

2

Images, Descriptions, and Pictures

Personhood and the Clash

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When I first read “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” (PSIM)—over forty years ago—I was, in a word, gobsmacked. The essay crystalized and made explicit so many of the suspicions, tendencies, and leanings that I had felt in my own still naive attempts to figure out how things hang together that I was convinced I had found a philosophical program that I could live with. In large part, I still feel that way, but in the ensuing years—decades—I have also come to a more critical appreciation of that essay and the program it manifests.

It is central to PSIM that there is a *clash* between the manifest and the scientific images that is to be resolved, essentially, by the victory of the scientific. It is a dramatic story—the *Bildungsroman* of the truth itself. The long-standing conflict over teaching evolution versus “creation science” in the schools shows that Sellars has put a finger on an important tension in modern culture. But I’ve come to believe that Sellars has not accurately captured the structure of the tension nor how we should envision its ultimate resolution. Since the dramatic narrative of PSIM is so central to Sellars’s thought, these failures could entail rejecting the Sellarsian framework in general, but I think we can isolate the errors in Sellars’s thinking here sufficiently well to use the remaining principles of his thought to construct a better view of how these things hang together.

I will begin by examining Sellars’s claim that the manifest and the scientific images both claim to be *complete* images of man-in-the-world. The claimed replaceability of the manifest image by the scientific image rests in part on the latter’s being as complete as the former, otherwise the replacement could at best be only partial. Sellars’s own philosophical work was, however, very sensitive to the complexity, multidimensionality, contextualization, and open-endedness of language and the conceptual framework it expresses. When something is complex, multidimensional, context-dependent, and arguably open-ended, just what does completeness amount to? This tension between completeness and open-endedness is a symptom of a deeper tension in Sellars’s thought, which I hope to clarify to some degree. My thoughts end up where I have ended before

in thinking about these issues: the scientific image cannot replace the manifest image as neatly as Sellars and his interpreters often think.

1. Two Complete Images of Humankind-in-the-World

The contrast that rules PSIM is between the manifest and the scientific images of man-in-the-world. This distinction has become widely familiar in the profession, taking on some life of its own, and is certainly familiar to readers of this volume, so I'm not going to spend much time reviewing this distinction, so that I can move more directly to the points on which I want to focus. The basic distinction between them is that the scientific image wags bold by postulating empirical but unobservable entities as theoretical posits in the explanation of the course of things.

In contrast, the manifest image—the image in terms of which humans came to awareness of themselves as humankind-in-the-world and that has dominated our view of the world for millennia—is generally (though not rigidly) conservative. It began with the historical emergence of organisms in possession of the concept of persons (a piece of history still opaque to us). Such beings are self-conscious intenders that recognize normative standards to which they are subject. Originally applying this personhood concept a bit wantonly, the manifest image has achieved an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the world around us, and, in particular, seems less and less willing to see personhood in everything. The categories pertaining to *things* have become far more refined by inductive and correlational methods, and some subcategories of the supernatural have begun to evaporate, but the manifest image, as such, does not extend itself into unobservable empirical realms. Methodologically, the manifest image is prior to science, but “scientific discourse is but a continuation of a dimension of discourse which has been present in human discourse from the very beginning” (EPM §41, SPR 172, KMG 252).¹ Sellars claims the scientific image, which is still very much in its infancy, will eventually challenge and replace the manifest image, revising the very categories in terms of which we experience the world.

My first point is not a criticism of Sellars's distinction so much as of a common reading it is given. Too often, the focus on “man-in-the-world” is dropped and we are left simply with the manifest and scientific images of the world, period. It does sound retrograde now to talk of *man* in the world, and speaking of the manifest image of humankind-in-the-world does not roll as easily off the tongue, but I think it is a mistake to lose sight of the fact that on Sellars's own terms, he's interested *specifically* in two ways of describing and understanding *our own* place in the world. To people intrigued by Huw Price's notion of *subject naturalism* (Price 2011: 184–99), this will seem a potentially important point. Indeed, some of my criticisms of Sellars's thought here

¹ I use the now standard abbreviations for Sellars's works, citing paragraph or section numbers in order to make the citation less dependent on a particular version, but also citing page numbers in commonly available versions. See the References list for complete details.

stem from the belief I have come to have that he himself occasionally forgets this focus and does not adequately take into account the fact that in any usable image of human-kind-in-the-world we will occupy two distinct roles, namely that of describer and describee. This crucial fact is easily lost sight of when we consider the images as very general images of the world, rather than images centered on our self-understanding.

The focus of my attention here is that each of the images is supposed to be *complete*, that is, each is supposed “to define a framework which could be the *whole truth* about that which belongs to the image” (PSIM ¶56, SPR 20, ISR 388). Sellars’s language here needs interpretation. First, the final clause, stipulating that completeness means being the whole truth “*about that which belongs to the image*,” threatens emptiness unless we can specify non-circularly what “belongs to the image.” If what belongs to the image is only and whatever it talks about, then completeness is too easy. Suppose, for instance, we exclude from science such problematic cases as, say, the 4 M’s identified by Huw Price—Morality, Modality, Meaning, and the Mental (Price 2011: 184–99). It then seems relatively easy for science to be “complete.” In its proper context, however, it turns out that Sellars includes the clause about what belongs to an image because “the conception of *the* scientific or postulational image is an idealization in the sense that it is a conception of an integration of a manifold of images, each of which is the application to man of a framework of concepts which have a certain autonomy” (PSIM ¶55 SPR 20, ISR 388). The particular images united in the total image have distinctive domains to which some things belong and some do not. But the scientific and manifest images themselves are supposed to be *total* and all-inclusive images. As far as I can see, a truly *complete* framework could only be one that could be the whole truth, *period*.

Second, the reference to “the *whole truth*” entails that the image is supposed to be both *ontologically* and *ideologically* complete, ontologically complete in that no new *basic* objects would need to be added to it to perform its job in mediating our interactions with the world; ideologically complete in that truths go beyond objects. Truths and their alter egos, facts, have propositional structure, especially predicative structure, so to be capable of the whole truth, a framework must contain (or be able to construct) all the predicates necessary to describing and explaining the world. This must, of course, include the predicates that we use to deny existence or truth as well as those we use to affirm existence and truth. The complete framework must not just encompass all that there is, but all that can be said about it.

In order to understand fully what it means for both images to claim completeness, however, we have to get more precise about just what an image is. I turn now to this.

2. The Clash of the ‘Image’ Images

Sellars’s notion of an *image* is notoriously loose—Sellars basically admits as much—but I’ve come to see that something important hangs on the issue, thanks in part to a correspondence with Bruce Aune.

Sellars himself uses a large number of different metaphors to supplement the basic image image, fully exploiting what he acknowledges as the ambiguity of the metaphor. Sellars also characterizes his images as pictures (PSIM ¶¶10–11), visions (¶7), projections on the human understanding (¶12), perspectives (¶10), conceptions (¶12), idealizations (¶13), as well as frameworks (¶14) and constructions (¶19). The notion that they are *pictures* is particularly dangerous, given that ‘picture’ is a term Sellars also uses in a highly technical sense in his metaphysics of epistemology. As far as I can see, Sellars does not use ‘picture’ in his technical sense in PSIM, but when we consider the broader view of his philosophical work, his notion of picturing enters into the story in complex ways.

The significant choice here is between (a) a conception of an image on which it is a *description* of what there is in the world (including us); it would be a complete statement of what is the case. Aune thus calls an image “a conceptual, discursive picture of the world, one made up of endorsed . . . assertions.”² This characterization still leaves vague whether there are restrictions on the vocabulary that can be used in this description of what is the case. This is particularly crucial, as we will explore more thoroughly later on, in regards to the vocabulary of the causal modalities, for, in the strictest sense, Sellars does not think that uses of causal modalities are simple descriptions of what is the case. The opposed alternative is (b) a conception of an image according to which images are the equivalent of conceptual frameworks and contain not just a particular description of humankind-in-the-world, but the general resources required both to *describe* the world and to *act* within it. I take it that an image qua conceptual framework is both richer and less determinate than an image qua particular world-story, not unlike the way a language is richer and less determinate than a particular story told using its resources.

Aune argues that Sellars intends an image to be a discursive representation of humankind-in-the-world, that is, not a conceptual framework used to understand humankind-in-the-world, but the *result* of using such a framework. There is much to be said for such a reading of Sellars’s use of ‘image.’ This interpretation is certainly consistent with the assertion I quoted above, that the images purport to be “the whole truth,” for descriptions are unproblematic subjects of the predicate “true,” whereas calling a conceptual framework *true* requires some squirming.

It is also consistent with a claim from EPM that is clearly an early prefiguration of Sellars’s notion of the scientific image. There he says,

if . . . 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 ¶117, §41, SPR 172, KMG: 252)

² Bruce Aune, 28 February 2012, personal communication.

The inference Sellars pushes the reader towards, from science as a continuation of a long-standing “dimension of discourse” to its supersession of the “descriptive ontology of everyday life,” makes sense only if we suppose that the dimension of discourse science continues is the *descriptive* dimension itself and that what science does is produce a better *product* than that produced by traditional methods. At the very least, then, science is to give us a new descriptive *vocabulary*. But it also seems clear that we cannot think of scientific advance merely in terms of new vocabulary poured into old bottles. Science threatens—and promises—to provide new bottles as well, revising the “framework categories of the common sense picture of the world” (EPM ¶117, §41, SPR 172, KMG: 252).

These lines from EPM encourage the view that the manifest and scientific images differ principally in their “descriptive ontologies” and thus differ in the actual descriptions each would give of humankind-in-the-world. I take it that little of great philosophical significance hangs on factual, that is, non-categorical, differences among descriptions of the world. The specific timing of a geological epoch or the range of a species of bird are not philosophically significant. To the extent that descriptive *ontologies* are what is at stake here, though, Sellars seems to be pointing to something *more* than a mere description of the world. But I now want to argue that Sellars’s functionalist and ultimately pragmatist approach to language, thought, and meaning also puts in question the notion of a descriptive ontology Sellars relies on.

3. Unities and Differences: Fitting Picturing into the Images

Remember that Sellars casts the philosophical project as a search for unity, for how things “hang together.” In PSIM, two different kinds of plurality in language and experience are singled out as targets for philosophical unification. One is the principally diachronic distinction between manifest and scientific images. The other, principally synchronic, pluralism “concerns the distinction between the fact-finding, the ethical, the aesthetic, the logical, the religious, and other aspects of experience” (PSIM ¶10, SPR 4, ISR 372). These different aspects of experience, we must remember, “are but aspects of one complex picture which is to be grasped reflectively as a whole” (PSIM ¶10, SPR 4, ISR 372).

One could, therefore, think that the distinction between the manifest and scientific images concerns only descriptive ontology, and that this is equivalent to the “fact-finding” aspect of experience. This encourages us to think of the descriptive ontology of our language as a component that can vary more or less independently of the other components of the language and is thus subject to being changed without affecting those other components.

Such a conception would accord with some significant themes in Sellars. His idea that the language of science must ultimately be “joined” to the language of individual

and community intentions (PSIM ¶114, SPR 40, ISR 408) implies that there are two separable and relatively independent components to put together.³ In particular, it is entirely consonant with the naturalism he delimits, among other places, in CDCM:

[N]aturalism presents us with the ideal of *pure* description of the world (in particular of human behavior), a description which simply says what things *are*, and never, in any respect, what they *ought* or *ought not* to be; and it is clear (as a matter of simple logic) that neither ‘ought’ nor any other prescriptive expression *could* be used (as opposed to *mentioned*) in such a description. . . . The idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no modal expression is of a piece with the idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no prescriptive expression. For what is being called to mind is the ideal of a statement of ‘everything that is the case’ which, however, serves *through and through, only* the purpose of stating what is the case. And it is a logical truth that such a description, however many modal expressions might properly be used in *arriving* at it, or in *justifying* it, or in showing the *relevance* of one of its components to another, could *contain* no modal expression. (CDCM §80: 283)

We encounter here the notion of a module-like, pure descriptive core to language, and I think that it is this conception that stands behind Aune’s claim that the scientific image is a propositionally structured description of the world, a ‘world-story,’ and not something as mushy as a conceptual framework. If we can isolate a “pure descriptive core” within language, then several things seem to fall easily into place. Some of the diachronic differences in language (between the manifest and scientific images) would be to that degree independent of the synchronic differences I have pointed to (between the descriptive, the ethical, the aesthetic, and the religious dimensions of language and experience), and this would ease the task of explaining the evolution of language and particularly the replacement of the manifest by the scientific image. It also seems clear that isolating the “pure descriptive core” of language is intended by Sellars to be significant for ontology. The descriptive ontology of everyday life is supposed to be replaced by the much more rigorous vocabulary in which we can say *only* what is the case. Any vocabulary outside of this “pure descriptive core” is in some way *expressivist*—it may be essential and indispensable to the business of language and thought, but does not commit us ultimately to any real *objects* of language and thought.

But I have come increasingly to doubt that we can make sense of the ideal of a “pure descriptive core to language.” For one thing, I doubt that such a notion is, in fact, a part or requirement of naturalism, as Sellars claims in CDCM, rather than a holdover from a simplistic empiricism. The notion that there is, much less *must be*, some level of language or experience at which all tinge of our own contribution or perspective on the world falls away, revealing just “what is the case,” assumes a conception of objectivity that I do not think is supportable in the long run. It is a version of what Huw Price calls and castigates as “object naturalism” (Price 2011: 184–99). Empiricism

³ I have criticized Sellars’s language in this regard in deVries (2012).

often assumes that there is and must be some level of experience at which the world presents itself to us *in propria persona*, distinguishable from anything we contribute, but that's not an aspect of empiricism that survives Sellars's own critique. Indeed, Sellars's attempt to isolate a pure description of the world is, it seems to me, a cousin of the positivists' attempt to isolate the *cognitive content* of language. I think both attempts are doomed.

Sellars is, paradoxically, one of those who undermined such ideas. A *pure* description of the world would have to be couched in language that itself is somehow proof against retaining connections to the affective and action-oriented. In the sciences, systematic nomenclatures and theoretical terminology are often developed in ways that do keep them distant from immediate affective and deliberative force. But there is no reason, given Sellars's holistic and functionalistic treatment of the semantic, to believe that (1) there is or could be any isolable purely descriptive domain in language, or (2) such a purified descriptive language could *replace* the languages we currently know and love. The fact that it is a bedrock function of language to prepare and orchestrate action should make us suspicious of the notion of pure description.⁴

I have argued previously that Sellars came increasingly to see this in the course of the 1950s (deVries 2010). In that paper, I argued that Sellars's dawning realization that this ideal of a pure description would be forever out of reach became an important source for the notion of picturing Sellars developed in the late fifties and early sixties. Rather than abandoning his naturalistic or empiricist ideal of a pure descriptive core in language, which is no longer compatible with his philosophy of language, Sellars transposes that ideal into a non-semantic key.

He called this aspect of language and thought *picturing*. What makes what he calls a "natural linguistic object" a *picture* is not its *descriptive* content in any direct way. What makes it a picture is participation in a *picturing relation* with some object in accordance with some well-behaved and appropriately selected projection rule.

There are a couple of things to notice about picturing. First, since the picturing relation really *is* a relation, it is susceptible to natural scientific investigation. I have some questions about how exactly that investigation would proceed, but I don't have time to raise them here. Second, it is the picturing relation that accounts for the truth of realism (SM V ¶78: 142–3). How it might do this is also something I don't have room for here. Third, the picturing relation between a language and objects in the world imposes a constraint on what would constitute a proper semantic interpretation of the language, in two ways. (1) "The *criterion* of the correctness of the performance of asserting a basic matter-of-factual proposition is the correctness of the proposition *qua* picture" (SM V ¶57: 136). (2) If one did, by appropriate anthropological/linguistic sleuthing

⁴ From a Sellarsian point of view, description is a semantic function utterances can perform, and it has to be treated in the same way we treat other semantic characteristics. Saying what something *describes*—for instance, saying something of the form '*P* describes *x*' or '*P* describes *x* as *F*'—is an essentially semantic characterization of a linguistic object, and is no more fundamentally relational than saying what a linguistic object refers to or means.

and theorizing, identify the components of the picturing relation, i.e., the natural linguistic objects, the “projection relation” belonging to that language, and the worldly objects that stand in that projective relation to those natural linguistic objects, then one would be able to read off the basic objects recognized in that language. What the projection relation is for any language will hardly be obvious—it could be known only by dint of hard theoretical labor. On the other hand, in Sellars’s view, it functions also as a transcendental condition on the empirical meaningfulness of a language. We confidently proceed on the assumption that the language enables us to picture the objects of our world and expect to be able to fill in the details as we go on.

The kinds of things that the language in question is committed to are the kinds of things denoted by the subject- or referring-terms of the elementary atomic sentences involved in the pictures generated by confrontations between well-trained language-users and worldly objects. I never felt fully confident I understood just what Sellars’s own criterion of ontological commitment was. But this is my current understanding. It is, then, the picturing relation of the ideal Peircean framework, and neither the referring “relation” nor the quantifier, that Sellars takes to fix the ontological catalog of ultimate reality. The system that generates the most accurate, most finely grained pictures available is the current measure of what is real. Its Peircean idealization is the ultimate measure of reality.

In my earlier paper, I argued that picturing, which did have forerunners in Sellars’s earlier thought, rose to greater prominence at this time in order to save his commitment to naturalism while allowing him at the same time to go more thoroughly functionalistic and deflationist in his semantics. I still think that story has much to recommend it, but since that paper, I have noticed time and again how muddled Sellars could be about many of these things. For instance, he tells us that picturing is not a semantic concept nor a semantic relation,⁵ yet he also occasionally refers to it as a kind of truth (e.g., SM V §9: 119). Sellars apparently had difficulty keeping the picturing role and the descriptive role of language clearly separate, even after having made the distinction.

4. Linguistic Roles and Ontology

Consider as well the following text. In SM V, section X, Sellars rehearses an argument for scientific realism vs. instrumentalism. The instrumentalist, he believes, thinks that singular statements applying theoretical concepts are *essentially* or *in principle* the sort of statements that are inferred to from observation framework sentences. He responds,

the Scientific Realist need only argue that a correct account of concepts and concept formation is compatible with the idea that the ‘language entry’ role could be played by statements in the language of physical theory, i.e. that in principle this language could *replace* the common-sense

⁵ For instance, SM V §58: 136: “Picturing is a complex matter-of-factual relation and, as such, belongs in a quite different box from the concepts of denotation and truth.”

framework in *all* its roles with the result that the idea that scientific theory enables a more adequate picturing of the world could be taken at its face value. (SM V ¶90: 146)

The domain over which the quantifier in the phrase “in *all* its roles” ranges is the problem here. There is no explicit mention of restrictions on the domain. Does the context of a discussion of picturing (the topic of the chapter) and realism vs. instrumentalism (the topic of the section) implicitly restrict the domain of the quantifier to the *descriptive* roles or the roles constitutive of the descriptive function(s) of a language? Or could Sellars really mean that the theoretical concepts of advanced science could replace the concepts of the manifest image in their aesthetic, ethical, and religious roles as well? Our interpretive choices are not clearly determined by the text.

Sellars talks of “*the* ‘language entry’ role” (my emphasis), but “the language entry role” is a highly generic characterization.⁶ There have to be many species of language-entry roles, only some of which would be perceptual reports or generally relevant to scientific practices. “Hello, how are you?” performs a language-entry transition, but it is not an observation sentence in any clear sense of the notion, and I have no idea of how a statement in the language of physical theory or even social theory could do its job. Many questions also perform a language-entry job, and while their content can certainly be couched in the language of scientific theory, there is nothing particularly scientific about the question-asking form itself.

Sellars wants to hold on to the assumption that there is a “descriptive core” that is central to and presupposed by all other uses of language. He seems to think as well that this descriptive core will be particularly significant for ontology. But this assumption seems to me inevitably to be in tension with the functional pluralism about language that his treatment of semantical and pragmatic properties generates. In particular, once we’ve made the distinction between picturing and describing, it isn’t clear that *description* can bear such an ontological burden. I am certainly willing to grant that description is an essential function of language and thought, but I doubt that we have reason to believe that a “pure descriptive core” exists in any usable language. If description is an essential function of language, that is, if no system that did not provide for the descriptive function would count as a linguistic system, it still doesn’t follow that the descriptive function must be provided for via a discrete set of expressions that can be isolated from all other functions. In a system as complex as the language-thought nexus, most events are multifunctional. The recent work of people like Huw Price, Rebecca Kukla, and Mark Lance has to make us question whether the notion of description as a linguistic kind can bear the ontological weight Sellars often wants to put on it. As I have argued above, picturing should be bearing that weight for Sellars.

⁶ At one point Sellars says “‘Describe’, like ‘refer’, does not stand for a specific linguistic job, but rather a job classification” (SM V §31: 126). “Language entry role” is similarly not a specific linguistic job, but a job category.

5. Language and Action

Exploring the variety of language-entry and language-exit transitions is, I think, a worthy enterprise,⁷ but I now want to focus on the language-exit role. There seems to be a quick and fairly obvious argument that Sellars himself cannot believe that the language of physical theory can replace the common-sense framework in *all* its roles. The language-exit role is in large part played by statements of intention and especially volition. These statements, according to Sellars's own analysis of them, take the form

Shall [I do A at t].

Sellars is clearly committed to the idea that whatever substitutes for 'A' in this schema could be formulated in the vocabulary of science. I dread to think of what the scientific formulation of "remember to get my wife a stunningly romantic anniversary gift" would be, but that's not where I want to apply pressure now. I want to focus on the fact that such statements are, first, essentially first-personal, and, second, essentially non-descriptive.

Is the language of physical theory, at any stage of advancement, *personalized*? Granting that the connection between grammatical 'persons' and metaphysical persons is tenuous, there are two different questions here. A formal question: Does the theoretical language of advanced science provide for the distinction between first, second, and third persons? And a substantive question: Are persons going to be among the entities recognized by advanced science? It is surely the case that the language in which one *does* science has the formal provisions for persons—without them, we could not engage in *disputation* and *deliberation*, both of which are activities crucial to scientific procedure. And the language in which one *does* science must also have a substantive conception of persons as the beings who engage in the practice of scientific discovery, for science is a set of intention-guided practices responsive to shared norms of rationality. But this is not sufficient to determine whether the language of advanced science is personalized in the sense that persons are provided for, either formally or substantively, in the *content* of that science. Yet surely it would be odd to claim that the language of science is complete, yet does not provide in the content it acknowledges for what seems essential to the *doing* of science.

There are a number of philosophers who insist that the image of the world that science paints for us is relentlessly third-personal, or, better, *impersonal*, a "view from nowhere," in Thomas Nagel's phrase. And I have argued myself that a Sellarsian scientific *picture* of the world would be a point-of-viewless representation that one can learn to employ to anticipate and explain how the world around one wags. But the picture itself provides no intrinsic anchorage within it for oneself or one's point of view. Just as a map does not tell one where one is, though it can be *used* by the practically skilled to locate oneself and one's relations to landmarks, the scientific picture could not tell one

⁷ I think Kukla and Lance (2009) make interesting contributions here in 'Yo!' and 'Lo!'.

what, where, when, or who one is independently of certain practical skills that relate the point-of-viewless picture to our first-personal situation.

Sellars tells us that “the scientific image of man turns out to be that of a complex physical system” (PSIM ¶70, SPR 25, ISR 393). This is a significant difference from the manifest image, where persons are basic entities. “The basic roadblock [to seeing a person as a physical system] is the unity of the person as the subject of conceptual activities” (PHM ¶95: in SPR: 100; in ISR: 345). But Kant, Sellars thinks, shows us a way to avoid taking the unity of a person to be ontologically ultimate and irreducible.

The heart of the matter is the fact that the irreducibility of the ‘I’ within the framework of first person discourse (and, indeed, of ‘you’ and ‘he’ as well) is compatible with the thesis that persons can (in principle) be exhaustively described in terms which involve no reference to such an irreducible logical subject. For the description will *mention* rather than *use* the framework to which these logical subjects belong. Kant saw that the transcendental unity of apperception is a form of experience rather than a disclosure of ultimate reality. If persons are “really” multiplicities of logical subjects, then unless these multiplicities used the conceptual framework of persons there would be no persons. But the idea that persons “really are” such multiplicities does not require that concepts pertaining to persons be *analysable into* concepts pertaining to sets of logical subjects. Persons may “really be” bundles, but the concept of a person is not the concept of a bundle. (PHM ¶95, SPR 100–1, ISR 345)

The crucial move here is that, while the conceptual framework of persons and intentions is recognized as conceptually autonomous, it gets embedded within a more encompassing, impersonal framework. In that larger framework, there is no commitment to the reality of persons as basic individuals or intentions as their states, but there is a commitment to the existence of states and relations of physical systems that are interpretable as perceptual responses to the world, as thoughts, and as actions. Such states and relations are possible only within a broad and incredibly complex system of such states and relations, some of which are interpretable (by other such systems) as being *employments* and not just *instances of* the concepts of personhood, agency, etc.

Sellars tells us that “persons can (in principle) be exhaustively described in terms which involve no reference to such an irreducible logical subject” (PHM ¶95, SPR 101, ISR 345). My argument here is intended to put this claim into question, not by emphasizing the exceptionality of the concept of persons so much as the non-exceptionality of description. I see no reason to believe that the descriptive aspect of a language can be so semantically isolated from the other dimensions of language as to make it possible to describe exhaustively a person or her activities in ways that involve *no* reference to persons—where this means involving no *use*, either explicit or implicit, of the concept of a person. The ideal of a pure descriptive core to language shorn of all modal or normative connotations is a pipe dream. It is not hard to see why: A language that has a semantic dimension but no pragmatics is, literally, useless. Descriptions unrelated to the possibility of action would have little point, for descriptions are the descriptions they are because of the possible uses to which we put them. Thus, at the very least, there are always implicit, backdoor references to speaker and audience in any description.

The most Sellars can hope for is that persons can (in principle) be exhaustively *pictured* in ways that do not treat them as irreducible subjects.

If this is right, then the distinction I drew earlier between the scientific image as a discursive statement of the (pure) facts of the world versus the scientific image as a conceptual framework through which we cope with the world starts to crumble. The idea that we “join” the scientific image to the language of intentions, which implies that they are somehow (*really*) independent is at best an overstatement. Any language within which a scientific image of the world is possible must *already* be a language containing the concept of persons and the language of individual and community intentions.

Many people worry that adopting the descriptive ontology of fully achieved science is itself simply *incompatible* with recognizing the ethical, the aesthetic, the religious, and any other normatively loaded aspects of experience. What I think Sellars has to say is that as we start using the well-defined terms science generates in our immediate responses to the world and these terms get embedded in our ethical, aesthetic, and religious activities and deliberations, those terms and the concepts they express will *change* and be enriched and will no longer be just those well-defined scientific concepts. Given the structured holism of Sellarsian semantics, the right way to think of the relation between the manifest image and the scientific image is as a matter of *mutual accommodation*, not one-way dominance.

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