, constitutive principles of conceptual activity.

From this perspective, an objection that is sometimes leveled against theories which see truth as ideally warranted assertion (and could also be leveled against Sellars) loses some of its strength. The objection is that we or the imagined Peirceans could never know that we, or they, have arrived at the endpoint of inquiry. Even when we think they have arrived at such a point, we might still be wrong and the only way to find out is to continue inquiring. Thus, rather than bringing inquiry to a halt in the perhaps mistaken assumption that there is nothing more to know it would be prudent to go on. There is no way of telling whether we have met our target or not. But then, these objectors claim, we could not pursue an aim for which we could never recognize that it has been achieved.

According to the objection above, philosophers like Sellars illegitimately assume that users of an ideal scheme know that they are in perfect conditions. I do not think that this needs to be so. Even if users of Peirceish are by definition in perfect conditions there is no need for them to be certain about it in a reflected sense. This is because doubts about whether they are in such conditions simply would not arise. As I remarked above, notions

¹⁰⁹ Maybe this picture is too idealistic. Dennett (2017) claims that as soon as we are introduced to the space of reasons we often succumb to the temptation of giving reasons even if we do not have or know good reasons for something (it is hard to keep all the candidate reasons at arm’s length). According to Dennett this is a source of some persistent ideologies.

of an ideal scheme come into play when our current conceptual scheme fails us in some respect. In moments where this is not so, we do not distinguish between semantic assertibility by us and “ultimate truth”. For a Peircean, per definition, there would be no moments where her conceptual scheme could fail her, thus no need ever for her arises to explicitly revert to the notion of a better scheme nor to reflect on her epistemic situation.¹¹⁰

An unsympathetic pragmatist reader might object that on this account, Sellars introduces the notion of an ideal, Peircean conceptual scheme in order to give an anchor to our concepts of truths and reality at times when we hit on the imperfections of our current conceptual scheme and cannot suffice with semantic assertibility for us. At such moments, we lack rules which could tell us what is to be correctly asserted. Thus, according to the objector, Sellars still treats truth and reality as something we try to reach for when our current set of conceptual practices turn out to be inconvenient in some respect. But how could we make sense, at such times, of the idea of truth as S-assertibility for a Peircean, a user of an imagined conceptual scheme? How could something which is only imaginary guide us in choosing actual changes to make to our conceptual scheme in order to avoid the failure we have hit upon? Why should the notion of truth as S-assertibility in a fictitious, ideal conceptual scheme be any more helpful and graspable here than, for example, the notion of truth as correspondence to reality? Do we not rather tinker with our conceptual scheme when it turns out to be inconvenient at some point, amending it piecemeal guided only by what we currently judge to be the best means to achieve concrete aims rather than guided by an ungraspable ideal of truth?

What I will try to show now is that a pragmatist does not need to read Sellars in such unfavorable terms. Rather, the way Sellars conceives of the limit of inquiry and the Peircean conceptual scheme as a guiding ideal is compatible with an emphasis on practice and scientific activity as problem-solving rather than as the striving for a hardly graspable ideal called “the truth about the world”.

Practical adequacy

It is misleading to say that, for Sellars, striving for an ideal, Peircean conceptual scheme is striving for ultimate truth or for the uncovering of reality. This is so only indirectly. We

¹¹⁰ Again, this raises the question what self-conception the Peirceans would have or if they would have one at all. See n. 106.

conceive of the Peircean conceptual framework as a framework which never gives rise to those failures which normally make us change our conceptual practices. In a Peircean scheme, there would be no vacui in S-assertibility, no ambiguities as to which of a set of statements is assertible nor ambiguities whether a certain sentence is assertible or not. Users of a Peircean conceptual scheme could not be wrong about which statements are true and which are not, whereas we, users of a probably imperfect scheme, may turn out to be wrong about this. Therefore, striving for a Peircean ideal scheme is, indirectly, striving for ultimate truth. But that does not mean that for Sellars “the truth” of, for example, a certain theory is a criterion for adopting this theory. How could it be? Truth is not a quality of sentences for Sellars, but the truth-predicate signals sentences which can be correctly asserted. For Sellars, however, the ideal endpoint of inquiry is not an aim which we consciously strive for but something that embodies general principles which guide the construction of our conceptual systems. If we follow through on these principles this may bring us closer to an ideal state, but in a situation where we need to decide about changing our conceptual scheme our immediate aim is to have a working conceptual scheme again here and now.

So far, I have argued that we can give a reading of Sellars on truth, existence and the ultimate conceptual scheme which may be reconciled with his pragmatist commitments. However, Sellars explicitly claims that his Peircean scheme is ideally adequate to the world (SM, ch.V §69). Sellars’s opponent might argue that in this idea of some of our schemes being perfectly adequate Sellars returns to an unacceptable kind of realism. Up to now, we have shown that Sellars need not rely covertly on other than causal language-world relations, and that his ideal of an ultimate conceptual scheme does not, so far, commit him to such non-causal relations. Still, we have not yet explained in what sense the Peircean scheme is perfectly adequate to the world and it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that Sellars recurs to such relations after all here. At the same time, Sellars cannot simply drop the notion of adequacy. Until now, we have explained the Peircean framework as the perfect embodiment of principles constitutive of any conceptual framework. However, it is not clear how such a perfect embodiment is connected to the world. With what justification could we claim that it is “the measure of all things”?

We need to avoid the idea that the adequacy which Sellars talks about is established by criteria independent of any conceptual scheme. In chapter 2.3, I claimed that we can find two notions of adequacy of conceptual schemes to the world in Sellars’s writings and

that these two are potentially in tension with each other. Hopefully, it will come out in this subchapter that any notion of adequacy depends in some way on conceptual schemes for Sellars. In the case where he claims that every scheme is adequate to its world this is clear. But also his ultimate adequacy depends on features of conceptual schemes, however, not of a specific scheme, but on features any scheme must have.

What I would like to show now is that Sellars's Peircean scheme and its ideal adequacy can be understood in terms of practical aspects.¹¹¹ Sellars advances two suggestions as to how we could fill in the abstract notion of a Peircean conceptual scheme as a perfect embodiment of the highest principles which constitute our conceptual practices. Both ways of conceptualizing the ultimate conceptual scheme are linked to practical aspects of using concepts. The ultimate adequacy of a conceptual scheme may therefore be adequacy on a practical level. This is a level where Sellars's pragmatist and his realist concerns meet and where the tensions between these two need to be settled.

In order to approach the topic of adequacy, I will look at the two more definite conceptions of the Peircean framework which Sellars offers. The first is the notion of a conceptual scheme creating ideally adequate pictures and the second is the notion of the limit of an ideal process of scientific inquiry. In *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars writes:

Let us now go one step further and conceive of a language which enables its users to form *ideally* adequate pictures of objects, and let us call this language Peirceish. [...] We might, to begin with, look at Peirceish "externally", and construe the semantical uniformities it involves in terms of the electronic propensities of Peirceish robots, by means of which their tapes are filled with "information" reflecting their environment and reflected in their behaviour. (SM, ch. V §69-70, Sellars's emphasis)

This is the first way to conceive more specifically of Peirceish. We are recalled the android from *Being and Being Known* (BBK) who follows through on the program engineered into him and records a map of his environment on a tape. Only this time, the robot, as Sellars remarks, would be a "more perfect robot" generating ideally adequate pictures. "More perfect" is not related to the robot's "hardware" capacities. The robot from *Being and Being Known* also instantiated the program wired into him perfectly well, that is, it

¹¹¹ This is a controversial claim. For example, Seibt writes in Seibt 2007, 104 that even though a correct picture can be more or less adequate relative to our practical purposes, we can distinguish this correctness from practical adequacy. My claim is that if we try to do so, we will not be able to harmonize the conflicting tendencies in Sellars's thought.

generated an adequate picture of the world judged by the rules it was programmed with. The expression “more perfect” concerns the robot’s program, the set of rules with which it is equipped. As was noted in chapter 3.3, the connection between picturing and linguistic rules is very close. In a Peircean conceptual scheme, it is a perfect set of rules¹¹² which allows its users to generate ideally adequate pictures, i.e. something like a perfectly adequate linguistic map of their environment. The question is what “better” and “more adequate” mean in this context.

The second more specific notion of the Peircean conceptual scheme follows immediately after Sellars’s remark on Peircean robots when Sellars speaks about applying our own epistemic notions to Peirceish. For him, this means conceiving of Peirceish as

“the same game” [the same conceptual game we play], this time, however, in a more developed, more adequate form. We conceive of Peirceish speakers as a successor generation in a continuing scientific community or, at least, as an “adopted” generation (as we might “adopt” Martians). (SM, ch. V §72)

In this way of conceiving Peirceish, we see it as a more advanced conceptual scheme which has grown out of our current one by scientifically driven conceptual change.

These two ways of conceiving more definitely of Peirceish need not be in tension. According to Sellars, we can conceive of language both as a system of causally induced, regular natural events or as a system of rule-governed linguistic expressions. Each of these corresponds to one of the two more specific conceptions of Peirceish. However, for both conceptions the question is what we are to make of expressions such as “more adequate”, “better” and “more developed”. What I will try to show is that we can understand both in terms of our practical abilities.

Sellars’s picturing is the idea that the regular causal relations between the linguistic sounds and marks we produce and the rest of the world create something like a map of the world in linguistic form. He emphasizes this analogy between linguistic pictures and maps repeatedly (especially BBK; TC, 46; NAO, ch. V). He also highlights that the point of map-like representations is to be used in practice, i.e., in purposeful behavior and actions, in particular for navigating our environment:

¹¹² These will be implicit rules, or rules embodied at a material level as Peirceans will not need to talk about rules.

the essential feature of the functioning of a map *as*, in a primary sense, a map is its location in the conceptual space of practical reasoning concerning getting around in an environment (NAO, ch. V §58; Sellars's emphasis)

the point of being a map is to translate into sentences which dovetail with *practical* discourse about getting from point A to point B. (NAO, ch. V §77; Sellars's emphasis)

Maps or map-like structures play an important part in practical inferences about certain subject-matters. Sellars gives the following example of such an inference:

I am here. Here is Urbana.

Chicago is north-east from Urbana on Route 89.

This is Route 89.

I will get to Chicago (and satisfy certain other conditions) *if and only if* I go north on 89.

I will go north on 89. (NAO, ch. V §77; Sellars's emphasis)¹¹³

By analogy, the linguistic “maps” or pictures we generate have a similar function. We could, for example, imagine the following inference:

I will eat something healthy.

At time *t* (10 minutes ago), there was an apple at place *x*, (the kitchen table).

Apples are healthy.

I will move to the kitchen table and eat the apple.

In the second step of the inference, we “consult”¹¹⁴ our linguistic map-like structure. So, although picturing is a causal process we can use the products of the picturing process in

¹¹³ Obviously, Sellars does not claim that we infer this in the form of an explicit overt (i.e. spoken or written) or inner (mental) reasoning. This would disagree with the phenomenology of making minor decisions like this one where we mostly do not go through an explicit chain of reasoning. The status of inference in Sellars's thought, and especially whether inference can be unconscious, is not something I can go into here. It is plausible, however, that Sellars at least conceives of inferences as the one above as a quick succession of dispositions to utter certain sentences, as a triggering of events which we could classify conceptually even if at the time of the inference we do not consciously classify them so. This is supported by the fact that when the conclusion of such an inference is challenged, we are able to cite our reasons, e.g., for going north on Route 89, even though at the time of choosing the route to take we did not make a conscious inference.

¹¹⁴ The same considerations on inferring explicitly and unconsciously as in the note before apply.

reasoning. This is because the material in which we picture the world, i.e. specific sound patterns or patterns of marks, as well as neural events, is at the same time the embodiment of a conceptual system.

Sellars claims that it is “the *point* of being a map” that the sentences we generate from it, such as “Chicago is north-east from Urbana on Route 89.”, are used in practical reasoning. Thus, we would not call a structure which we could not imagine being used in this way a map. Being at least potentially used in practice is, for Sellars, necessary for a map being a map. Analogically, picturing would have no point if it did not support our navigational practices.

We can use this characterization of maps in order to explain what the expression “more adequate” in “more adequate pictures of the world” means for Sellars. This can be spelled out in terms of how successful the actions resulting from the practical inferences¹¹⁵ which draw on our linguistic pictures are. For example, the action resulting from the practical inference above is my going to the kitchen and eating the apple. This action may be successful and then there is no need to question the adequacy of my linguistic map. It may also be unsuccessful, the apple might be gone, for example. In this case, my map is inadequate in some respect: the map representation of the apple may have been generated in the wrong way, perhaps because I hallucinated the apple, or maybe my map is gappy, e.g., some events have happened which the map does not represent, such as my son’s coming into the kitchen and eating the apple himself. And for some purposes, a map mapping the world in terms of apples and kitchen tables is too coarse and we need a finer-grained map for them (e.g. when we want to have a reliable mapping of processes like cut surfaces of apples turning brown). If pictorial adequacy is linked to practical success, an ultimately adequate picture of the world would be a picture leading to successful action whatever the purpose (provided our practical inferences are valid).

Of course, Sellars does not think that we could achieve such an ultimately adequate linguistic mapping. His aim is only to explicate the concept of an ultimate conceptual scheme. So far, we can say that for Sellars our concept of such an ultimate scheme is the concept of a structure which generates an ultimately adequate linguistic map where adequacy is practical adequacy. Still, the question remains whether we can have a sensible

¹¹⁵ To be precise, the result of such an inference is an intention to act. However, Sellars treats intentions in such a way that they automatically culminate in actions provided that no obstacles arise.

conception of such an ideal map leading to successful action on each occasion. Actions are typically done to achieve a purpose, fulfill some end or satisfy a need. In our apple example, the end was to eat something healthy, maybe linked to an overarching end of leading a healthy life. An ideal map would have to provide the right relevant map-premises for practical inferences concerning any end, any need or purpose whatsoever. We, however, pursue only certain ends and purposes and are aware that there are other needs and purposes pursued by other persons or groups which sometimes cannot be simply reconciled with ours. Where should we take a graspable conception of “any” purpose, need or aim? I will return to this question in a short while. Before this, let us have a look at the second way in which Sellars suggests a more concrete conception of an ultimate conceptual scheme.

The second conception was that of an endpoint of an ideal process of scientific inquiry. The “ideal” in “ideal process of inquiry” refers to unlimited resources (time, materials, etc.) and to perfectly rational inquirers. What does this process of inquiry look like according to Sellars? He suggests that it is a process in which scientists adopt new generalizations, laws or theories by practical inferences. The inferences they make are practical and not theoretical, because adopting something, a law-like statement, a theory, and the like, is an action. This action needs to be based on reasons in order to be rational. As their premises, the scientists’ inferences employ, among other things, statements about the aims or purposes which scientists want to achieve. Let us state one of the practical inferences already cited in chapter 2:

We shall bring about E [an end].

Bringing about E implies accepting theories of such and such a character.

T [a theory] is of this character.

Therefore, we shall accept T. (OAFP, §19)¹¹⁶

The process of scientific inquiry is characterized by inferences of this kind and therefore Sellars’ second characterization of the Peircean conceptual scheme is obviously

¹¹⁶ *On Accepting First Principles* (OAFP) is only one of the essays where Sellars discusses practical inference in the process of scientific inquiry. Others include *Induction as Vindication* (IV) and *Are There Non-Deductive Logics?* (NDL). However, the general line of argument of these essays, as far as the issues discussed here are concerned, are similar, so I will focus on OAFP.

also linked to practice and action. Like the characterization in terms of picturing, it makes a reference to our ends and purposes. For picturing, these were any ends which could be furthered by possessing a precise map, but for the process of ideal inquiry there at least seems to be a more restricted set of ends, the scientists' ends.

What is the end E of adopting a theory which figures in Sellars's first premise above? Characteristically for Sellars, the end, in this case, is not to "learn the truth about the world" or to "uncover reality". Even though the Peircean ideal conceptual scheme gives us a conception of ultimate truth and reality, this does not mean that conceptual change is guided by the ideal of reaching "truth". Truth is not a thing, property, relation or state and thus nothing that can be reached. Sellars states explicitly himself that a real end needs to be such that we can know whether we have reached it or not:

we run into the difficulty that the end is one we could never know ourselves to have reached, and I submit that any end with reference to which the doing of a certain action is to be justified must be the sort of thing that can be known to be realized. (OAFP, §33)

As for "knowing *the* truth" about the world or "uncovering reality and its laws", these are ends that could not be known to be realized (if "truth" and "law" are understood in a traditional way) and Sellars therefore suggests that reaching the truth about the world is no end we can have in view.¹¹⁷

What he suggests instead has a strong pragmatist flavor to it. The scientists' aim in accepting generalizations, laws and theories is not to reach a static state (such as "knowing the truth"), but the aim is to acquire the ability to do certain things. Thus, for Sellars inquiry is bound to practice not only because it proceeds by practical inferences, i.e. inferences the result of which is an action (e.g. the acceptance of a law or theory). Also, the aims themselves which figure in these inferences are practical aims. For the acceptance of single new laws, the relevant aim is

being in a position to draw inferences concerning new cases, in a way which explains the observed cases. In other words, our proximate end-in-view is to have a principle of inference which applies in the same way to 'new' and 'old' cases (OAFP, §35).

¹¹⁷ For a comparable pragmatist reflection of ends see e.g. Dewey 1929, 112, where he claims that ends are always something we can consciously intend, i.e. they are ends-in-view.

In the case of the acceptance of whole theories, Sellars offers two such aims: First, this is the aim of possessing

the direct ability to produce adequate conceptual pictures of relevant parts of our environment (OAFP, §26)

Here, we have a link to our discussion of adequate picturing before. The aim of theorizing is to generate adequate pictures, i.e., pictures which facilitate successful action in the world. However, Sellars himself claims that ultimately adequate pictures would be of

unlimited accuracy and *open-ended* relevance (OAFP, §27; Sellars's emphasis)

and admits that this end is probably not very appealing (still, he leaves open whether the end appeals to *him*). It is precisely the sort of end which we could not know to have reached.

Sellars then introduces a second end for accepting theories, probably to offer something more graspable. This second aim is that of "having confirmed empirical law-like statements" (OAFP, §28). It is linked to the first end, as Sellars then more or less implicitly explains, because law-like statements provide us with principles of material inference which help us to build the adequate linguistic picture of the world which the first end referred to. The second end is more graspable, however, for we can know when we have confirmed law-like statements. Furthermore, having confirmed law-like statements is not simply the static state of possessing something but being able to draw successful new inferences on new cases in harmony with old cases (see the quotation above). So again, the aim is being able to act successfully in a certain way. Unfortunately, Sellars is not overly clear in neither of these passages and it remains open whether this would be his final word on the aims of theory acceptance.

Sellars's two ways of characterizing the Peircean conceptual scheme both point towards understanding this ideal on the practical level, i.e. on the level of action. Conceiving of it through the lens of picturing means imagining a picture or map of the world fit to any purpose or need. Seeing it as the limiting point of an ideal process of inquiry means understanding it as something which grows out of the here and now endeavors of scientists to acquire a practical ability, i.e., to successfully explain past events and predict new ones. The ideal limit of scientific inquiry would be the point where the practical abilities of scientists to explain and predict are perfected.

Both of the ways of characterizing the Peircean conceptual scheme involve practical inferences, i.e. inference the result of which is an action.¹¹⁸ When we conceive of the Peircean scheme as the ideal endpoint of scientific inquiry, practical inferences drive this very process of inquiry. When we conceive of the Peircean scheme in terms of perfectly adequate pictures we conceive of the product of this process of inquiry, and now the practical inferences in question are inferences in which this product is applied. The two practical inferences have a different subject matter: in the case of picturing, we reason about objects and events in the world and about actions appropriate to them, in the case of scientific inquiry we reason about our conceptual schemes. Still, the fact that in both cases the inferences are practical shows how much Sellars's conception of an ultimate conceptual scheme is linked to action.

Therefore, we might try to spell out the ultimate adequacy of the Peircean scheme as practical adequacy. In the case of picturing this would mean that Peirceans can successfully navigate and manipulate the world no matter what their purpose may be, in the case of the process of scientific inquiry this means that Peirceans (which are at the ideal endpoint of this process) can successfully infer¹¹⁹ on new cases consonant with old cases whatever subject matter is concerned. This kind of practical adequacy would not rely on any language-world relations of fitting, matching and the like. When Sellars's realist thesis is informed in this way by his pragmatism, it becomes the claim that there is a language or conceptual scheme on the basis of which its users are able to act appropriately¹²⁰ no matter what their concern is. If this reading is acceptable we would have shown that Rorty's characterization of Sellars's position (see Rorty 1988) as one which allows that we could be more and more successful but that the gods laugh at us for picturing worse and worse does not apply.

Still, a pragmatist might argue that this way of linking a realist stance to our practical concerns with the world is too superficial. She might say that we cannot conceive of a scheme serving *any* needs and ends. First, we know that aims can conflict and it is therefore dubitable that we could fulfill *every* aim even if we restrict ourselves to ends which it is physically possible to fulfill. Second, we may never know what aims and needs

¹¹⁸ See also EPM, §39: "classificatory schemes, however theoretical their purpose, have practical consequences".

¹¹⁹ But see notes 106 and 112 for caution about inference and about whether Peirceans infer anything.

¹²⁰ That is, to act successfully whenever this is possible and never to engage in unsuccessful action. Of course, this does not mean that Peirceans would be "all-mighty".

future generations will strive for. Hence, we have only our own aims and needs to go by. From this point of view, there is no clear understanding of what “any aims and needs” means. The pragmatist critic could further argue that Sellars’s idea of reality is not the notion of a pluralistic reality, i.e., that for Sellars, there is only one reality. This implies, however, that the ends, needs and aims which a perfectly adequate conceptual scheme facilitates need to be universal, to exclude different outlooks of what ultimate practical adequacy would consist in. Why, however, should we suppose that there are such universal ends?

From a similar vantage point, we might also object to the second way of understanding the Peircean ideal, i.e., understanding it on the basis of the practical aims of inquiry. Why should we take the aim of establishing explanatory and predictive mechanisms to be more than a contingent aim, i.e., an aim we might also not have? If the perfect adequacy of Sellars’s Peircean scheme is to be practical adequacy, this aim should better be one which we in some sense necessarily have. Otherwise, the concept of ultimate reality would either be an optional concept for us, one we could abandon if we liked to (which is what pragmatists like Rorty have claimed all along) or we would have to find an altogether different way of reconciling Sellars’s pragmatism and realism.

Universal and necessary ends

In the last part of this chapter, I would like to sketch some lines on which Sellars might have responded to the worries voiced above. My account will not be conclusive, mainly because what Sellars himself offers is incomplete. But at least, I want to show that there is room for discussion, i.e. that a conciliatory reading of the realist and pragmatist aspects of Sellars’s thought is not to be excluded in the first place. I would like to point out that the main field on which such a discussion should take place is that of Sellars’s practical and moral philosophy. It is in particular in this field, and not over the question of an alleged special relation between language and the world, that Sellars’s realist and the pragmatist tendencies may drift apart and therefore need to be reconciled.

When we try to find clues as to how Sellars would grapple with the pragmatist’s objections from above, we see that he was not unsensitive to questions of this kind. In *Are There Non-Deductive Logics?*, he raises the question whether the ends stated in the premises of practical arguments in the process of scientific inquiry are ends we only

“happen to have”. To find an answer, he asks when practical arguments like the one for theory acceptance are good arguments, instead of being merely valid (NDL, §47). Good arguments are valid arguments that proceed from true premises. The problem for practical arguments is that one of the premises states an intention, it says something like: “We shall achieve end E.” If the practical argument is to be good, this intention must be true in some sense, it must have, in Sellars’s words, a kind of practical truth or objectivity.

However, it cannot be true as empirically descriptive statements are true. We already know that for Sellars, the truth-predicate is applicable generically to all kinds of statements, including the practical statements we are discussing. For different kinds of statements, the criterion for truth will differ. In the essay mentioned above, Sellars asks what this criterion is for practical statements. He answers that

in thinking and acting in terms of probability [i.e., concerning the acceptance of generalizations, laws and theories], we are, in a certain sense, identifying ourselves with a continuing community [...] the prime mover of the practical reasoning involving [sic] in probabilistic thinking, indeed all logically oriented thinking, ‘deductive’ as well as ‘inductive’, ‘practical’ as well as ‘theoretical’, is not an idiosyncratic *wish* to promote truth, but the intention *as a member of a community* to promote the total welfare of that community. (NDL, §58-59; Sellars’s emphasis)

Thus, what ensures that the statement “We shall achieve end E.” has a claim to objectivity, i.e., is more than a mere expression of a subjective desire, is the fact that I make that statement when considering myself as a member of a community. When I consider myself as the member of a community, I consider myself as someone who is bound by the rights and duties of a community and understands these rights and duties as binding on any other member of the community. That is, I express the given intention not simply from my own, personal point of view, but after I have taken into account those rights and duties binding myself and other members. Sellars calls such intentions from the viewpoint of community membership “we-intentions” and for him, they capture the moral “ought”.

But why should I be right? What ensures that “We shall achieve end E.” really expresses such a we-intention? It might be just wishful thinking on my part and simply express my personal desires after all which I wrongly take to be something that the whole community intends. We still do not know what the criterion of objectivity is for moral statements and the practical statements derived from them. Sellars investigates this

question in the last chapter of *Science and Metaphysics*. His idea there is that if we can find an ultimate, universally reasonable, i.e. objective we-intention we could derive other we-intentions from it which would then share this universal reasonableness. Universal reasonableness is the species of generic truth for moral and practical statements. After some probing, Sellars suggests the following we-intention, also mentioned in the quotation above, as the hinge he was looking for:

It shall_{we} be the case that our welfare is maximized. (SM, ch. VII §120)

When we disregard Sellars's technical apparatus for practical reasoning, this would read, for example:

We shall bring it about that our welfare is maximized.

Together with the factual knowledge gathered by natural and social science we could, according to Sellars, derive further, more specific we-intentions on how to act in certain situations.¹²¹ To use a somewhat contrived example, science may establish that only a certain model of redistributing wealth in society best serves the welfare of our community. Given our knowledge of this and provided we are rational, we derive the more specific we-intention

We shall act according to redistribution model *RM*.

and still more specific we-intentions as to what concrete actions are implied for specific situations (declare taxes, pay taxes, etc.). The idea is that when science is at the ideal end of inquiry, i.e., when "all knowledge is in", the we-intentions derived from our primary universally reasonable intention would all be themselves universally reasonable. At that point, we would only reason from true premises, thus all the practical arguments which have their starting point in Sellars's universal, categorically reasonable we-intention would be good arguments, and as Sellars claims, the conclusions of good practical arguments are themselves categorically reasonable (NDL, §50). What we ought to do

¹²¹ This is possible, because for Sellars there is a link between factual reasoning and practical reasoning. If something is factually implied, the corresponding intentions also imply one another:

‘It is the case that-P’ implies ‘it is the case that-Q’ ↔ ‘It shall be the case that-P’ implies ‘it shall be the case that-Q’ (SM, ch. VII, §13)

would be determined and incontestable.

Like in the case of truth in general, this is an imagined state which captures how our concept of morality, i.e. the concept of “ought“, works. And like for truth, even if we are not members of the ultimate Peircean community and do not possess their complete knowledge of the world, this does not mean that “ought” does not express the moral point of view for us. If we accept an ought-statement, a we-intention, we take it to express the moral point of view. It may turn out that we were mistaken about that, e.g., that the respective intention did not follow from our hinge intention because we inferred it on the basis of flawed or incomplete factual information. But this fallibility does not mean that we are not morally bound by our ought-statements.

Our question was how we can ensure that the ends we pursue in scientific inquiry, the ends which make us accept certain generalizations, law-like statements and theories, are not simply “ends we happen to have”. If they were merely “ends we happen to have”, we could have different aims making us accept different generalizations, law-like statements and theories and thus a different picture of the world. But as already emphasized, Sellars does not countenance the idea of plural realities or relativism. Thus, the question is how to confer objectivity onto the ends we pursue in science.

We have seen that as far as moral and practical discourse is concerned, objectivity is, for Sellars, universal categorical reasonableness. Sellars’s hinge intention was:

We shall further the welfare of our community.

This is a we-intention which is, according to Sellars, categorically reasonable intrinsically, i.e., it need not be derived from other categorically reasonable intentions, but is categorically reasonable by itself. He is open to attack here, for we could ask why it is precisely this we-intention and no other which constitutes the moral point of view.

Sellars’s line of thought here would probably be a Kantian one. He would claim that his primary reasonable we-intention is constitutive of our concept of morality. Morality is connected to the concepts of rights and duties and the moral “ought”, and these do not have any application when we dissect them from the notion of a community in which they are used. So, Sellars’s claim would be that if we want to have a concept of morality then his hinge we-intention is part of that concept. If we let go of this we-intention, we also let go of the very concept of morality, and not only of it but also of our concept of community.

This is emphasized by Sellars when he says that

we saw that the categorical validity of an intersubjective intention of the form

It shall_{we} be the case that our welfare is maximized

would seem to consist in the fact that it is by virtue of such an intention that a group or community is a group or community. Roughly, a community consists of individuals who intend *sub specie* such an intention, the scope of ‘we’ being the members of the community. (SM, ch. VII §140)

Thus, the concepts of rights, duties, morality and community are inextricably bound to each other. Of course, this would need much more argument. But my aim is to show on what lines we can reconcile Sellars’s pragmatist and realist commitments, so I just want to indicate that a lot more needs to be done at this point and move on.

If the ends pursued by science are to be objective, if they are not to be merely “ends we happen to have”, they need to be derivable from Sellars’s primary we-intention. At first sight, this offers a promising strategy for reconciling Sellars’s realist and pragmatist concerns: We acknowledge that science is driven by practical considerations, on the level of perfecting the picturing function of language as well as on the level of how scientific inquiry proceeds. We would thereby incorporate a general pragmatist claim, namely that science is itself a practical endeavor embedded into other practices and pursuing practical ends.¹²² At the same time, there is a prospect of showing that these ends are not arbitrary, because some ends can be treated as objective (those which can be derived from the we-intention to maximize the welfare of our community). If the ends pursued in science were such objective ends, they would be practical ends, but objective at the same time. The way to understand this objectivity is to tie it to the welfare of our community. This link to our community is a pragmatist theme in general and also present in Sellars’s own pragmatist commitments more specifically, e.g., in the idea that the truth-predicate works as a signal of correct assertibility from the viewpoint of a language user who considers himself part of a certain linguistic community.

However, this strategy also comes with many problems and open questions. First, it

¹²² Such an approach, with a simultaneous emphasis on pragmatism as well as realism, has been recently defended by Hasok Chang.

would be necessary to show that the aims pursued in scientific inquiry are in fact derivable from the we-intention of pursuing the welfare of the relevant community. A second problem concerns the notion of community in Sellars's primary we-intention. In life, we are members of many hierarchical and overlapping communities, commitments to which may be in conflict. Does reasoning from the standpoint of any such community constitute the moral point of view (or *a* moral point of view among a number of possible ones)? If it does, how are we to defend the aims of scientific inquiry as ends we do not merely happen to have, not merely as the end of one community among others? Thus, the question is whether linking epistemic ends to morality in Sellars's sense would provide us with the universal aspect we are looking for.

As a further problem, Sellars's notion of community and the link he must make between epistemic ends and the end of promoting the welfare of our community are open to several threats of circularity. A community, for Sellars, is a group of people bound together by certain rights and duties (SRLG, §74; PSIM, sec. VII; SM, ch. VII §140). Thus, we can specify what community we are talking about by stating the rights and duties which bind its members. To derive more specific categorically reasonable we-intentions from Sellars's primary we-intention we need to specify the welfare of which community is to be promoted. But in order to do so one would already have to know more specific we-intentions (rights and duties) in order to delineate what the relevant community is.

We could eliminate this circularity by emphasizing that for Sellars a collective intention like

We shall pay taxes.

is as user-bound as the truth and meaning statements we discussed in chapter 2. We do not identify the respective community from the outside but from an involved point of view, i.e. as members of the community concerned.¹²³ That is, for a user expressing this intention, the question which community is concerned does not arise, because she can only have this we-intention from a point of view where she already considers herself as the member of a

¹²³ Note that a similar threat of circularity may arise for Sellars pragmatist treatment of truth. The truth-predicate is used to signal sentences semantically assertible by us, i.e. by the rules of our linguistic community. But what is a linguistic community? One feasible answer would be that a linguistic community is a group of speakers bound by the same (or relevantly similar) linguistic rules. Thus, in the case of truth too, the question arises as to how we can capture the "by us" in a non-circular way. And here too, the way out of this circularity may be to emphasize that our standpoint is always already involved, i.e. that we cannot reflect about truth without already being the member of some community.

certain community. She may be wrong about whether this specific we-intention is implied by the intention to further the welfare of the respective community, but she cannot be wrong about which community she is considering herself to be a member of.

Second, there seems to be a circularity in the relation of the epistemic ends of science and the primary end of promoting the welfare of our community. We said that the final stage of scientific inquiry would provide us with the factual knowledge needed in order to derive more specific “ought” statements from our primary we-intention. We only arrive at this final stage by pursuing the ends of scientific inquiry. But these ends can be shown to be objective, i.e. derivable from our primary end of promoting our welfare, only at the imagined ideal end of inquiry, i.e. after we have already followed them through. In other words, we would need science to show in the long run that the fruits of scientific inquiry are actually promoting the general welfare, but this objective “justification” is pending until the end of a process of inquiry which depends on the very principles and ends which we want to justify.

We can try to attenuate these problems by asking what the relevant community is that scientist implicitly refer to when stating their epistemic ends. There is a passage where Sellars implies that this community is the universal, all-embracing community of rational agents when the epistemic ends of science are concerned, even though the moral point of view itself can be constituted by membership in any community whatsoever:

It might, however, be argued that only if the ‘we’ of ‘our welfare’ is the ‘we’ of ‘we rational beings generally’ is an inter-subjective intention of this form categorically valid. This *might*, as we shall see, be true if the welfare in question is what might be called epistemic welfare, but not if we take into account, as we must, needs and desires generally. (SM, ch. VII §139; Sellars’s emphasis)

When we assume that the relevant community is that of rational agents, part of the welfare of the community in question would be trivially promoted by pursuing epistemic ends, simply because it is these ends which constitute the community.¹²⁴

Thus, if we pursue this line, much hinges on whether we can defend the notion of a universal epistemic community, a universal community of rational beings. If we can do so,

¹²⁴ The ends of the community in question would not include only epistemic ends as such, there may be all sorts of other ends connected to these (e.g. those of material protection of the epistemic agents).

we might be able to justify that the aims which science pursues are objectively valid, i.e., binding for all members of the community of rational agents. Arguably, this community is universal because we all want to be regarded as rational beings at least to some extent. With this status, our status as self-determined, responsible agents and therefore our status as bearers of rights stands and falls. Having the status of a rational agent is thus a presupposition of being a member in any community whatsoever.

We could then imagine that the ends pursued by science would be ultimately satisfied, i.e., we could develop the notion of a Peircean conceptual scheme. For the Peirceans there would be no occasions anymore to critically step back and distance themselves from their conceptual scheme. As the concepts of truth and reality function to signal assertible sentences in the way explained in chapter 2.2 and 4.2, there would be no sense in saying that members of the Peircean community hold something to be real which is not real at all.

On the basis of these considerations, we could try to address the worries raised above from our imaginary pragmatist. The pragmatist claimed that the idea of fulfilling every aim and need cannot be understood. But if every objectively valid end is derivable from an ultimately reasonable end, we can claim that there are infinitely many possible ends. Together with factual information, infinitely many ends can be derived from our primary community end of furthering our welfare, but still this would not mean that the notion of infinitely many ends would be unintelligible. Further, the objection was that aims can conflict and that it is therefore not possible to fulfill every aim. Here, Sellars seems to harbor the hope that the community of moral and of rational agents is ultimately the same and that conflicts of this sort are only superficial, caused by our lack of factual information and will vanish when “all knowledge is in”. Finally, the uniqueness of reality would be assured by the fact that there is only one all-embracing community of rational beings, i.e. that community which is relevant for anchoring the ends which drive scientific inquiry and conceptual change, and that we all belong to this community.

But of course, the idea of such an all-embracing and universal community of rational beings is questionable, and it has been questioned by pragmatists like James, Dewey and Rorty. And we are at a point where it is really unclear what resources Sellars offers, what he would want to commit himself to. His considerations on linking epistemic ends to the ends of a universal community in the last chapter of *Science and Metaphysics* show

uneasiness on his part as to how much worth there is in this idea. An important outcome of the discussion so far is, in any case, that a defense of Sellars's concept of ultimate reality or truth need not and should not revert to a qualitatively special relation (like "fitting", "matching", "picturing" or "truth") between a certain language (Peirceish) and the rest of the world. What I have tried to show is that for Sellars the greater adequacy of a conceptual scheme can be spelled out as its greater power to answer to practical concerns and that the unifying element needed for his realist position might be found in his moral philosophy.¹²⁵

Further problems

The possible resolution of the tensions between Sellars's realism and pragmatism offered above concerns only one of the two complementary questions posed in the introduction. It may offer us an explication and a defense of Sellars's concept of ultimate truth and reality. However, it is clear from the character of this solution that a good answer to the other question (about the place of norms and human action in a world described by science) is needed to make it work. My reading depends on such concepts as ends, action, intentions and morality. All of these belong to those aspects of Sellars's manifest image which seem to be threatened by a purely scientific account of man and the world. Therefore, my reading also requires that we reconcile Sellars's pragmatism and his scientific realism from this second perspective and spell out his "stereoscopic vision" of our commonsense and scientific understanding of ourselves.¹²⁶

But this is not the only direction from which objections to the reading presented here may issue. Attacks on Sellars because of the supposed incompatibility of his pragmatism and his realism have come mainly from authors who understand themselves as thorough pragmatists (such as Brandom, Price and Rorty). So far, I reviewed objections from this direction based on doubts whether Sellars can reconcile his own pragmatist and realist

¹²⁵ Making a link to moral philosophy might not only be beneficial in answering the question I am concerned with here. In the introduction, I raised another question concerned with the tensions in Sellars: what place to give normativity, which is so emphasized by him, in a world exhaustively described by science. In a recent essay, Christias (2017c) suggests how to answer this question. According to Christias, in Sellars's completed scientific image of man, norms get "eliminated" by being perfectly materially realized. However, to achieve a Peircean scheme, only a subset of all our norms need to be perfectly realized, namely those concerning concept use. What about other norms, e.g. ethical and practical ones? These could be perfectly materially realized (and thereby "eliminated") only if the users of a Peircean scheme would not only be perfect knowers but also perfect moral agents, perfect users of artifacts, etc. Thus, if elimination by realization of normative phenomena is Sellars's view, this provides further motivation to link his position on ultimate truth and reality to practical concerns and to morality.

¹²⁶ For steps in this direction see O'Shea 2012; Seibt 2009; Christias 2017b or deVries 2012.

commitments. But there may be objections that target Sellars's pragmatism itself. They might claim that the Sellarsian pragmatism which emerges when combined with realism as suggested here is a position not worthy of the name "pragmatism".

A radical pragmatist like Rorty would probably want to attack Sellars's approach to first principles. The ideal conceptual scheme is, for Sellars, a perfect embodiment of principles which all of us need to commit ourselves to if we want to have the status of concept-users. These principles are constitutive of our status as concept-users and are therefore universal. This universality is what allows us to speak of *one* ultimate conceptual scheme and *one* reality. However, we might wonder whether we do not deceive ourselves in calling these principles constitutive and universal. Our understanding of which standards we need to fulfil to be a concept-user might be only a local understanding of rationality, that of the Western intellectual tradition. Could we defend our standards as universal if we were confronted with a very different set of standards which nevertheless allows those who abide by them to lead satisfying and fulfilled lives? The question is whether we do not inflate a local understanding of rationality into the idea of a universal community of rational beings and whether what we (or Sellars) take to be an a priori inquiry does not, in the end, target "merely" contingent aspects of our practices.

In raising this question not only the correctness of Sellars's philosophical position is at stake. By pronouncing standards and principles as necessarily universal, we claim that there are no conceivable alternatives. Doing so can also be a deliberate means of ruling out alternatives, silencing opposing voices and points of view. Even if there were one such universal ideal we all should be committed to, how can we be able to know whether an ideal we are presented with is universal or if it is merely used, consciously or unconsciously, to exclude alternatives?¹²⁷ It might be simply more prudent to dispense with talk of universal standards and ideals (even if there were such things) in order to keep room for alternatives that allow us to shed critical light on what we would take otherwise to be self-evident. This would be a Rortean position according to which we should dispense with discussions about what ideal rationality is or what reality is, not because the claim that there is an ideal of rationality or that reality has certain features is necessarily false but because taking up a pluralist stance open to alternatives will have more desirable

¹²⁷ This is something that Dewey claims with respect to Greek philosophy. According to Dewey, some things taken to be universally true in Greek philosophy, e.g. the priority of contemplation over practice, was a (possibly unconscious) expression of the class division of Greek society, i.e., of a social privilege (Dewey 1929, 93-94)

practical consequences. Thus, from a position like this one could claim that Sellars ignores the wider impact of different philosophical positions, regardless of the question whether his own position is correct or incorrect. This indicates that two authors like Sellars and Rorty would disagree deeply about metaphilosophical questions on the purpose of philosophy.

An objector arguing from a Rortean position could also claim that this call for pluralism is already inherent in Sellars's approach itself. Sellars anchors the commitment to develop increasingly adequate conceptual schemes in the hinge intention defining the moral point of view: the intention that each of us further the welfare of our community. However, it is hard to tell that we can defend universalism given this (very pragmatist) reference to the community of those who have this intention. Of course, it may be possible in principle to reach universal agreement on what the welfare of an all-embracing community could be. But the most promising way to such agreement, the objector might claim, is not to extract purportedly universal standards from a local intellectual tradition but to engage in an open-ended discussion between cultures and communities.

Thus, underlying the Sellarsian approach, there is the problem of pluralism and universalism. Linked to this is the question whether the practical aims of developing conceptual schemes which I have identified in Sellars's framework (successful navigation on the level of picturing and the ability to draw material inferences on the level of inquiry) might be conceived in a too limited way. As Rorty claims in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Rorty 1989), a valid purpose of conceptual change is to redescribe people, institutions and things to make social transformation possible (e.g. in the wake of feminist, abolitionist and anti-racist movements). These changes are progressive but their purpose neither seems to be improving navigational practice nor acquiring material inferences to better explain and predict. Thus, there might be a rather conservative element to seeing progressive conceptual change only in terms of new explanatory inferences and improved navigational capacities.

These considerations arise when we see pragmatism as not only concerned with human practices in general but also as a critical self-reflection of philosophy's position in culture. From this point of view, pragmatism does not only ask what we can make of philosophically labored concepts such as truth, knowledge or meaning when we view them from an angle giving primacy to practice and use. It also asks self-reflectively about the

harmful or beneficial impact of different philosophical positions themselves on practice, society and its institutions. This is a question which Sellars does not pose. It is a point where more radical pragmatists like Rorty or Dewey might claim that his pragmatism is very limited in its scope.

Still, there are some more pragmatist metaphilosophical aspects in Sellars's reconciliation of realism and pragmatism. Even if, in the end, it might not be possible to reconcile all of Sellars's pragmatist and realist commitments in the way suggested here, his realism itself will retain distinct pragmatist traits. As we have seen, in setting up his realism, Sellars declines to give answers to questions which occupy many other realists, especially scientific realists, in the generation of philosophers after him. These are for example questions about conceptual continuity or whether and to what extent reference is retained through conceptual change. In the first section of this chapter, we have seen how Sellars refuses to establish philosophical criteria restraining these processes but leaves decisions of this kind (continuity or not, reference to the same objects or not?) to practitioners and historians. This is to acknowledge philosophical modesty and the primacy of practice at least for some questions.

Sellars probably never completely gave up his early understanding of his own philosophy as the attempt to explicate the concept of an empirically meaningful language, even though he does not use the label anymore after his early essays and even though he extends the project during his career (e.g. by the notion of picturing). If we accept the general view of philosophy from his early essays, we are left with only certain questions philosophy can give a good answer to. This also excludes demands for a philosophical justification of the choice of a certain language or of the decision for a certain route of conceptual change, e.g., by adopting a new scientific theory. Philosophy cannot say anything about these topics:

epistemology as the pure theory of languages can develop the formal properties of languages with different conformation rules and can compare realistic with non-realistic languages: but as a purely formal discipline cannot choose THE confirmation rules or THE language. (RNWWR, §57)

Recall his reflections on the pragmatist's having "the last word":

"Are you not saying that, after all, the pragmatist has the last word?", I shall be asked.

In a sense this is true. But the pragmatist must take the bitter along with the sweet; for the “last word” is not a philosophical proposition. Philosophy is pure formalism; pure theory of language. The recommendation of formalisms for their utility is not philosophy. (PPE, §49)

As we see, the pragmatism of the type Sellars addresses here wins and loses at the same time. It is right that philosophy has to give way to practice and to mere considerations of utility in questions of what conceptual system we should adopt (and therefore also on what shall count as real, true etc.). But pragmatism as a philosophy can say no more than that and therefore maybe is not philosophy at all.¹²⁸

Thus, it may be contested whether notions like Sellars’s ultimate truth and reality are needed in general or for his own project specifically and in general and if they are reconcilable with his pragmatist commitments. I have outlined above where we should try to look for possible ways of reconciling these two poles in Sellars. In any case, however, it cannot be denied that even should this reconciliation fail his realism leaves room for the pragmatist urge for philosophical quietism on certain matters.

¹²⁸ See also his early claim that to justify a set of rules is simply to display these rules once again (LRB, 134). This also means that there is no philosophical and no neutral justification for adopting a certain set of rules, e.g. a certain conceptual scheme.

5. A conciliatory reading – scientific realism and pragmatism

Sellars's scientific realism is famously expressed in the claim that "science is the measure of all things". My general aim is to show how this claim can be reconciled with Sellars's pragmatist commitments. So far, I have looked into the idea that there is "a measure of all things", i.e. the idea that there is one ultimate description of the world that captures things the way they are. We saw that this claim need not be read as a claim about what reality or ultimate truth are, or about how the words "reality" or "ultimate truth" can be defined. Rather, these concepts provide us with a recipe that tells us how to proceed in situations where existing rules and habits have turned out to fail.

In this chapter, I turn to the remaining part of Sellars's claim, i.e., to science. Even if we can make sense of the idea of an ultimate, practically adequate conceptual system, why should it be science that brings us closer to it? Why should it not be other areas of human activity, the arts, religion, commonsense or philosophy? And provided that there is a satisfying answer to this question, the answer still needs to be reconciled with Sellars's pragmatist commitments. Of course, it seems to be uncontested that if there is some way of reaching a conceptual system "adequate to the world" or "capturing things as they are", it will be by scientific inquiry. But even if this really was self-evident to all (and it is obviously not evident enough for some authors, e.g. Husserl and others in his tradition), we could still demand a philosophical justification of this fact.

To find such a justification in Sellars, I will proceed in the following way. First, I will look into contemporary scientific realist attempts to justify that science is closing in on the truth about the world. It is important to see that Sellars's approach differs from these attempts on a very basic level. Later scientific realists try to give an account of how science as a historically developing phenomenon approaches truth. In contrast, Sellars operates on a level which can be called transcendental. To make this clear, I will point out things that he says about science and show that his notion of science has two aspects. One is the empirical aspect of science as a historically developed area of human culture, an area which itself can become the object of empirical inquiry (e.g. sociological, historical, neuroscientific). The other is the transcendental aspect already mentioned. From this latter perspective, "science" is the name of any activity that systematically pursues the rational development of our conceptual systems. Science as an actual, historically developed area

of culture may embody this activity to a higher or lesser degree. I will argue that if we accentuate the first, empirical aspect, it will be hard to defend the claim that science must be the measure of all things as a part of Sellars's system. However, if we accentuate the second aspect science falls quite naturally into place as the activity which gives the lead in building an ultimately adequate conceptual scheme.

5.1. Scientific realism and the success of science

At the time of Sellars's main contributions to the philosophical debates, scientific realism was not part of the philosophical mainstream. Philosophy of science was dominated by an instrumentalist understanding of scientific theories advocated among others by many logical empiricists. And even if realism was a theme in Popper's work it did not stand in the center of his interest. Later, in the wake of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, social constructivist accounts of science came to the foreground. It is therefore not surprising that much of Sellars's discussion of scientific realism revolves around uncovering the weaknesses of what today would be called anti-realist accounts of science.

A strong interest in scientific realism has reemerged since the nineteen-seventies, the last fruitful decade of Sellars's own philosophical writing. So, there is not too much temporal overlap between the contemporary wave of scientific realism and Sellars's productive period. The only real point of contact is his debate with van Fraassen on whether accepting a theory implies regarding theoretical statements as true or if we can stay with the less demanding claim that we only need to regard them as empirically adequate (see van Fraassen 1975, Sellars's reaction SRT and van Fraassen's immediate reply, van Fraassen 1976). Otherwise, the contemporary discussions on scientific realism on such themes as the pessimistic induction, inference to the best explanation, stability of reference and the no-miracle-argument did not touch Sellars's work. Jay Rosenberg, discussed in chapter 3.3, makes efforts to extend Sellars's approach into the contemporary debates but, as already stated, the position which emerges departs from Sellars's own.

Modern scientific realism centers around Putnam's claim that a realist position towards scientific theories is "the only philosophy which does not make the success of science a miracle" (Putnam 1975, 73). Part of the efforts of contemporary realists is concentrated on refining this claim to make it defensible against objections. For example,

it needs to be clarified what success is and what type of entity is successful (scientific disciplines, theories or only parts of theories). The only position which explains scientific success according to Putnam, i.e. scientific realism in his sense, claims that “terms in mature theories typically refer”, “theories accepted in a mature science are typically approximately true” and “that the same term can refer to the same thing even when it occurs in different theories” (Putnam 1975, 73). This is quite a guarded characterization. It applies only to *mature* theories for which it is *typically* so that their terms refer or that they are *approximately* true. Putnam’s characterization implies a set of tasks for the scientific realist, e.g., to explain the notion of approximating truth and the notion of mature science. Maturing and approximating are both notions of continuous processes. Together with the last aspect (the possibility of coreference of terms in different theories) this requires that scientific development is largely continuous, a position which must be defended against the claim that scientific development is discontinuous and that theories are incommensurable.

I will not go more deeply into these contemporary discussions for, as is already quite clear, contemporary scientific realism differs from Sellars’s position. Still, it is useful to contrast the two approaches because they diverge in a fundamental characteristic which is important for Sellars’s account of science. Modern scientific realist approaches try to create a link between a theory’s truth or truth-likeness and the theory’s success. This link is not established by deductive argument or conceptual analysis but by inference to the best explanation. We could use the former two methods if there were a direct conceptual link between success and truth, i.e. if the success of a linguistic structure implied its truth, but there obviously is no such direct link. That a theory is successful does not necessarily imply its truth. Therefore, contemporary scientific realists embark on an inquiry which is largely empirical in character: it starts with the uncontroversial empirical assumption that scientific theories are and have been successful and then offers the truth or truth-likeness of the theory as the best explanation for this fact. This suggestion is then open to further empirical confirmation or attack.

Thus, this kind of scientific realism puts forward an empirical thesis which can then be further exploited to defend a position in philosophy, namely that scientific inquiry approximates truth over time. But that means that the principal way of refuting or supporting the thesis is to use the history of science as data. This can be clearly seen in the works of contemporary scientific realists and their opponents: scientific realists usually

offer a refined version of Putnam's no-miracle-argument and some account of the continuity of science followed by examples drawn from the history of science to support that theory (see, e.g., Psillos 1999, Leplin 1979;¹²⁹ for opposition to scientific realism for its lack of historical support see Laudan 1981). The extent to which the debate relies on the history of science far exceeds the extent to which this was the case before the comeback of scientific realism in the later 20th century.¹³⁰

Sellars and contemporary scientific realism

How does Sellars's attempt to justify scientific privilege in matters of ontology in contrast with the approach of modern scientific realism? Sellars clearly does not attempt to draw on the history of science to defend his account. The only example from the history of science which he keeps coming back to is the Boyle-Charles law and the van-der-Waals law for the compression of gases (e.g. in TE; LT and EPM). But this example has more of an illustrating than a justificatory role: it illustrates Sellars's distinction between empirical generalizations and theoretical laws and the role of the latter in explanation. It is simply cited by Sellars without further analysis.

Thus, Sellars's strategy for justifying science's privilege in ontology must be different from the strategy of contemporary scientific realism. As we will see, there is some place for the notion of success in Sellars's treatment of science, but it is not the place that contemporary scientific realism gives it. In general, Sellars does not conduct a partly empirical inquiry into successful theories or into theories as such. Rather, as I will argue further below, he operates on a transcendental and conceptual level.

Successful practical application is central to Sellars's account of an ideally adequate conceptual scheme as we saw in the last chapter. But the relation between success and truth is very different in his scheme than it is in contemporary scientific realism. The latter tends to spell out its concept of truth in terms of a classical correspondence theory. Additionally, for many contemporary scientific realists, the truth or truth-likeness of a linguistic structure is explanatory, i.e. it is a property of this structure which helps us explain why the structure has other properties (e.g. why it yields successful predictions).

¹²⁹ See also the *Scientific Realism and the Challenge From the History of Science* project at <http://community.dur.ac.uk/evaluating.realism/>.

¹³⁰ Of course, the idea that the history of science is relevant to philosophical inquiry into science did not originate from scientific realist circles. Its source are works such as Kuhn 1970 or Lakatos 1970.

But for Sellars truth is not a property. The truth predicate is a pragmatic device in our language for him that signals which sentences in this language are correctly assertible.¹³¹ That linguistic structures are correctly assertible by us may explain some things, especially about how we behave, but it will not explain the success of these structures. Rather, if there is an explanatory relation at all here, then (as Rosenberg stressed and as we could see for example in Sellars's account of scientific reasoning in chapter 4.3) it will operate in the opposite direction, i.e. that using certain linguistic structures yields success explains why we accept them as S-assertible. Therefore, Sellars's justification of science's privilege could never take the form of an inference to the truth or truth-likeness of scientific theories as the best explanation of their success.

There is also a difference between Sellars's general concerns and the concerns of contemporary scientific realism. The latter intends to capture science as a progressive and convergent process that gradually approximates truth. But while Sellars seems to be optimistic about these issues in general, he does not make them a topic of his philosophical inquiries. We do not find any detailed discussions of theory succession, convergence or approximate truth in his work. It is therefore a mistake to ascribe a worked-out view of the development of scientific theories to him, an attribution made for example by Laudan:

[...] the requirement (R4) often attributed to Sellars – that every satisfactory new theory must be able to explain why its predecessor was successful insofar as it was successful. (Laudan 1981, 43)

There are passages where Sellars appears to express something like the position which Laudan describes. He writes for example that

theories not only explain why observable things obey certain laws, they also explain why in certain respects their behaviour obeys no inductively confirmable generalization in the observation framework. (LT, §42)

The idea that theoretical laws explain the success and the failure of inductively reached, empirical generalizations appears in many more places of Sellars's writings. At first sight,

¹³¹ Therefore, putting the problem of ultimate truth in Sellars as the problem of how he can hold that conceptual change is truth-conducive (as in Lee 2016) gets things upside down. If my account in the last chapter is acceptable, conceptual change is "truth-conducive" only in an indirect sense for Sellars, namely in that an ultimate conceptual scheme would be perfectly adequate on a practical level. There would be therefore no reason for conceptual change and thus no reason to challenge what is semantically assertible, i.e. true, for users of this scheme.

it seems similar to the claim that a good successor theory needs to explain the success and the failure of its predecessor, but actually it is not. In these places, Sellars speaks about the relation between generalizations based solely on observations and laws established by the positing of unobservable entities. That is, he speaks about the relationship between the manifest (or observational) framework and the scientific (or theoretical) framework. He does not address theory succession *in* the theoretical framework. At the same time, Sellars says explicitly that the observational framework must not be regarded itself as a theory:

while I agree with Feyerabend that the conceptual framework of “common sense” is, in the last analysis, false, I find it confusing rather than clarifying [...] to speak of this framework as a false *theory*. (SRII, 158; Sellars’s emphasis)

Thus, when Sellars claims that theoretical laws explain observable events and also explain why purely inductive generalizations are only as successful as they are he is not concerned with the topic of theory succession. We therefore should not simply attribute a theory of theory succession to him. Rather, as we have seen in the last chapter, much in Sellars points to a philosophically modest view about theory succession and conceptual change.¹³²

To summarize, the concerns, strategies and presuppositions of Sellars’s scientific realism and of contemporary scientific realism differ much from each other. Both need to defend the claim that science has privileged grip on what is real or ultimately true. Contemporary scientific realism pursues a strategy which combines inference to the best explanation and confirmation by empirical, historical inquiry. If this strategy worked out, i.e. if inference to the truth-likeness of scientific theories as the best explanation for the success of scientific theories could be shown to lead to an empirically adequate story of the development of science and to yield reliable predictions, we would, it seems, be justified in being confident about science’s “grip on reality”. But this approach to science has its own problems. It makes truth a property of linguistic structures apt to explain other properties of these structures. But we do not have a good explanation as long as we do not understand the *explanans* well. Thus, the abductive reasoning of contemporary scientific realism needs to be backed up not only by empirical data but also by an intelligible theory of truth. Otherwise, to claim that truth or truth-likeness is the best explanation for a

¹³² The position which is attributed to him according to Laudan should be ascribed to Jay Rosenberg, not to Sellars. Rosenberg is possibly the link that made Laudan mention Sellars in this context.

theory's success is not clearer than to claim that the success of theories is best explained by, e.g., their approaching God's idea of the world. Many contemporary scientific realists rely on variants of the correspondence theory of truth, therefore the strength of their approach will depend on whether these can be made convincing enough. Be that as it may, this latter approach clearly is not Sellars's.

5.2. Sellars and science

Science is a theme constantly present in Sellars's writings. He mostly concentrates on specific aspects of scientific inquiry, e.g., he writes about theories, their relation to observation, about the role of analogy in theory construction, the meaning of theoretical terms, induction and probability. However, he says less about science in general, its role and place in the larger framework of human activity. Of course, there is the iconic picture of the clash of the two images, the manifest image and the scientific image, which we find in *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*. But what this science generating the scientific image is, how it came into being and how it hangs together with other parts of culture remains somewhere in the background of Sellars's exposition.

Two ways of understanding science

In this subchapter, I will assemble some of the statements Sellars makes about science in general. On this basis, I will show that there are two aspects in Sellars's understanding of science, two aspects which correspond to his distinction between empirical and philosophical approaches to language, meaning and thought that we already encountered. The fact that Sellars sometimes emphasizes the first and sometimes the second aspect can give rise to puzzling questions as to how he conceives of the relation between science and common sense. For the question how to defend science's privileged grip on reality in Sellars's framework, it is decisive whether we see science under the first or under the second aspect. My aim is not to give an account of all of the more specific topics mentioned in the last paragraph. Some of these arise only after we emphasize one of the viewpoints Sellars takes up on science (such as the problem of the theory-observation distinction). On others, I touched in the last chapter, such as the application of first principles in science. The different aspects of Sellars's philosophy of science have already been mapped (e.g. Pitt 1981; Gutting 1977 and 1978). I would therefore like to focus on

Sellars's treatment of science on a more general level and show that there are things to be clarified here too.

To highlight the first aspect, I will start with Sellars's portrayal of science in *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*. There, Sellars speaks of science primarily as an activity which gives rise to the scientific image. Science in this sense is a highly specialized enterprise, that of postulating theoretical entities and devising theories in order to explain observable events. Clearly, not everything that we call science today and only some part of science in the past actually is of this character and Sellars does not deny this. At the same time, part of actual scientific activity does correspond to what Sellars describes. Science happened to begin to postulate unobservable entities and as it turned out this revealed itself as a highly effective and successful way of explaining, predicting and controlling observable events.

The train of thought which follows is well-known. Postulating unobservable entities is more successful at explaining observable events than merely sticking to observable, manifest entities. One example of this explanatory gap in our manifest image of the world is the problem of how conceptual activity is possible. According to Sellars, there is no good explanation for this in the manifest image (the emergence of conceptual activity appears like a holistic "jump" from the level of nature to some higher level, PSIM, 6). But in the scientific image, this phenomenon can be explained in terms of evolutionary theory (PSIM, 17).¹³³ However, explanations in terms of unobservable entities are not only more powerful than manifest image explanations, but the descriptions of the world in the vocabulary of unobservable things also conflict with our commonsense descriptions. Therefore, they cannot both be true descriptions of the world. Because of its greater explanatory power, this true picture of the world is to be found in the scientific image. Still, we cannot give up our commonsense picture of the world either, because our self-understanding as rational, responsible agents using meaningful language is based on it and without this self-understanding science itself would be inconceivable. Hence, the task of fusing the two images.

It is crucial that the explanatory success of the scientific image and its superiority to the manifest image are something contingent. It was no necessary course of events that

¹³³ Sellars does not cite any concrete theory he has in mind. Relying solely on what Sellars says, the reader cannot assess whether his claim that theoretical science has an explanatory grasp on the problem of conceptual activity is justified.

science began to postulate unobservable entities and that this strategy turned out to be effective. Given a different world, things that *we* cannot explain in *our* observable framework might have been explainable without the need of postulating unobservable entities. It is a contingent fact that part of science can be characterized by the method of postulating unobservable entities and that this method is highly successful.¹³⁴ Sellars indicates that when he considers science as a postulating and theory-building activity, he thinks of it primarily as an actually existing practice:

although current literature shows an increasing tendency to reflect the realities of scientific practice rather than antecedent epistemological commitments, the type of theory with which I shall be concerned—namely, that which postulates unobserved entities to explain observable phenomena—is still suffering from the effects of a Procrustean treatment by positivistically oriented philosophies of science. (LT, §2)

This remark indicates that in what follows in the essay cited, i.e. Sellars's account of postulational theorizing, he wants to focus on “the realities of scientific practice”¹³⁵ as opposed to “antecedent epistemological commitments”.

Could Sellars defend the claim that science has an ontological privilege on the basis of this first aspect of his view of science? An answer to this question would have the following outline: We have a set of actually existing, historically evolved practices, in this case theoretical science or the theoretical postulation of unobservable entities. These practices have proved to be highly successful in the explanation, prediction and control of phenomena. In Sellars's case, the scientific theories have proved successful at explaining phenomena that cannot be explained in the manifest image and they also explain why manifest explanations are successful only to the degree that they are. It is these successes which warrant our privileging theoretical postulation of unobservable entities when it comes to what exists and what does not exist.

This claim is similar to the semi-empirical thesis of contemporary scientific realism discussed above. Their shared core is that the success of existing scientific theories warrants calling these theories true and, in Sellars's case, also proclaiming their superiority over common sense. But if Sellars presented such a semi-empirical thesis, we should

¹³⁴ The task of fusing the images is therefore also a contingent task for philosophy. It is the form which philosophy's overarching aim of “explaining how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense” (PSIM, 1) takes in our contemporary circumstances.

¹³⁵ Regardless of whether he actually did capture the realities of scientific practice in his treatment of theories.

expect a similar defense of it as in contemporary scientific realism, a defense based on empirical data. As Sellars operates with an account of truth different from contemporary scientific realism, the empirical link he would need to establish between success and truth would also have to take a different form. Contemporary scientific realists need to block the pessimistic induction based on the claim that many past successful scientific theories were false and that their terms did not refer (Laudan 1981). Sellars would need to find a way of blocking a similar pessimistic induction based on the claim that the semantic rules established by many past successful theories have long since been overcome as inconvenient. It would therefore be unwarranted to claim that the success of the developing scientific image approaches something like stable assertibility. What is more, contrary to contemporary scientific realism, Sellars cannot fall back on a concept of truth-likeness or approximation to truth, for his functional account of truth does not allow for such notions (and neither does his notion of picturing on my reading).

If Sellars's claim that science has an ontological privilege had an empirical character, we could expect him to offer examples from the history of science to support this claim. As already mentioned, however, Sellars uses such examples only very sparingly. One example he frequently offers is the case of the (observational) Boyle-Charles law and the (theoretical) van-der-Waals law on the behavior of gases. He sometimes points to behaviorist psychological theory.¹³⁶ And in the essay *Time and the World Order* (TWO), he analyses the commonsense and the relativistic understanding of time, but here he pursues metaphysical questions and not the aim of linking science's success to its purported privileged access to reality. None of these examples amounts to a detailed historical account of the respective theories, their development and impact. Rather than justifications, they are illustrations of Sellars's thesis of the privileged position of theoretical science. Given this lack of empirical back-up, Sellars simply seems to assume that the link between the superior explanatory power of scientific theories and their ontological privilege can be taken for granted.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ However, it is not clear whether psychological theory would form part of the scientific image as Sellars conceives it. On the one hand, it postulates "inner" entities which cannot be directly observed, at least not from a third person perspective, and thus could be part of the scientific image. On the other hand, it does not call into question the basic entities of the manifest image, i.e. persons, and therefore stays in the framework of this image (see SK, lec. II §55). In any case, this unclear status of psychology indicates that there are problems in the details of how the manifest and the scientific image are delimited by Sellars.

¹³⁷ This explains why Jay Rosenberg develops his Sellarsian account of theory succession on the basis of growing explanatory power. Such a fine-grained account of how to understand better explanation is lacking in Sellars.

Even if Sellars could defend this line of thought, he still would be confronted with the question whether such an account could be reconciled with his own pragmatist commitments. I will return to this question below and show that the answer is probably negative. It is so at least if we isolate this semi-empirical approach to science from a second aspect of Sellars's treatment of science, an aspect which I want to trace in the next section and which can be more straightforwardly reconciled with his pragmatism.

Science a priori

If the foregoing was all that Sellars had to say on what science is and what its results are, he would lack a convincing defense of his claim about the ontological privilege of science. But, as I will show next, there is a second aspect to Sellars's treatment of science¹³⁸ which does not regard science primarily as an actually existing, historical phenomenon, but as a highly developed form of a practice which already needs to be in place if we want to see ourselves as concept using beings, regardless of what concrete shape it actually takes. If we add this to the semi-empirical viewpoint from above, we will see that Sellars's account of science becomes defensible and that it also harmonizes more naturally with his pragmatist concerns.

It should make us suspicious that Sellars does not offer much defense of science's ontological superiority by examples drawn from the history of science. This can generate the impression that there is no such direct defense at all to be found in him and that he depends merely on the intuitive attraction of this idea. However, before we think about settling on the view that Sellars's ontological priority of science is simply an undefended claim we should return to his conception of science.

The rather surprising fact that Sellars does not cite examples from the history of science to back up his claims about science's ontological privilege may also indicate that this is not how he intended a defense of this claim to work. I would like to show that alongside the very specialized, restricted understanding of science from *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* and Sellars's essays on theories, there is a much broader

¹³⁸ Gutting makes a similar claim in Gutting 1977, 78. He writes that for Sellars scientific realism is in one sense a contingent thesis and in another sense, it is not a contingent thesis. However, Gutting does not explain how Sellars can defend his scientific realism as a necessary position and why science, according to him, can not only make ontological claims (tell us that something exists) but has ontological privilege (be the arbiter in ontological questions). I will attempt to sketch such an explanation below.

understanding in his work of what science is and does. It goes hand in hand with the idea that philosophy is a special kind of inquiry contrasted with empirical inquiry. On this understanding, together with the reading offered in the last chapter, science's privileged ontological position becomes necessary in Sellars's scheme.¹³⁹ Science as the project of postulating unobservable entities and generating the scientific image becomes then simply the form which science understood more broadly has taken in our circumstances.¹⁴⁰

It is unfortunate that Sellars's iconic and influential essay *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* emphasizes the contingent aspect of science without explicitly embedding it into this broader view. The result is that our manifest, commonsense conception of the world appears to be sharply contrasted with a scientific world view, with all the consequences that this has: Sellars will be pressed to justify why the activity of theoretical postulation of unobservable entities has a grip on ontological matters that other discourses, common sense, religion, art or non-theoretical science lack, a justification he does not provide (and this is precisely a point where he is attacked by pragmatists like Brandom and Rorty).

But there are other passages in Sellars which speak for a broader understanding of science. In *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Sellars reiterates the claim that science and common sense are continuous:

if, that is to say, scientific discourse is *but a continuation* of a dimension of discourse which has been present in human discourse from the very beginning, then one would expect there to be a sense in which the scientific picture of the world *replaces* the common sense picture; a sense in which the scientific account of "what there is" *supersedes* the descriptive ontology of everyday life. (EPM, §41; first emphasis mine, Sellars's emphasis otherwise)

Here, we find two ideas. First there is the idea that scientific discourse is not qualitatively different from something that has been there "from the very beginning". Thus, scientific discourse is not something new or alien, but a more refined, intensified form of some

¹³⁹ This is what makes Rosenberg's attempt to defend convergent realism in Rosenberg 1980 and Rosenberg 1988 so clearly inspired by Sellars. Rosenberg, too, tries to show that convergent realism is necessary given some assumptions on what science's place in conceptual development is. He thus brings a Sellarsian element into the contemporary debates about scientific realism which were focused more on empirical defense otherwise.

¹⁴⁰ Sellars himself often states clearly that the postulation of unobservable entities captures only some part of science and only some part of scientific theories themselves (e.g. PSIM, 19; SR11, 157; LT, §2).

dimension of discourse which was always there. Second, it is this continuity that makes us expect that scientific description will acquire a privilege over commonsense description as far as ontology is concerned. To say that we would *expect* this privilege of science, is, in this context, a very strong way of expressing oneself. The continuity of science with commonsense might explain science's privilege or it might make us see that privilege, but if it makes us expect its privilege, the continuity of science and commonsense needs to lend a strong reason for science's privilege indeed. This immediately poses the question which "dimension of discourse" Sellars has in mind and from the very beginning of what it has been present.

The second question can be answered easily: we are talking about a dimension of human discourse which has been present from the very beginning of discourse itself, i.e. from the very beginning of human conceptual activity. But what is this dimension? If what Sellars means were empirical factors in the development of human speech and thought, he would need to rely on large amounts of knowledge in prehistory to claim anything defensible about the beginnings of human conceptual activity. But he probably means something else, a feature not to be discovered by empirical inquiry but a necessary feature of discourse. What Sellars is talking about was necessarily present right from the beginning of human conceptual practices, because otherwise those practices would not have counted as conceptual practices at all. Thus, the dimension of discourse which science is continuous with according to Sellars is a necessary aspect of our conceptual practices. Science pursues this necessary aspect, i.e. science does something (in a more systematic and intensive way than we normally do) that any of us must do to be a concept-user. In this broader sense, then, science is itself necessary if there are to be concept-using beings.

What is this dimension of discourse? To answer this, it is good to go back to the last chapter. There, I claimed that we must conceive of Sellars's Peircean conceptual framework as a framework in which the principles we need to obey if we want to count as concept-using beings are perfectly embodied. One of those principles was that we be able to give reasons for what we say in order to explain what we speak about. When these reasons are challenged, we can justify ourselves by referring to general principles (law-like statements, statements about the necessity of something, etc.). If I claim that "Lily will hibernate this winter.", someone might ask for an explanation of what I claim. I might do this by saying: "Because Lily is a female polar bear.". That Lily is a female polar bear

explains why she will hibernate. If someone wants to challenge that this is a good explanation, I could answer that this is a good explanation because female polar bears hibernate and that this is a principle by which we can draw successful inferences on old and new cases. If my interlocutor wants to challenge me further, he must offer a different, possibly more successful principle of inference. If he does not do so and claims that principles of inference of this kind do not have enough warrant (maybe because they are not grounded in absolutely secure knowledge) and that we should therefore not use them, he is suggesting something that would undermine our ability of using concepts. I could not be said to understand the concept “polar bear” if I did not know at least some things that warrant my application of the concept to something and things that follow from something’s being a polar bear. As Sellars says:

The problem is not “Is it reasonable to include material moves in our language?” but rather “*Which* material moves is it reasonable to include?” (SLRG, §81; Sellars’s emphasis)

Thus, in order to be a concept-user, I must include material moves and therefore at least implicitly principles like “Female polar bears hibernate.” into my language.

When I discussed the practical aspects and ends of scientific inquiry in the last chapter, I said that the end E which Sellars offers for the acceptance of new law-like statements, i.e.

being in a position to draw inferences concerning new cases, in a way which explains the observed cases. In other words, our proximate end-in-view is to have a principle of inference which applies in the same way to “new” and “old” cases (OAFP, §35)

is not an end we can choose or which we merely “happen to have” as concept users. If I never draw inferences on new cases in a way which explains known cases in which I correctly apply a certain concept, I cannot be said to wield the concept. Thus, this is one dimension which, given Sellars’s inferentialist approach to meaning, needs to be there “right from the beginning”, i.e. from the moment humans can be said to be concept users.

As we saw in the last chapter, in his discussion of practical reasoning in science Sellars links this necessary aspect of concept use to what scientists do. From this perspective, scientists do what every concept user does, only in a more elaborate way. The ability to place what we say into “a net of implications” is not an all-or-nothing affair. A

child slowly grows through many intermediate stages from being a non-concept using being into a fully accepted concept user, i.e. until he commands a critical level of material inferential moves. Similarly, even adults may be able to use a concept with different levels of ability or clarity. I have a rudimentary concept of oxygen, but a chemist has a much more developed concept of oxygen because the space of implications in which she is able to place it is much richer than mine. There may be even concepts we think we use correctly without, however, actually having the status of the user of such a concept, i.e. without actually knowing when to apply it correctly or what follows from applying it (e.g. instances of false uses of foreign words). The status of a concept-using being in general or that of knowing how to use a specific concept are therefore only vaguely delimited. We will not be able to formulate precisely what the threshold is in the general as well as in the specific case.¹⁴¹ Similarly, when thinking about the origins of language and concepts, we will not be able to pick out a certain moment of time which demarcates a prehistoric population as a non-concept-using group from the same population as a concept-using group.

Thus, we can follow the principles that we need to follow in order to have the status of concept-using beings more strictly or more loosely. This is the same as to say that explanations can be better or worse, but even when they are worse they still count as explanations. When asked why we need oxygen, I may respond that we need to “burn” our food, a process in which energy is released that our organism needs, and that burning is a process which involves oxygen. This folk-biochemical explanation will be adequate enough for most purposes of my life as a non-biochemist. The biochemist, in contrast, will produce a more complex and detailed explanation. He is able to place the concept of oxygen into a much richer inferential network which allows him a wider range of actions, manipulations and so forth in which oxygen is involved. But even if I cannot place the concept of oxygen into such a rich network of inferences as the biochemist, I still count as capable of using the concept of oxygen, while the biochemist counts as even more capable of this.

Thus, when a pre-scientific concept user looks for principles which allow him to

¹⁴¹ This parallels what deVries and Triplett remark about the status of being a knower and when it is acquired by a child (deVries, Triplett 2000, 94-95). They claim that for Sellars there are no ultimate boundaries between knowers and non-knowers. Thus, there is no momentary jump which makes a knower of a child that did not have this status before. Rather, at some time, the child has acquired enough habits forming part of what deVries and Triplett call the knowledge game to be treated by others as a player in this game.

explain things he has already encountered and to form reliable expectations in new, similar cases, he is already doing science in Sellars's broad sense, even though in a rudimentary form. Even this rudimentary science already comprises more than mere inductive generalization. It already includes, or at least so Sellars insinuates, the postulation of things which are not directly observed (a fact he calls "most important"):

the most important thing of all, namely that the process of devising "theoretical" explanations of observable phenomena did not spring full-blown from the head of modern science. In particular, it obscures the fact that not all common sense inductive inferences are of the form

All observed A's have been B, *therefore (probably)* all A's are B,

or its statistical counterparts, and leads one mistakenly to suppose that so-called "hypothetic-deductive" explanation is limited to the sophisticated stages of science. The truth of the matter, as I shall shortly be illustrating, is that science is continuous with common sense, and the ways in which the scientist seeks to explain empirical phenomena are refinements of the ways in which plain men, however crudely and schematically, have attempted to understand their environment and their fellow men since the dawn of intelligence. (EPM, §51; Sellars's emphasis)

In the background of this, there seems to be the idea of a division of intellectual labor. As concept-users, we need to be committed to develop our conceptual abilities at least to some fundamental extent in accordance with the principles that constitute conceptual systems ("Every change has a cause.", no inconsistencies, etc.). For most purposes of everyday life, it is enough to have concepts only rudimentarily developed. But for some purposes, which are rarer or not obvious to non-scientist concept users, a richer understanding of our concepts is needed. Scientists, then, are the group of people which do the work of developing our conceptual scheme in the light of the basic principles of concept use to the finest detail. Science is this activity pursued systematically.¹⁴²

The idea that science is a continuation of the things we must do to have anything like common sense is further underlined by another of Sellars's claims. He asserts that scientific realism, i.e. the claim that science is the arbiter of "what is and what is not", is

¹⁴² Dewey claims something similar when he writes that science's aim is to distinguish cognitively valid from cognitively invalid approaches by tracing out in the consequences of things we accept in greater detail than we can do so in everyday life (e.g., by spotting incompatibilities, Dewey 1929, 324).

an outgrowth of something we might call “commonsense realism” (i.e. the claim that there are chairs, cats or rocks etc.). Sellars writes that

what we call the scientific enterprise is the flowering of a dimension of discourse which already exists in what historians call the “prescientific stage,” and that failure to understand this type of discourse “writ large”—in science—may lead, indeed, has often led to a failure to appreciate its role in “ordinary usage,” and, as a result, to a failure to understand the full logic of even the most fundamental, the “simplest” empirical terms. (EPM, §40)

Here again, there is emphasis on a “dimension of discourse” existing before science as a historical phenomenon developed, and on the idea that what happens in science is the “writing large”, i.e. the intensification and systematization of this dimension. But Sellars adds that the role of this dimension in commonsense discourse as well as in scientific discourse has sometimes been misunderstood and that the two misunderstandings in the respective areas are linked. As we have seen, the dimension of discourse Sellars is talking about is the expression, establishment and critical reflection of material inferential moves. Those get expressed in statements like “Whales are mammals.” or “Force equals mass times acceleration.” Sellars contends that the role of such statements is the same in commonsense discourse and in scientific discourse.

The misunderstanding of these principles he mentions in the passage above is a misunderstanding on Humean lines. According to such a line, statements like the two above express only the constant conjunction of two events (every time we encountered a whale, we also encountered a mammal). Such a view denies that there are lawful connections between, e.g., being a whale and being a mammal. Sellars opposes this Humean view, not, however, because he thinks that there really are lawful connections in the world (after all, he is a nominalist). He understands the lawfulness or necessity of statements like “Whales are mammals.” as a fact about our language. We need to adopt such principles in order to possess concepts at all (e.g. in order to possess the concepts of whales or mammals). They express more than a constant conjunction because as principles of inferences they are unrestricted and apply to any inference involving the respective concepts, whether past or future, whether inferences we actually make or inferences we could make.

The fact that without such principles we could not have concepts, applies to

scientific concepts in the same way as it does to “the basic empirical concepts” which Sellars mentions in the passage above. Thus, we cannot have complex concepts like “whale”, “mammal” or “atom” without principles of material inference, but neither could we have concepts like “sweet” or “blue”. If we ignore this, according to Sellars, i.e. ignore the dimension of discourse he so frequently mentions in the passages above but never names directly, we will be forced into unattractive philosophical positions. Such a position is, for example, the abstractionist theory of concept acquisition according to which acquire concepts by abstracting them from non-conceptual material, i.e. from experiences that we have access to independently of our ability to use concepts. On such a view, we first need to acquire concepts and only afterwards can we begin to draw inferences. For Sellars, this order needs to be reversed: we first acquire the dispositions to draw inferences in a rudimentary way and only after having reached a critical mass of such dispositions can we be said to be concept-users.

What is important here is that an abstractionist view of concept acquisition loosens our grip on realism. If we form our concepts by abstracting them from experiences, if all we have on the side of lawfulness is the constant conjunction of experiences, we are nudged towards a phenomenalist or empirical idealist position. This is because experiences are always at least to some extent private and mental. How could we guarantee that the concepts we abstract from private experience are based in “something external” to the mind when what they are abstracted from is mental? And when they are not based in something external, e.g. in objects which endure independently of what I perceive and think of them, how could the lawful relations between my experiences be really laws, i.e. independent of what I perceive and think? These are questions which an abstractionist theory of concept acquisition needs to answer if it is to be joined to realism.

In contrast, Sellars’s inferentialist view of concept acquisition (including such basic concepts as “sweet” or “blue”) is already committed to a kind of commonsense realist position. On this view, concept acquisition depends on social interaction for it is other people who create the dispositions to react linguistically on input from the world and to infer in children. At the same time, this account of concept acquisition presupposes causal interaction with the world because others generate the disposition in children to react in certain ways to objects in the world. For this to be possible, the objects must be public objects which can be perceived by both parties, the trainer and the trainee, objects which

already behave lawfully.¹⁴³

Thus, what Sellars hints at in the passage above is that there is a reasonable account of law-like statements according to which these statements express more than a constant conjunction of experiences.¹⁴⁴ On this account, law-like statements are principles of inference and they play a crucial role in commonsense as well as scientific discourse. This account helps us avoid the anti-realist implications of abstractionism as a theory of concept acquisition. It offers a view of concept acquisition which already relies on commonsense realist assumptions and thus makes this kind of realism part of a consistent bigger picture.¹⁴⁵

Thus, according to the passage cited above, commonsense realism is linked to what Sellars considers as the right account of law-like statements. Science revises our set of these law-like statements but their role in scientific discourse stays essentially the same as in commonsense discourse. This is so even if before the wholesale adoption of the scientific image we keep those scientific principles of inference and the concepts belonging to them at a certain distance (or “at arm’s length” as Sellars writes, SRLG, §87), linked only by correspondence rules to entrenched commonsense concepts. But if we accept, at least initially, some form of commonsense realism and see science as the systematic development of precisely the aspect of commonsense discourse which this realism is based on, we cannot withhold a realist attitude towards the scientific framework. And because science develops this aspect into more refined forms, it has a louder voice in ontological matters than commonsense. Thus, if we want to accept commonsense realism at all (and this is, for Sellars, a position which we should initially accept, see, e.g. PHM, sec. V), we should also accept science’s eventual ontological primacy. Therefore,

the Manifest Image of man-in-the-world, [...] properly understood, is the gateway to Scientific Realism. (NAO, Introduction §5)

These considerations explain why Sellars makes the strong claim that the continuity of science and common sense can make us *expect* science to replace our commonsense image of the world. (Note that the question here is not primarily whether theoretical entities exist,

¹⁴³ This is similar to Davidson’s description of language learning as triangulation.

¹⁴⁴ But neither does his account commit us to law-like relations existing objectively in the world, see CDCM.

¹⁴⁵ Compare also to the link between ought-to-be rules and our concept of things existing independently from us from chapter 4.2.

or what relation theoretical entities have to observable entities. We are talking about science at a more fundamental level. The postulation of theoretical entities is the historically developed and successful form which science as the project of systematically developing our inferential resources has taken.)

As science is an activity which is fully dedicated to developing the constitutive features of our conceptual system it has some advantages over what non-scientists in everyday life can do to develop these resources. Scientists can suggest several different ways in which our inferential resources can be developed further, and they may test each of them for how fruitful its results are. They are not bound by the requirements of everyday life to set up well-functioning practices right away. In everyday life, we settle for “rule-of-thumb-beliefs” (APM, §27) which give us principles of inference which work sufficiently well for everyday life concerns. But science can allow itself the luxury to suggest several schemes and find out which is working best, i.e. it can experiment with several schemes that run for the status of expressing what is necessary or lawful:

to all conceptual structures there are alternatives; and [...] no conceptual frame carries the imprint “sterling” certifying it to be *the* conceptual frame to which all others, to the extent that they are “coherent,” approximate. The essence of scientific wisdom consists in being uncertain, about what is certain, in a readiness to move from one conceptual frame to another. (ITSA, 319; Sellars’s emphasis)

We know that it is not merely one of our contingent ends to develop our conceptual resources to reach completeness, more explanatory power, consistency and so forth, but that it is an aim which we are committed to as concept-using beings by default. Nevertheless, concept use itself is a natural phenomenon for Sellars (see, e.g., his insistence that theoretical science can explain how concept-using organisms came into being, see PSIM, 17). Thus, there should also be two aspects to what science achieves: the first is the one already discussed, i.e. the development of our conceptual resources according to rational principles. The second aspect should target our position as biological creatures with the ability to use concepts. As I said in the last chapter, the practical aspects of progress towards an ultimate conceptual scheme are two-fold for Sellars: on a first level, we pursue the development of conceptual resources for a certain aim or end – not a theoretical aim such as knowing the truth, but a practical aim, i.e. being capable to do certain things. The things we want do are things that any concept-user already does to

some extent (explaining, inferring). In this sense, science pursues an end which is self-standing because it is an end which is constitutive of our status as conceptual beings. On a second level, however, where we view ourselves as biological creatures, the ability to use concepts is a highly adaptive, naturally evolved capacity. From this perspective, the end of reaching better and better explanation is not self-standing but it is the second end which Sellars connected to the Peircean conceptual scheme, i.e., that of enhancing our ability to navigate the world (that is, to picture it). This is not a necessary end.¹⁴⁶ On this natural as against the rational level,

from the standpoint of the anthropologist, science consists exactly in the attempt to develop a system of rule-governed behavior which will adjust the human organism to the environment. (LRB, §38)¹⁴⁷

That the aims of science are situated on these two levels reflects the two-fold point of view on language that we have already encountered: what is seen as a meaningful linguistic expression from one point of view is a natural linguistic object (a pattern of sounds or marks) from the other, what is seen as a true empirical statement from one point of view is a complex natural linguistic object picturing its environment from the other. Similarly, from one point of view science's aim is to provide us with an explanatorily consistent and powerful conceptual scheme and from the other it is the aim of generating regular natural linguistic events which reflect regularities in the environment of the organism. From the first point of view, the aim which science pursues is not contingent, from the second it is, but the activity of pursuing these aims is one and the same described from different vantage points.

It is important that science, for Sellars, is defined by its aims. Science pursues a certain end, the end of being in a state to draw successful inferences concerning old and new cases of a type of event or thing (OAFP, §35). According to Sellars

to be committed to [this end] is to have a certain intention which is *constitutive* of the scientific enterprise. (IV, §60; my emphasis)

¹⁴⁶ Maybe this could be expressed in the following way: the fact that the ends constitutive of conceptual schemes are necessary for us is itself a contingent fact (for it is contingent that we evolved into concept-using creatures). Necessity comes into the world only with us as rational creatures.

¹⁴⁷ Probably, Sellars understands "human organism" in a wide sense, here, including much more than genetically determined aspects, e.g. dispositions to behave in certain ways.

Thus, science is not defined in the first place by a certain method (like postulating unobservable things and events) but by the end that it pursues. We would not call anything by the name “science” which does not pursue this end. This claim underlines once more the transcendental understanding of science of which I claimed in this subchapter that we can find it in Sellars’s thought. At the same time, as we have seen, we are talking about an end which any concept-using being needs to be committed to. What results is a very broad understanding of science, at least much broader than Sellars’s very restricted characterization of the scientific image in *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* suggests. It is a conception of science according to which, to put it in a nutshell, any concept-user already is to some extent a committed scientist. I will now turn to the question whether this broader understanding of science can be helpful in reconciling the privileged position Sellars ascribes to science with his pragmatist commitments.

5.3. Science and pragmatism in Sellars

In the last chapter, I tried to read Sellars’s notion of ultimate truth and reality in such a way as to harmonize it with his pragmatist concerns. The question in this chapter is how we can justify that science has a special connection to “ultimate truth and reality” which other areas of culture, other ways of encountering the world (religion, superstition, common sense, art, etc.) do not have. My aim is to motivate the idea of science’s privilege in ontological matters and to blend it with Sellars’s pragmatism.

In chapter 2.3, I pointed out how Sellars’s pragmatist commitments and the privilege he ascribes to science might be in tension. I focused on Huw Price’s work and the possible unfavorable conclusions we can draw from contrasting Price’s and Sellars’s very similar approaches. Price advocates a global pragmatism similar to Sellars’s pragmatist treatment of truth. For Sellars, the truth-predicate functions to signal correct semantic assertibility for any type of statement whatsoever. It is applicable to scientific descriptive statements as well as ethical, mathematical, semantical, practical and commonsense descriptive statements.

At the same time, Sellars is no error-theorist with respect to ethical, semantical or practical statements. He does not claim that although ethical, semantical or practical statements have a truth-value, those statements are always false, but clearly assumes that ethical and practical statements can be true, e.g.:

the above account of truth applies to all kinds of propositions, ranging from singular state-of-affairs intensions to the propositions of mathematics and even the propositions of practical discourse. (SM, ch. IV §30)

He goes on to illustrate this by the argument

The •causing pain is *prima facie* wrong• is true (S-assertible)

Causing pain is *prima facie* wrong

In short, not only scientific statements can have a truth value and some of them are actually true but also ethical, semantical, logical, mathematical statements and so forth have a truth value and some of them are actually true. This is an approach equal between scientific and other statements. None of these statement types has an exclusive claim on truth, at the same time, none of these statement types is reducible to any other. And, as Price shows, this means that the idea that scientific statements are “more descriptive” of the world than other types of statements is not intelligible.¹⁴⁸ For Price, this implies that we cannot give the scientific description of the world an absolute privilege. At most, we can accord science a perspectival privilege, a privilege arising from the fact that we conduct philosophy from a naturalistic position (Price et al., 2013).¹⁴⁹

What Price calls pragmatism is close to the pragmatist elements in Sellars. Thus, if we follow Price in that a naturalist outlook combined with this kind of pragmatism forces us to reject the absolute ontological privilege of science, Sellars seems to be unable to uphold commitment to his *scientia mensura* without sacrificing his pragmatist tenets.

The function of science

Let us view the problem in the light of the two aspects of Sellars’s understanding of

¹⁴⁸ In chapter 3.2, we saw that deVries’s strategy in defending practical reality as a Sellarsian concept was based on this idea.

¹⁴⁹ However, Price’s position itself is unsettling. He starts from a naturalist position which privileges a scientific approach to the world and comes to see that science can be accorded only a perspectival or relative privilege on that basis. Does this not undermine his starting position? The key for Price here is probably that as long as we look for a distinctively philosophical account of “what there is” or “what is real”, his position will appear unstable. But when we settle with science as it is done, without philosophical backing, this instability vanishes and all that we do is to turn a successful practice on itself. However, it might be more consistent for Price then, to drop attempts to characterize science’s position within culture in terms of privilege or non-privilege and thus drop talk of perspectival privilege together with talk of absolute privilege.

science which I have drawn attention to. I will try to show that when we understand “science” as the name of a historically evolved discourse in which methods like theory-construction, model-construction or postulation are employed to explain and predict phenomena, we will get under pressure by a Pricean line of thought. Science will be one discourse among other discourses, each of which probably developed because it fulfils some function vital to us. These discourses are equal in being descriptive, generating sentences with a truth-value or stating facts (where these latter notions are understood on the basis of a deflationist understanding of truth for Price or a semantic assertibility approach for Sellars). How to justify then that science still has a special position in describing the world or in delimiting “what there is and what there is not”?

We could argue that the function fulfilled by science is more fundamental than the functions fulfilled by other discourses, e.g., ethical discourse, folk psychological discourse or semantical discourse. But it is hard to say what “more fundamental” could mean. It might mean “more salient”, in the sense that the function of scientific discourse is more important than the functions fulfilled by other discourses. But how to compare the importance of the purpose of ethical discourse (say guaranteeing social coordination and sociability) with the purpose of explaining and predicting events?

A different sense which we could give to “more fundamental” is that scientific discourse will be eventually able to secure the purposes of the other discourses. The idea is to eliminate ethical discourse, folk-psychological discourse or semantical discourse in favor of scientific discourse because, supposedly, scientific discourse itself will be eventually better at the task of these other discourses (say at securing sociability or at predicting the behavior of other human beings). But how could we justify such a claim? It is not clear whether scientific discourse could take over the tasks of other discourses. The case of ethical discourse is one of the primary examples. Science does not make any evaluative judgements about what is good or bad, and probably, even if the function of ethical discourse is “merely” to maintain sociability in a group-forming animal like *Homo Sapiens*, we probably need to make evaluative judgements somewhere in this process. At least Sellars does not envisage anything like the elimination of ethical discourse in favor of scientific discourse:

Certainly a scientific knowledge of the needs and abilities of men would play a determining role in shaping the actions and policies of one who already has a moral

perspective. But mere knowledge of things as valued or prized does not present them to the knower as *values* (i.e., as things which, other things being equal, *ought* to be brought about or realized). (SE, 217; Sellars's emphasis)

Even provided that this problem could be circumvented, we would still need to justify the claim that science will be eventually better at fulfilling the roles of certain other discourses. To do so, we would probably need to rely on the purported success of science in the specific areas which other discourses are concerned with. The task to link the success of a discourse to the idea that this discourse describes reality or that it provided us with "the truth about the world" in a way which other discourses do not do would remain.

As we have seen in the discussion of contemporary scientific realism, science as a historically evolved human activity is not necessarily successful, but it has turned out that it mainly is. Whether science as an actual activity is successful, is not a conceptual, i.e. philosophical question, but an empirical one, open to empirical confirmation and refutation. Thus, whether it will continue to be successful is not something we could establish from the viewpoint of today. A verdict on whether scientific discourse is more fundamental than other types of discourses because it will be able to replace these latter by better fulfilling their functions has to await future development and can be given only *ex post*, not *ex ante*. This is not to dispute that science actually is successful (and probably will continue to be so). It is only to say that there is no philosophical defense of an absolute privilege of science when we understand science as a historically developed phenomenon and give up the non-pragmatist claim that the statements of a certain type (the scientific one) are inherently descriptive, truth-value-apt and fact-stating while other statement types are not.

I emphasized that this view of science as a historically evolved discourse characterized by methods such as model and theory building or the postulation of unobservable objects and events is just one aspect of Sellars's understanding of science. The more fundamental aspect understands science as any kind of activity that develops our conceptual resources according to the principles that anyone needs to be committed to if she is to count as a concept-user. The problem with the foregoing account based on understanding science as a historically evolved phenomenon was that the only way to defend the ontological privilege of science was to rely on some sort of non-pragmatist account of language and its place in the world. As Price claims, a thoroughly pragmatist

account in which scientific discourse is one discourse among many others each of which fulfills some salient function has no room for an absolute ontological privilege for one type of discourse. In order to give it such a privilege, we have to recur to the idea that this one discourse has a special relation to the rest of the world that other discourses do not have (purportedly the relation of “describing” or “representing”). But given a pragmatist functional treatment of truth as we find it in Sellars and Price, this is a solution that is not open to us, and it is a solution I tried to avoid when bringing together Sellars’s pragmatism and realism in chapter 4.

Rorty claims that Sellars’s notion of picturing and the *scientia mensura* are precisely such a fall back into a representationalism, a position alien to Sellars’s otherwise pragmatist principles (Rorty 1988). If we based our reading of Sellars merely on the contingent aspect of his understanding of science, this would be a conclusion lying close at hand, as we have seen when contrasting Sellars and Price above. However, when we understand science in the second, transcendental sense, there will be room for a different perspective.

In the last chapter, I presented a reading of Sellars’s views about ultimate truth and reality that does not need to rely on a special language-world relation. As I argued, Sellars does not explain the notion of his Peircean ideal conceptual scheme in these terms, e.g. as an ultimately good representation or description of the world. When he seems to do so, e.g. when he speaks about the ultimate adequacy of the Peircean framework, this can be understood as practical adequacy (and at most in a derived sense as representational adequacy). The impression of some authors that Sellars still relies on language-world relations which he himself claims we should reject is based on a misreading of Sellars’s picturing. In contrast, I anchored Sellars’s idea of a Peircean conceptual scheme in the practical aspects of language-use and rational conceptual change. According to this alternative reading, the Peircean ideal scheme is simply the scheme that perfectly embodies the commitments we need to undertake if we want to count as concept using beings. And according to the more fundamental aspect of Sellars’s understanding of science, science is any activity systematically pursuing the development of our conceptual activities according to the principles which would be perfectly embodied in the Peircean scheme.

On this view, science and the idea of an ideally adequate conceptual scheme are

conceptually linked. That science drives conceptual development towards an imagined Peircean scheme is not something we discover or justify by empirical inquiry. Nor would there be need to do so, because the claim that scientific activity brings us closer to an ideally adequate scheme would be analytically true. The Peircean scheme is a perfect embodiment of the principles that we are committed to as concept-users and science is the activity of developing our conceptual scheme systematically in accordance with these principles. Therefore, science conceived in this way necessarily brings us closer to the Peircean ideal. In this understanding, Sellars's scientific realism needs not be in conflict with his pragmatist positions. If the strategy of reconciling Sellars's pragmatism with his realism presented in the last chapter is acceptable, the claim that science has a privileged take on ontology is simply a necessary appendix to that strategy. Thus, if Sellars's realism and pragmatism are reconcilable in the way outlined in the last chapter, so will be Sellars's pragmatism and his claim about the privilege of science.

Saying that for Sellars science simply is the activity of developing our conceptual resources according to principles we already need to accept does not mean that he dissects science from what is often regarded as constitutive of it since the Scientific Revolution: the confrontation of what we believe to be true with experience. For Sellars, conceptual activity includes three possible transitions: the triggering of conceptual responses by causal impact from something non-conceptual (language entry transitions), intralinguistic transitions like inference, and the triggering of actions by intentions (language departure transitions). Science in Sellars's wide sense would include the whole set of conceptual activity, i.e. all three types of transition, not only the second, intralinguistic transitions.¹⁵⁰ This cycle from "experience" to action in the world and to "new experience" is also emphasized in the classical pragmatist tradition as a model of rational inquiry (see, e.g., James 1995). Thus, to say that science is a "rational" activity for Sellars does not mean that it relies, in traditional terms, only on "reason" and not on "experience". It means that science systematically develops principles we need to accept to count as concept-users, and therefore rational beings. One way to do so is to infer conclusions with the help of principles of inference (law-like statements) we accept or consider accepting and see whether these conclusions coincide with the conceptual responses triggered by causal

¹⁵⁰ Sellars spells out how science proceeds from language entry transitions to action in IV. His understanding of action is wide and includes such actions as adopting principles of inference. It is not clear whether all classical pragmatists would want to understand action in this wide sense (see, e.g., Peirce 1998, 141).

impact from the world.

Taking up this broad view on what science is may also help to solve another problem connected to Sellars's specific type of scientific realism. Gutting (1977, 99) remarks that it is the we-intentions of scientists which guide scientific practice and in which Sellars's scientific realism is ultimately anchored (for we-intentions see chapter 4.3). But given that Sellars wants to claim that science provides us not merely with *an* adequate description of the world but with the only, exclusively adequate description of the world, he would be under pressure to say why it is the we-intentions of such a small group which lead to the ultimately adequate understanding of reality. What would it be about their we-intentions that makes them prior to we-intentions of other communities? If, however, we extend our idea of science in the way sketched here, anyone wanting to be regarded as a concept user would need to accept the we-intentions relevant for scientific practice. The problem about the priority of "the scientists'" we-intentions would thereby be solved, simply because any concept user would be a scientist in a rudimentary way.

Problems

There may be some unease with such a quick solution. First, Price's criticism of the absolute privilege of science has not yet been answered. In his view, the conceptual resources which science develops are only tied to a specific purpose, which he calls "environment-tracking" (Price et al. 2013, 39). Other discourses would have different purposes and otherwise, according to Sellarsian and Pricean pragmatism, they would be on a par as far as fact-stating and truth-aptness goes. This brings us back to our initial problem: why should a Sellarsian or Pricean pragmatist accord a special status to scientific discourse?

To counter this, we have to see that science or scientific activity in the broad sense in which it is conceived by Sellars are not simply restricted to developing the resources of one discourse targeted at "tracking objects" in Price's terms or "picturing" in Sellars's terms. Science is the activity of introducing and developing material inferential moves in our language. These can be used for practical reasoning or moral reasoning in the same way in which they are used to reason about physical events in a more limited sense. For example, the core of ethical discourse is the concept of "ought" and Sellars's primary universally reasonable intention of furthering the welfare of our community (see chapter

4.3). But what follows from that core is something we discover, according to Sellars, by employing scientific reasoning, i.e. by using material inferences justified from a scientific point of view. Thus, what we ought to do to further the welfare of our community is, for Sellars, a scientific question where science is conceived in its broad sense:

Yet we feel that the moral ought is, *in principle*, unequivocal, i.e. that if, like Smith [who has complete scientific knowledge], we had ideal knowledge, what we ought to do would be uniquely determined. (SM, ch. VII §78; Sellars's emphasis)

He makes a similar point for practical reasoning in general:

Drawing on additional knowledge of scientific principles, laws, empirical generalizations, the probable outcomes of actions of various kinds in various kinds of circumstance described with a subtlety of a casuist, he [Smith with complete scientific knowledge] continues

If I want to lead a life of kind L, I ought to do such and such actions (A_i) in such and such kinds of circumstance (C_i)

[...] His policies are general in the logical sense in which a fantastically complex law-like statement is general, even though it happens to apply to but one instance. *Indeed, his policies are the practical counterparts of just such law-like statements.* (SM, ch. VII §67; Sellars's emphasis)

To think that according to Sellars, science cannot develop the resources we employ in ethical or practical thinking would be to overestimate the importance of his conception of science as a postulating activity. This latter conception generates the impression that for Sellars scientific activity creates a discourse cut off from everyday life concerns to which ethical and practical discourses belong. But science as a postulating activity is just one aspect of science more broadly conceived by Sellars. There is no need to view science in the broader sense as an activity limited to the purpose of developing means of effectively "tracking objects" in the environment.

Price's potential objection was that scientific discourse is just one discourse among many which are different in purpose but equal in truth-aptness. One way of addressing this objection is to claim that there is no such "scientific discourse" as a closed-off discourse for Sellars as long as science is conceived broadly. We can delimit such a

discourse or an assembly of discourses from an anthropological or sociological point of view. But viewed from Sellars's transcendental perspective on science, science is the activity of developing our conceptual resources in general. We are committed to the principles of concept use regardless of the precise subject matter, purpose or area of discourse, so science in the broad sense is *eo ipso* not limited to one such area.

Provided that we can block Price's objection in this way, Sellars's pragmatist commitments can be reconciled with the privileged position he ascribes to science broadly understood. However, we need to be clear about how far-reaching this understanding of science is, what is implied by it and what not. The privileged status of science is most clearly expressed in Sellars's *scientia mensura*:

science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.
(EPM, §41).

Given all that we have said about Sellars's treatment of truth, of existence claims and his broad notion of science, this statement needs to be read in a more modest manner than it is usually read. When true existence statements are bound to what is semantically assertible by us given the conceptual framework we currently possess (see chapter 4.2.) and science is the activity of systematically developing our conceptual resources according to principles we are all committed to as concept-users, Sellars's *scientia mensura* can be read as the claim that science is the privileged driving force of conceptual change. When there are diverging suggestions as to how to change our conceptual practices, it is the scientific suggestion we should prefer. But again, this claim only indirectly implies a privilege for the actually existing, historically developed cultural phenomenon called science. To prefer the "scientific suggestion" in such a case is simply to prefer the suggestion which accords more well with the principles we need to commit ourselves to as concept users. This claim itself is almost tautological given that we cannot but see these principles as binding. The real work for someone trying, like contemporary scientific realists, to show that scientific theories as the outcome of an actually existing human practice have ontological grip on the world would be to show that science as an existing activity approximates the ideal, broad conception of science.

It is probably no accident that Sellars's *scientia mensura* occurs in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* at a place where Sellars emphasizes the close connection between common sense and scientific inquiry and where he calls scientific inquiry "commonsense

procedure writ large”. In these passages, Sellars insinuates that it is *because* of this close link with commonsense that science has its privileged status in ontological matters. If science has a privileged status in ontological questions, it has it because it is common sense pursued more intensively and systematically, and, we could add, because our commonsense conceptual framework always already was the arbiter of what there is and what there is not. A conceptual framework grown out of this initial commonsense framework by abiding by the same principles, only more systematically, retains this privileged status.

Thus, Sellars’s *scientia mensura* can be read as a reiteration of the claim that science is precisely that practice which develops our conceptual resources systematically and rationally.¹⁵¹ This may seem like a disappointing reading. It does not offer direct comfort for the claim that science as a cultural, historically developed phenomenon moves into the right direction, i.e. brings us closer to a conceptual framework ideally adequate in Sellars’s or any other terms. It also does not emphasize the iconic clash between our manifest, commonsense image of the world and the image offered by science (but of course, it does not exclude that common sense may get into conflict with its more developed, scientific form). It only claims, analytically, that science is any activity which develops our conceptual resources systematically and according to principles we already need to be committed to. This was why it could be reconciled with Sellars’s pragmatist commitments in such a straightforward way.

But what is the purpose of holding such a view? One could object (in contrast to Sellars’s analyses of concrete questions of scientific practice such as induction, postulation and theory building) that there is no content to this general view of science, that it cannot teach us anything about actual scientific practice and its consequences. However, we can understand the broad use of the term “science” which I have attributed to Sellars as one in a whole line of terms linked to regulative ideals of language use. And what such regulative ideals provide us with are standards of criticism by which we can evaluate existing practices. Thus, we can evaluate, by historical or sociological inquiry, how much scientific practice accorded and accords with the regulative ideal of scientific inquiry. We can also criticize those scientific practices which accord with it only to a minor extent (e.g. which are inconsistent or offer empty explanations). But it is not philosophy

¹⁵¹ And only indirectly, i.e. through all the turns we have taken up to here, as a delineation of what it means to exist, as e.g. Brandom reads it (see chapter 3.1).

that discovers to what extent existing science accords with this ideal, but this is a task for the history and sociology of science.

Again, however, serious questions from outside of Sellars's system arise. In Sellars's picture, the pursuit of science understood in the broad way needs to be linked to our we-intention of fostering the welfare of an all-embracing community, either understood as humanity or as the community of rational beings. But whose welfare is at issue? The joint welfare of the individual members or the welfare of an abstract community? Given Sellars's nominalism, it should be the former. However, it is not easy to see what positive or negative impact the systematic development of our conceptual resources might have on something so elusive as individual happiness.

Furthermore, if we regard the relevant community as that of all rational beings where are we to draw its boundaries? Should we include some of the higher animals or possible universal artificially intelligent machines? This is not a decision which solely depends on scientific findings, just as it is not a scientific decision when to regard a young child as a member of the community of knowers, rational beings and language users. This is a decision on a different level and it shows that having the we-intention of furthering the welfare of our community and deducing everything else with the help of scientific laws is not enough to determine everything we ought to do (it does not determine whether we ought to include artificial intelligences into our community of rational beings).

These and other problems remain for the account I have sketched in this chapter. The main claim of this chapter was the following: provided the direction indicated in the last chapter for a reconciliation between Sellars's realism and pragmatism is good, we can also reconcile Sellars's scientific realist outlook with his pragmatist commitments (all the remarks of caution from the end of the last chapter still apply). But the price to be paid for this is accepting that Sellars's purely philosophical account of science tells us much less about the privilege of science as an actual phenomenon than alternative readings of Sellars suggest.

6. Conclusion

In the introduction, I posed two complementary questions about the tensions between Sellars's realism and his pragmatism. The first was concerned with how Sellars can integrate norms into a world described exclusively by science. The second was how Sellars can sustain the idea of an ultimate truth about reality while linking his conception of truth and reality to our contingently evolved, constantly changing conceptual schemes. This latter question was the one I focused on in my text. Chapter 2 mapped the problem space and the tensions between Sellarsian realism and pragmatism, chapter 3 critically examined existing approaches to our problem, and chapters 4 and 5 provided my own proposed way of approaching Sellars's thought.

After having presented the main features of Sellars's realism, scientific realism and pragmatism in the first parts of chapter 2, I proceeded to characterize the tension between these two poles of Sellars's work. I claimed that we can understand it as a tension between two notions of adequacy. The first of these notions can be found explicitly in Sellars's early work and continues to be present in his later account of truth as semantic assertibility. In this first sense, every functioning conceptual scheme applied to the world is adequate by its own lights. The second notion of adequacy is based on Sellars's claim that there is an ultimate truth about the world and a final conceptual scheme (the Peircean conceptual scheme) which captures it. Obviously, these two notions of adequacy are in conflict. To reconcile Sellars's realism and pragmatism one needs to show that the tension between them is only apparent.

It is often denied, mainly from pragmatist quarters (e.g. by Rorty and Brandom), that Sellars can achieve such a reconciliation. In the last part of chapter 2, I claimed that there is a certain way of reading Sellars, which I called the straightforward reading, that makes him appear especially susceptible to attacks of this kind. According to the straightforward reading, Sellars countenances an internal, nonrelational understanding of truth as semantic assertibility, but then tries to compensate for the shortcomings of this understanding by introducing a second, relational aspect of truth, picturing. This relation is meant to provide an anchor for the realist concepts of ultimate truth and reality, i.e. for a notion of ultimate adequacy. From a pragmatist's viewpoint such as Rorty's, this idea is then decried as an attempt to lure those semantic word-world relations back in through the window which Sellars officially expelled by the door. Therefore, on such a reading, there seems to be no prospects of reconciling Sellars's pragmatist and scientific realist

commitments.

In the following chapters, I tried to achieve several things. First, I tried to weaken the motivation to adopt the straightforward reading or other readings on which Sellars's scientific realism and his pragmatism cannot be reconciled (such as Brandom's reading). Then, I attempted to replace these unfavorable readings by one which maintains the prospects of harmonizing Sellars's *prima facie* conflicting commitments. Chapter 3 focused on the critical part of my thesis. I analyzed existing approaches to our problem by three authors (Brandom, deVries and Rosenberg). The discussions of Brandom and deVries were meant to criticize the respective author's view directly, the discussion of Rosenberg's approach turned mainly against the straightforward reading.

Brandom argues that Sellars's scientific realism needs to be rejected on the basis of other commitments Sellars undertakes in the philosophy of language, commitments which are part of what I identify as Sellars's pragmatism. If Brandom is right, anyone accepting Sellars's type of pragmatism would need to reject his type of scientific realism. I showed that Brandom's attack misses its target as he misreads Sellars's *scientia mensura* as a straightforward identity claim about commonsense and theoretical scientific objects without taking into account the whole complexity of Sellars's approach. In the chapter on deVries, I examined the concept of practical reality, its possible motivations and consequences. I argued that deVries's approach is based on an overly Kantian reading of Sellars's scientific realism and an equivocation in deVries's notion of "objects of conceptual schemes". I showed that these two aspects are not in line with Sellars's thought and that they may tacitly assume pseudo-semantic relations between language and the rest of the world. In the subchapter on Rosenberg, I tried to motivate the idea that we understand Sellars's notion of picturing in a different way than it is understood by advocates of the straightforward reading. On Rosenberg's later understanding and mine, the question "What is a correct picture of the world?" is as much internal to conceptual schemes for Sellars as the question "What sentences are correctly assertible?".

I showed that Sellars is not committed to the controversial view that picturing is a means of neutral comparison between conceptual schemes. The rare passages which seem to convict Sellars of such an untenable notion of picturing can be given a harmless reading. Thus, the role picturing plays as a philosophical tool is much more modest than claimed by advocates of the straightforward reading. It could be part of a scientific theory of

cognition, but this does not make pictorial adequacy a criterion of adequacy independent from any conceptual scheme. Even though Sellars conceives of picturing as a means of comparison between conceptual schemes, this comparison is always effected by the lights of the conceptual scheme of those who compare. Provided this account of picturing can be defended, the central feature of straightforward readings has been knocked over.

On the basis established in the critical discussions in chapter 3, I turned to an alternative reading of Sellars. I developed this reading in several steps. The first step was to inquire into Sellars's approach to conceptual change, for the core feature of Sellars's realism, the Peircean conceptual scheme, is the ideal culmination of conceptual change. To highlight aspects of Sellars's take on conceptual change I discussed the threats of incommensurability and relativism/dogmatism. I showed that Sellars aspires to avoid relativism by making "our" conceptual scheme the anchor of truth and to avoid dogmatism by allowing for the possibility that we critically step back from and revise our conceptual practices. The discussion of incommensurability revealed that Sellars's approach to conceptual change has quietist elements. To understand users of other schemes we need to be able to functionally classify their concepts as relevantly similar to our own. But the question when concepts count as relevantly similar and whether conceptual change is continuous or not in concrete cases is deflected by Sellars to experts outside philosophy, e.g., historians of science.

The second step was to provide an account of existence statements and statements about "something's really being something else" which does not depend on semantic word-world relations. I showed that existence statements can be read analogously to statements about the truth of sentences, i.e. as signaling semantic assertibility. Statements about "something's really being something else" were explained by the help of this latter approach and Sellars's take on conceptual change. These statements functionally classify concepts across different schemes and claim that our own scheme is more adequate than the scheme we compare it to.

Next, I tried to clarify the status of Sellars's Peircean conceptual scheme. I claimed that it is not an empirically detectable endpoint of inquiry, but a regulative ideal. We can conceive of it as the perfect embodiment of the principles that we already need to commit ourselves to if we want to count as concept-users (such as clarity on what can be inferred from what, consistency or parsimony). To defend this idea, I drew on Sellars's notion of

“language triumphant” (i.e. an ideal) present in “language militant” (empirically existing, incomplete language) and on his hints that we conceive of the Peircean scheme as an extension of our own conceptual system, the “same game” only in a more developed form. One advantage of this point of view is that it makes the connection between our currently existing conceptual schemes and the ideal, but only imagined scheme less problematic. It also helps us understand what happens at moments when one set of conceptual practices is abandoned and a new one accepted. The first principles which would be perfectly embodied in a Peircean scheme guide our decisions in such moments of an apparent rule vacuum.

The last step to take was to explain how we can understand Sellars’s notion of ultimate adequacy of conceptual schemes to the world in a way which does not rely on semantic or quasi-semantic terms (such as “fitting”, “matching” or “corresponding”). I argued that we can understand it as practical adequacy. I showed that this pragmatist trait in Sellars does not bring him into greater opposition to realism but, on the contrary, helps harmonize his pragmatist and his scientific realist commitments. Sellars’s two ways of characterizing the Peircean conceptual scheme allows for two notions of adequacy which do not conflict and which are both notions of practical adequacy. On the level of picturing, practical adequacy is our perfect ability to navigate the world successfully. On the level of scientific inquiry, practical adequacy is the perfect ability to draw successful inferences on new cases. An ultimately adequate conceptual scheme would be one which allows for perfectly effective actions on these two levels.

However, we act only for certain motivations, interests and needs and these can be diverse. Therefore, we needed a unifying element, which I located in Sellars’s moral philosophy. Sellars constructs morality around a single incontrovertible and pragmatized maxim: “Any of us should act so as to maximize the welfare of our community”. So, the Peircean ideal conceptual scheme is at the same time a rational, practical and moral ideal. Sellars insinuates himself that his maxim is linked to our epistemic, i.e. scientific practices. Therefore, it could provide us with the unifying element needed. However, I also showed that the idea that this maxim can underwrite the conception of a unified, ultimate conceptual scheme is problematic not only from a pragmatist point of view but also for more general reasons.

In chapter 5, I turned to Sellars’s scientific realism in connection to his pragmatism

and showed that there are two aspects to Sellars's conception of science. The first highlights science as a historically evolved area of culture which can be studied from a historical, sociological or psychological point of view. If we relied only on this perspective, science's claim to privilege in matters of ontology would be hard to defend on purely philosophical grounds. Rather, empirical inquiry into the history of science would be needed and Sellars does nothing of the sort. In contrast to this, the second aspect of Sellars's understanding of science does not concern science as an area of culture but as an activity which develops our conceptual resources according to principles we already must commit ourselves to in order to count as concept-users. I defended the claim that there is such a second aspect with reference to passages from Sellars's texts. If we emphasize this second aspect, Sellars's claims to the privilege of science falls into place naturally with his pragmatism, provided that the reading of his notion of ultimate truth and reality presented in chapter 4 is accepted. The price we pay for this reconciliation of Sellars's scientific realism and his pragmatism, however, is that we must read his claims on the ontological privilege of science in a more modest way than they are usually understood.

What I proposed in general is, then, that we do not see Sellars's pragmatist and scientific realist approach to what is real in contraposition. My overall strategy was to use one of Sellars's two clusters of commitments, the pragmatist one, to inform the other, scientific realist one. In this process, we saw that several Sellarsian theses that seem to have a strong realist ring to themselves, the *scientia mensura* first and foremost, but also statements on picturing and the Peircean conceptual scheme, can be read in a more modest way without necessarily losing their realist character.

Of course, this is less of a conclusion than a starting-point for further questions. Many things have remained unclear. Sellars insinuates that in the Peircean scheme, an epistemic ideal is linked to a practical ideal and ultimately to a moral ideal (the furthering of the welfare of our community). However, he never spells out in detail how we should understand these links precisely. I also directed attention to problems which this reading generates. Some of these problems are rooted in more radical forms of pragmatism than Sellars's and concern the possible impact of philosophical positions on practice.

Besides these concerns, however, the discussion helped to uncover unexpected affinities of Sellars's thought to the thought of other, classical and contemporary, pragmatist thinkers. Like the pragmatists, he destabilizes a number of distinction

traditionally understood as sharp, such as the distinction between the subjective and the objective, between dogmatism and relativism, or between “for us” and “in itself”. For example, Sellars does not have much to say about the rights and wrongs of scientific methods apart from the a priori constraints generated by the principles we all need to accept to count as concept-users. What Sellars develops are regulative ideals painted with broad strokes, ideals which even in the case of science are not new or foreign to us, but which we already recognize in using concepts. Philosophy in this view does not come up with constraints of its own but only tries to extract constraints which already need to be in place to engage in such activities as philosophizing itself, science, or simple everyday describing. Sellars claims that practice should live up to these ideals, but nothing more is said on his part on how to ensure that it does. To the contrary, as we saw in chapter 4, he leaves large spaces where practitioners themselves decide what is relevant, e.g., whether to understand a certain process of conceptual change as discontinuous or continuous, whether to hold that today’s expressions target the same object as already discarded expressions of the past did or not. Even if Sellars’s scientific realism as such with its transcendental elements may not be very relevant for contemporary debates about scientific realism, it might be precisely its quietist aspects which could fruitfully contribute to these debates. Although philosophy keeps some role of arbiter in Sellars’s picture, the judgements it can make are modest and the most substantial things are left to decisions in practice. Thus, in the background of Sellars’s pragmatically informed account of ultimate truth and reality, there is the question of what philosophy can legitimately say and what it cannot say, of philosophy’s scope and limits. The picture of the discipline that emerges is a one of beneficial self-restriction. This idea is present in Sellars right from his early essays, and it is central in much of pragmatism.

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Summary

My thesis focuses on the work of the 20th century philosopher Wilfrid Sellars and the tensions between his scientific realist and his pragmatist commitments. Sellars holds two *prima facie* conflicting theses: that what we call true and real depends on our own contingently evolving conceptual scheme and that there is an ultimate truth about the world or an ultimate reality to be captured in an ideal, scientific conceptual scheme. The aim of my thesis is to offer a reading of Sellars's work that can reconcile these conflicting tendencies. In this way, the thesis shall contribute to the ongoing discussions about the consistency of Sellars's work and, beyond the community of Sellars scholars, to discussions about the relation between pragmatism and realism.

The thesis is divided into an introduction, four main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 explores Sellars's realism, scientific realism and pragmatism as well as the tensions between them. The third chapter critically discusses existing approaches to the topic of the thesis. The fourth chapter indicates how Sellars could reconcile his notion of ultimate truth and reality with his pragmatist commitments. Chapter 5 shows how Sellars's claim that science is privileged over other human activities and discourses in matters of ontology can be harmonized with his pragmatism.

I claim that a common approach to Sellars's work which emphasizes the tensions inherent in it is merely optional. Contrary to this reading, I insist that highlighting the pragmatist, quietist and deflationist elements in Sellars's thought can help us develop an alternative reading of his scientific realism. This requires a reevaluation of what some controversial notions in the Sellarsian scheme such as picturing or the ideal Peircean scheme amount to. Throughout, I emphasize that we should understand Sellars's talk about the adequacy of conceptual schemes not in terms of non-causal word-world-relations but as practical adequacy. The universal, unifying element needed for a realism which deserves the name can then be located in Sellars's practical and moral philosophy.

As far as Sellars's claim on the ontological privilege of science is concerned, I show that Sellars understood science at least partly in an apriori way, as that activity which systematically pursues ends which any concept user must be committed to in order to count as a concept user. The privilege of science thus understood can then be reconciled naturally with Sellars's pragmatism. At the end, I point out some new problems which this reading generates and which would deserve a longer, independent treatment.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Dissertation befasst sich mit dem Werk des analytischen Philosophen Wilfrid Sellars und mit dem Spannungsverhältnis zwischen pragmatistischen und wissenschaftsrealistischen Elementen in diesem Werk. Sellars vertritt zwei auf den ersten Blick nicht vereinbare Thesen: erstens, dass immer von unserem Begriffssystem abhängt, was wir wahr und wirklich nennen, und zweitens, dass wir einen Begriff von absoluter Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit haben, der in einem idealen wissenschaftlichen Begriffssystem eingefangen würde. Ziel meiner Arbeit ist es, eine Interpretation des Sellarsschen Werks vorzulegen, die diese Spannungen abbauen kann. Auf diese Weise soll meine Arbeit einen Beitrag zu den anhaltenden Diskussionen über die Konsistenz dieses Werks leisten, wie auch zu Diskussionen über die Vereinbarkeit von Pragmatismus und Realismus über die Grenzen von Sellars' Werk hinaus.

Meine Arbeit besteht aus einer Einleitung, vier Hauptkapiteln und einem Schlussteil. Im zweiten Kapitel präzisiere ich, worin Sellars' Realismus, wissenschaftlicher Realismus und Pragmatismus bestehen und arbeite die Spannungspunkte zwischen diesen Positionen in seinem Werk heraus. Das dritte Kapitel diskutiert drei bereits bestehende Lesarten des Sellarsschen Werks im Zusammenhang mit dem Thema dieser Arbeit. Das vierte Kapitel stellt meine eigene Interpretation zur Vereinigung des Sellarsschen Realismus und Pragmatismus vor und das fünfte Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit der Vereinbarkeit zwischen Pragmatismus und der Behauptung, dass Wissenschaft in ontologischen Fragen gegenüber allen anderen Bereichen menschlicher Aktivität und Diskursen privilegiert ist.

Ich zeige, dass eine verbreitete Lesart des Sellarsschen Werks, welche die Spannungen in diesem Werk betont, nur optional ist und empfehle einen komplexeren Zugang. Entgegen dieser Lesart zeige ich, dass wir Sellars' Realismus auf neue Art verstehen können, wenn wir die pragmatistischen und deflationistischen Elemente in seinem Werk betonen. Dies verlangt eine Neubewertung einiger der kontroverseren Aspekte seines Werks, z.B. Sellars' Bildtheorie der Sprache und seine Vorstellung eines idealen Peirceschen Begriffssystems. Ich zeige, dass wir Sellars' Begriff der Adäquatheit eines Begriffssystems zur Welt nicht als Ausdruck einer nichtkausalen Sprache-Welt-Beziehung verstehen müssen, sondern als praktische Adäquatheit. Das einigende, universelle Element, das von einem echten Realismus verlangt wird, finden wir in Sellars' praktischer Philosophie und Moralphilosophie.

Was Sellars' These zum Privileg von Wissenschaft in ontologischen Fragen und deren Vereinbarkeit mit dem Pragmatismus betrifft, zeige ich, dass Sellars Wissenschaft von einem apriorischen Standpunkt aus versteht, und zwar als genau die menschliche Aktivität, die systematisch die Verpflichtungen realisiert, die jedes Begriffe nutzende Wesen eingehen muss, wenn es als solches gelten will. Wenn wir Wissenschaft auf diese allgemeine Weise verstehen, lässt sich ein Privileg für Wissenschaft mit den pragmatistischen Elementen in Sellars' Werk vereinbaren. Am Ende meiner Arbeit zeige ich neue Probleme auf, die meine Auslegung des Sellars'schen Systems generiert, und die in einem anderen Rahmen behandelt werden müssten.

Shrnutí

Tato dizertace pojednává o díle Wilfrida Sellarse a napětí mezi jeho vědeckým realismem a pragmatismem. Sellars zastává dvě na první pohled neslučitelné teze: zaprvé, že to, co považujeme za pravdivé a skutečné, závisí na našem vlastním, nahodile se vyvíjejícím pojmovém systému, a zadruhé, že existuje absolutní pravda o světě a absolutní skutečnost, která je zachycena v ideálním pojmovém systému vědy. Cílem dizertace je nabídnout čtení Sellarsova díla, které dokáže tyto protichůdné tendence uvést do souladu. Tato práce tak přispívá k stále probíhající diskuzi o konsistenci tohoto díla a k diskuzím o vztahu mezi realismem a pragmatismem obecně.

Práce je rozdělena na úvod, čtyři hlavní kapitoly a závěr. Druhá kapitola představuje specifčnost Sellarsova realismu, vědeckého realismu a pragmatismu a lokalizuje napětí mezi nimi. Třetí kapitola diskutuje již existující přístupy k interpretaci Sellarsova díla v souvislosti s tímto napětím. Čtvrtá kapitola ukazuje, jak lze uvést do souladu Sellarsova tvrzení o absolutní pravdě s jeho pragmatismem. Pátá kapitola se zaměřuje na to, jak lze smířit tvrzení, že věda má vůči jiným aktivitám privilegium v ontologických otázkách, se Sellarovým pragmatismem.

Ukazuji, že obvyklý přístup, který zdůrazňuje napětí v Sellarově díle, by měl být nahrazen komplexnějším čtením. Když na rozdíl od tohoto standardního přístupu zdůrazníme pragmatistické a deflacionistické prvky v Sellarově myšlení, můžeme konstruovat alternativní čtení jeho vědeckého realismu. To vyžaduje, abychom přehodnotili obsah některých jeho kontroverznějších tezí, např. o zobrazovacím vztahu mezi jazykem a světem a o ideálním, peirceovském pojmovém systému. Obhajuji tezi, že když Sellars mluví o adekvátnosti pojmového systému ke světu, nemá na mysli nekauzální vztah mezi jazykem a světem, nýbrž adekvátnost praktickou. Univerzální, sjednocující prvek, který musí každý skutečný realismus obsahovat, lze pak nalézt v Sellarově praktické a morální filosofii.

Co se týká Sellarsova tvrzení, že věda je v ontologických otázkách privilegovaná, ukazuji, že Sellars rozumí pojmu “věda” alespoň zčásti z apriorního hlediska, tj. jako lidské aktivitě, která systematicky realizuje ty cíle, kterým musí být každý uživatel pojmů zavázán, pokud chce mít status uživatele pojmů. Takto lze Sellarsův důraz na prioritu vědy smířit přirozeným způsobem s jeho pragmatismem. Na konci upozorňuji na některé nové problémy, které mé čtení vyvolává a které si zaslouží další diskuze nad rámec této práce.