All in the Family

Willem A. deVries

University of New Hampshire

In "The Father, The Son, and The Daughter: Sellars, Brandom, and Millikan,"[1]
Ruth Millikan considers how two scions of Wilfrid Sellars, both of whom see their own
work as a further development of Sellarsian ideas, could come to be as philosophically
distant as she and Brandom. Though Millikan contemplates the notion that (at least)
one of Sellars's spawn is apostate, she favors the idea that there is a crack in Sellars's
own position. She and Brandom stand on opposite sides of that crack and have wedged
it still further apart. Discord among the children is traced back to the parent's inner
conflict. Family dynamics are almost always interesting, but I have a personal stake in
this story. Academically, Sellars was not only my teacher, but my *Doktorvater*, and I feel
no Freudian urge to kill him off.

Sellars tries to sketch a coherent view of humanity-in-the-world that portrays us
as perceptive, thinking, willing agents and accommodates naturalism and scientific
realism without slighting the "autonomy of reason." In several places Sellars uses a
distinction between the causal or *real* order and the conceptual or *rational* order to set up
the problems that must be resolved.[2] Persons have access to and, indeed, sit at the

---

[1]"The Father, the Son, and the Daughter: Sellars, Brandom, and Millikan,"
Pragmatics & Cognition 13:1 (2005), 59-71. All citations will be parenthetical in the text,
abbreviations given in the list of References.

[2]He doesn't use a consistent vocabulary. In BBK, for instance, the distinction
faces the 'real order' off against the 'logical order' or 'intentional order' (BBK ¶¶31-33;
in SPR: 50; in ISR: 218-19), or the 'order of signification' ¶¶15, 46, 52-53, in SPR: 45, 55,

intersection of these two "orders"; trying to understand their relations is the cental crux in Sellarsian philosophy. Neither Millikan nor Brandom seems to think that Sellars was finally successful in giving us a unified image. Each chooses to elaborate and extend one side of Sellars's distinction in an attempt to tell a more unified story. Brandom emphasizes the rational, intentional order but says disappointingly little about its relation to the causal or natural order.

Millikan, in contrast, emphasizes the natural and causal order, and her articulation of a more thorough naturalism is a major contribution to contemporary philosophy. However, Millikan is not as clear as she could be about how she disagrees with Brandom or just what crack she finds in the Sellarsian edifice, so there is a clarificatory task to be performed. I will argue that she neglects certain aspects of the rational, intentional order, in particular what Kantians call "the autonomy of reason." There are important hints in Sellars for constructing a more adequate naturalistic treatment of reason.

I.   **Locating the Faultline: Rules and Roles, Norms and Causes**

Millikan quickly dismisses the notion that the crack in Sellars's edifice derives from his attempt to join themes from the early and late Wittgenstein, picturing and language games; "there is . . . no obvious crack in the bridge Sellars built between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*" (FSD: 60). Rather, Millikan worries about Sellars's

57; in ISR: 213, 223, 225-6. See also AE, in PP: 234, 267; in ISR:168, 203. In MEV he talks about the order of being and the order of knowing (MEV ¶5: 326, in ISR: 283). It is important not to confuse this distinction with his famous distinction between the manifest and scientific images. Citations to Sellars's works use what have become the standard abbreviations. See the References list.

"treatment of the nature of linguistic rules and the relation of these to conceptual roles and thus to intentionality" (FSD: 60). It isn't clear, however, exactly what the conflict is that Millikan finds within Sellarsian philosophy, so let me explore this issue with some care.

Sellars treats language as a rule-constituted set of practices that are embodied in certain complex patterns of behavior.

> The key to the concept of a linguistic rule is its complex relation to pattern-governed linguistic behavior. The general concept of pattern governed behavior is a familiar one. Roughly it is the concept of behavior which exhibits a pattern, not because it is brought about by the intention that it exhibit this pattern, but because the propensity to emit behavior of the pattern has been selectively reinforced, and the propensity to emit behavior which does not conform to this pattern selectively extinguished. (MFC: 423)

Pattern-governed behavior is present wherever there is learning. *Linguistic* patterns include patterns of responding to the world with words and responding to words with more words. Calling a certain pattern of response *linguistic*, however, is not a purely *descriptive* characterization of it. Linguistic events and objects occur in a context of rules and occur in part *because of the rules*. Crucially, the appropriate rules are not themselves descriptive generalizations about *de facto* patterns found in the world, but generalizations with *prescriptive* or *normative* force. Both linguistic behaviors and the rules that govern them are, as Sellars liked to say, "fraught with 'ought'" (TC: 212). And the point of an 'ought' is to motivate behavior:

> Learning the use of normative expressions involves… acquiring the tendency to make the transition from 'I ought now to do A' to the doing of A…it could not be

3

true of a word that 'it means *ought*' unless this word had motivating force in the language to which it belongs (SRLG: 350).

Sellars distinguishes two different 'oughts' with which behaviors can be fraught. There are ought-to-dos, rules of action. The basic form of such a rule is a conditional imperative: "If in circumstances C, do A!" This is the kind of 'ought' involved in what I will call paradigmatic rule-obeying. Paradigmatic rule-obedience requires complex cognitive and conative capacities on the part of the agent: knowledge of the rule, recognition of the circumstances as appropriate to the application of the rule, and conative structures that motivate one to apply the rule and act on it. Sellars absolutely rejects the idea that linguistic behaviors all occur *because of the rules* as cases of paradigmatic rule-obedience.

Sellars's other 'ought' is the ought-to-be, rules of criticism. For example, it ought to be the case that dogs come when their masters call. Such a rule speaks to no agent in particular, and it is certainly not a rule that dogs *obey* in the paradigmatic sense. It simply endorses a particular state of affairs without regard for any mode of achieving it. Still, dogs can exhibit a pattern of behavior that accords with the rule, and they can do so *because* of the rule, if their masters train them to come when called because the masters have reasoned along the following lines:

It ought to be the case that dogs come when their masters call.

Therefore, it ought to be the case that my dog comes when I call.

My dog will come when called only if I train it to do so.

Therefore, I ought to train my dog to come when called.

This reasoning moves from an ought-to-be to a relevant ought-to-do and comes to full fruition not in a belief about one's obligations, but in a set of actions that result in one's

4

dog learning to come when called. Ought-to-be's imply ought-to-do's.

Linguistic rules are primarily rules of criticism, ought-to-be's, especially the rules that define the structures constitutive of the language. Language is possible only because our linguistic behavior exhibits numerous interconnected regular patterns shared by most of the community because of the early learning that made those patterns second nature to community members. We can think about this set of patterns in two different ways, however, and this is significant for understanding the relations among Sellars, Millikan, and Brandom.

On one view, an anthropological and causal story dominates. It concerns the evolution and proliferation of complex patterns of behaviors and dispositions that provide for enhanced communication and coordination in the community. On this first view, the rule-governedness of linguistic behavioral patterns recedes into the background; linguistic behaviors take the shape they do, not *because of the rules*, but because the functionality of their historical ancestry explains their current appearance. At best, a rule summarizes a historical pattern. Indeed, the question is whether, given this view, the rule-governedness of linguistic behavior doesn't simply evaporate altogether.

On the other view, the sanctioning of the patterns and dispositions in the community, particularly the passing on of these patterns to new members, is taken to embody an *endorsement* of that set of patterns by the community, and the actual behaviors in the community are taken to realize (more or less well) a set of ought-to-be's operative in the community. On this view the base-level linguistic behavioral patterns are still imbued with normativity — as Brandom says, there are norms "all the way down" (MIE: 44, 625,638) — but one has to ask: communities of all kinds share

5

patterns of behavior (isn't that what it means to be a 'community'?), so what distinguishes a *de facto* from an *endorsed* and thus *de jure* behavioral pattern? When and how does a behavioral pattern acquire normative force?

We can recognize Millikan and Brandom in these two different views of the base-level patterns of linguistic behavior. Apparently, they do not believe these two views can be made fully compatible; the tension that Millikan finds lurking in Sellars is just this. On the one hand, because rules are normative or prescriptive, they cannot be translated or reduced into nonnormative, purely descriptive terms, yet, on the other hand, "on Sellars' view the presence of normative rules in the natural world appears in the end as just one more level of fact in that world" (FSD: 62). Brandom seems to agree that the two views are not compatible, but he disagrees with Millikan about which view is dominant.

II.   Some Sellarsian Geophysics

A.   Rules, Rational Agents, and the Institution of Norms

Let's explore the status of the normative in Sellarsian philosophy to further isolate the purported problem. First, Millikan's just quoted remark that the presence of norms turns out in the end to be "just one more level of fact in [the] world," needs explication. Sellars is happy to acknowledge normative facts, but that is because, in general, he takes fact-talk to be material mode truth-talk, and truth, for Sellars, is simply ideal semantic assertibility. The presence of normative facts (such as that murder is wrong) comes down to the categorical ideal assertibility of certain sentences, (e.g., 'Murder is wrong'), which sentences ultimately express prescriptions and proscriptions of certain kinds of action. Sellars thinks some sentences that express norms must be

semantically assertible in any real language and therefore true in the language, and that means that there are normative facts. But this is not a terribly 'deep' truth about the ultimate ontological status of norms, in Sellars's view, for facts are, in any case, not basic ontological items.

Linguistic rules are ought-to-be's. They are not *categorically* assertible, for they do not hold for every rational agent, but only those attempting to speak a particular language. Speaking a language entails acting *because of the rules*, even if one is not (yet) aware of behaving in accordance with such rules or what those rules may be.

In Sellars's view, however, human languages never remain at the level of orchestrations of first-order behaviors or dispositions to behave. Human languages all contain the resources of their own meta-languages, and the possibility of reflexivity, of talk about language, is essential to mastery of one's language.

> One isn't a full-fledged member of the linguistic community until one not only conforms to linguistic ought-to-be's (and may-be's) by exhibiting the required uniformities, but grasps these ought-to-be's and may-be's themselves (i.e., knows the rules of the language.) (LTC: 101).

Such a reflexive grasp of one's language is *necessary* for a peculiar reason.

> Rule obeying behavior contains, in some sense, both a game and a metagame, the latter being the game in which belong the rules obeyed in playing the former game as a piece of rule obeying behavior (Sellars SRLG in SPR1963a: 327; in ISR: 34).

According to Sellars, rules of criticism (ought-to-be's) have no way of being realized in the world (other than merely accidentally) except insofar as there are *agents* who infer

rules of action from them and thereupon undertake the requisite actions.[3] Unless there

are agents cognizant of and acting on some rules of action, talk of *any* rules, including

the apparently less committal rules of criticism, turns out to be empty.[4]

This has consequences. This is why the application of ought- or rule-talk to the

activities of undomesticated animals is, in Sellars's view, always analogical.[5] Sellars

also has difficulty explaining how the first 'ought's came to be, for there could be no

rule-obeyers, it seems, unless they were trained to recognize and obey already existent

rules, yet there could be no such rules until there are rule-obeyers, agents, ready to

recognize and obey them. Most likely Sellars thinks that this problem can be resolved

by a move parallel to his resolution of the threat of circularity in his epistemology.

Well-entrenched patterns of behavior in a community are *retrospectively* endowed with a

normative status they did not originally have, because the community comes to *endorse*

that pattern of behavior as community members come to acquire the explicit

conceptions of an 'ought' and a rule. Behavioral patterns selected by environmental or

community pressures that could be metaphorically or analogously described as rule-

---

[3]There is more work for Sellars to do hereabouts. We do not, for instance, currently have explicit knowledge of all the ought-to-be's of English. But we do have a conception of English as a rule-governed system, and I, for one, want my children to command it well, and took steps when they were growing up to ensure they did.

[4]A word of warning: this does not mean that behavior fulfilling ought-to-be's ends up as paradigmatic rule-following behavior. The basic behavior patterns of language speakers are not only "acquired as pattern governed activity, they remain pattern governed activity. The linguistic activities which are perceptual takings, inferences and volitions never become obeyings of ought-to-do rules" (MFC: 424; in ISR: 88).

[5]Domesticated animals are often trained and therefore behave in certain ways *because of rules* that their trainers have recognized.

governed can become recognized and endorsed by the community and thereby become literally rule-governed. The relevant notion of a rule is transformed from a summary of a historically-grounded pattern to a prescriptive with normative force.

In his late article "Mental Events," Sellars discusses human language as a species of a broader genus, animal representational systems [RSs]. Sellars argues there that what distinguishes distinctively human RSs from other animal RSs is not the presence of subject-predicate structure, for this is just a particular way of embodying two characteristics that are common to *every* representational event: "one by virtue of which it represents an object in its environment (or itself); another by virtue of which it represents that object as being of a certain character" (MEV ¶72(b): 338; in ISR: 294). What distinguishes human RSs, Sellars holds, is the presence of *explicit logical structure:* "The crucial distinction is between *logic-using* RSs and RSs which do not *use* logic, though their operations are described by *mentioning* logical operations" (MEV ¶79: 340; in ISR: 296). The latter systems, which he calls "Humean RSs," associate one representational state, such as 'Smoke here,' with others, such as 'Fire nearby,' and possess propensities to move from the one state to the other directly. Logic-*using*, or "Aristotelian," systems can get from a 'Smoke here' to a 'Fire nearby' representation either by this direct Humean route or by means of an intermediary, standing, quantified representation "Wherever smoke, fire nearby" together with (Humean) propensities to infer in accordance with formally valid inference forms. "Thus we can say, following Leibnitz, that a Humean RS which moves directly from 'Smoke here' to 'fire nearby' apes an Aristotelian RS which syllogizes. . . . As Leibnitz put it, '[animals have] a sort of

9

consecutiveness which imitates reason'" (MEV ¶90: 342; in ISR: 298).[6]

Logical particles in an RS make a significant difference in the expressive power of the system, particularly if one includes the modal operators as logical particles. But it is odd that Sellars does not mention reflexivity, the possibility of talk about talk and thought about thought, as at least *another* important distinguishing trait of human representational systems. We have seen already that he is committed to such a thesis, and it is important to getting a full grasp of the autonomy of reason. The relation between reflexivity and the presence of logical structure for him remains unclear.

Brandom offers a hint, treating the logical particles as enabling us to make explicit relations between representations that would otherwise remain implicit in the inferential practices involving those representations. This is not yet a new level of meta-representations, but it might be construed as the first step toward evolving practices that enable us to treat representations as representations in their own right. What Brandom does bring out strongly is that normative statuses are derived from normative attitudes, so that rulishness is tied, not directly to our *de facto* patterns of behavior, but to how we represent those patterns. Normativity or rulishness is *instituted* by such attitudes — that is how Brandom expresses the point Sellars makes by basing the reality of ought-to-be's on their being transformed into and acted upon as ought-to-do's.

---

[6]Sellars refers here to §26 of Leibnitz's *Monadology*.

B.   Scientific Realism and the Causal Order

The metaphor offers itself that the rule- and ought-focused perspective on language and thought is a "top-down" view that needs to be complemented by a corresponding "bottom-up" view of the relevant behaviors. Sellars's deep commitment to naturalism, and more specifically, scientific realism, requires that high-level events such as thinkings or sayings get somehow grounded in the low-level events described and explained in the natural sciences. "Somehow grounded" is, of course, vague and challenging: can Sellars articulate a sufficiently clear and powerful "grounding" relation to serve his naturalism? Still, the "top-down vs. bottom-up" picture is at least slightly misleading, since, in Sellars's view, these perspectives employ incommensurable vocabularies, guaranteeing that there will be no smooth and unproblematic melding of bottom-up and top-down views.

Even a cursory reading of Sellars shows that he rejects the idea that rules, norms, intentional states, etc. can be simply *defined* in natural scientific terms. The concepts of rules, norms, and oughts and the dependent concepts of intentional states, of linguistic utterances and performances, remain, in the end, at least partially independent of the descriptive conceptions used in the natural sciences, precisely to the extent that normative, action-motivating concepts cannot be fully analyzed in descriptive, non-action-motivating language. A rule cannot be *analyzed away* in the purely descriptive language of natural science.

Nonetheless, Sellars is clearly a scientific realist. One construal of scientific realism is that it claims that the facts expressible in the language of the empirical sciences are *all* the facts. Sellars cannot subscribe to this version of scientific realism, for, as we have seen, he is happy countenancing moral and other normative facts.

Sellars's version of scientific realism is object-centered in the sense that he is committed to the thesis that the objects identified by the empirical sciences (at their ideal completion) exhaust the *basic* (kinds of) objects of the world. Other (kinds of) objects will prove to be in some appropriate sense reducible to or derivative from the basic objects identified in the empirical sciences.[7] There is, in principle, according to Sellars, a stratum in any empirically usable language (or conceptual scheme) in which the objects that are *basic* within the language are represented in configuration in a way in which no normative or prescriptive term occurs (see CDCM: 282-83).[8]

As a scientific realist, Sellars is also a normative anti-realist. This does not mean that he rejects the idea that there are normative facts. Rather, it means that there are no essentially normative *basic objects*, that normative properties are never basic, intrinsic or nonrelational properties of objects. Every normative fact is dependent on some (usually incredibly complex) descriptive *relational* facts about the object(s) involved. This also means that *persons*, objects that are essentially characterized in normative terms, cannot be naturalistically *basic* objects. So much for the manifest image.

---

[7]According to Sellars, the principle here is that "If an object is *in a strict sense* a system of objects, then every [intrinsic or nonrelational] property of the object must consist in the fact that its constituents have such and such qualities and stand in such and such relations or, roughly, every [intrinsic or nonrelational] property of a system of objects consists of properties of, and relations between, its constituents" (PSIM in SPR: 27; in ISR: 395).

[8]In CDCM, Sellars projects an ideal of a "pure description" of the world that would contain nothing either modal or normative. That idea, it turns out, won't do as it stands, and Sellars developed the idea of picturing in order to resolve the difficulties that arose. I make a first attempt to spell out the dialectic that led to his development of the notion of picturing in "Naturalism, the Autonomy of Reason, and Picturing" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* **18** (3) (2010): 1-19.

Millikan correctly points out that according to Sellars, "[f]rom the scientific realist's standpoint, you can understand the nature of the normative practices of a community without participating in them" (FSD: 62). That is, in explaining the practices of a community, one can adopt a standpoint outside the particular practices of the community studied, linguistic practices included. One "can describe what patterns of response in a language community, along with the origins of these responses in a history of language training, and training of the language trainers, and so forth, constitutes that 'rot' means red in that community" (FSD: 62). Indeed, Sellars sums the basic principle here succinctly: "Espousal of principles is reflected in uniformities of performance" (TC, in SPR: 216).[9]

Sellars is aware of the fact that explanations of the uniformities of performance in human practices will generally account for their fixation and proliferation by citing their utility and ultimately their survival value. The analogy with the forms of evolutionary explanation is unavoidable.

> The phenomena of learning present interesting analogies to the evolution of
> species. (Indeed, it might be interesting to use evolutionary theory as a *model*, by
> regarding a single organism as a series of organisms of shorter temporal span,

---

[9]Note the vagueness of Sellars's "reflected in." This is intentional on his part; his point is intended to be minimal: "I am merely saying that the espousal of a principle or standard, *whatever else it involves*, is characterized by a uniformity of performance. And let it be emphasized that this uniformity, though not the principles of which it is the manifestation, is describable in matter-of-factual terms" (TC: 216). Millikan inveighs at some length against the idea that conventions involve *regularities* (see, e.g., LCMS, sections IV and V: 170-175), and this could be taken as a rejection of Sellars's principle. But the regularities that Millikan rejects seem to be *stringent*, and the uniformities that Sellars refers are not stringent. They can be, for example, historically or culturally conditioned.

each inheriting disposition (sic) to behave from its predecessor, with new behavioural tendencies [playing the role of mutations, and the 'law of effect' the role of natural selection. (SRLG ¶16: in SPR: 327; in ISR: 34).[10]

Millikan sees this evolutionary line of approach as a "competing theme in Sellars' discussion of linguistic rules" (FDS: 64). After all, if we can explain the uniformities of linguistic performance, which is just the kind of thing science is good at, won't we have thereby also explained or made simply otiose any further explanation of the "principles" involved?   Since there will inevitably be slack in interpreting exactly which normative principles are "reflected in" a determinate set of uniformities of performance — or do we believe that a complete enough specification of the uniformities of performance in a community will determine a *unique* account of its 'principles' (linguistic, aesthetic, or moral)? — having a good theory of the behavioral uniformities seems likely to displace reliance on the principles altogether. This is the side of the crack in Sellars's edifice that Millikan has cultivated to great effect.

C.   Picturing

Millikan and Sellars agree that a full understanding of intentionality requires us to believe that our mental states embody a *picture* or *map* of our environment that enables us appropriately to maneuver within and modulate our behavior in response to that environment. For Sellars, picturing is a non-semantic isomorphism in the natural order between the structure of the occurrences of a subset of the tokens of the singular

---

[10]A bibliographic warning: The version of SRLG reprinted in ISR is the original, unrevised, unexpanded journal article. The versions coincide pretty well through ¶30, but there is a large addition in the SPR version consisting of ¶¶31-46 as well as smaller changes in later paragraphs.

propositional representations of a representational system and the structures of spatio-temporal objects they represent. This isomorphism is a *de facto* relationship between objects in the environment and representational events, and it serves a natural purpose in modulating the organism's interactions with its environment. Sellars's conception of picturing is often thought to be fairly obscure and has not received much attention; Millikan is one of the few who have picked up the idea and worked with it. But Millikan's conception of mapping does not seem entirely at one with Sellars's.

Millikan reports that, according to Sellars, "the manner in which the names occur in the picture is a projection, in accordance with a fantastically complex system of rules of projection, of the manner in which the objects occur in the world" (Sellars TC: 215; NAO, V ¶93: 118-119).[11] She then claims that "These fantastic complexities are introduced mainly by the inference rules, formal and, more importantly, material, that govern "statement-statement" (hence judgment-judgment) transitions" (FSD: 60). The fantastic complexities in the rule of projection will certainly be reflected in the (also complex) inference rules of the language, but it is misleading to say that they are *introduced* by the inference rules, as if the inference rules somehow came first. The notions of *picturing* and *method of projection* are, remember, relations "*in rerum natura*" (Sellars TC: 222; NAO, V ¶116: 125). Inference rules are patterns in the conceptual order; methods of projection are patterns in the *ordo essendi*.

---

[11]Another bibliographic warning. There are two printings (both from Ridgeview) of Sellars's *Naturalism and Ontology*, the original printing of 1979 and a "corrected" printing from 1996. Though they are not marked as different editions of the work, they do not agree in pagination. I lost my copy of the original printing (the one Millikan refers to) a long time ago. My citations of NAO include the edition-neutral chapter and paragraph numbers as well as the page in the 1996 printing.

. . .to say of a projection that it is *correct*, is, indeed, to use normative language[;] the principle which . . . I am taking as axiomatic [that espousal of principles is reflected in uniformities of performance] assures us that corresponding to every espoused principle of correctness there is a matter-of-factual uniformity in performance. And it is such uniformities, which link natural-linguistic objects with one another and with the objects of which they are the linguistic projections, that constitute picturing as a relation of matter of fact between objects in the natural order (Sellars TC: 222; NAO. V ¶116: 125).

The "projection relation" is rarely, if ever, a matter of a simple, straightforward law of nature. Rather, any particular item pictures only because of its position in a vastly complex *system* characterizable in terms of complex "laws operative in situ", as Millikan calls them. Wittgenstein's model was the relation between the shape of the groove in a phonograph record and the sound of a musical performance — a relation in which the similarity of the picture and the pictured is still relatively intelligible (once one has learned to think of sound itself as possessing a wave form). But the projection relation between sounds and the sequence of bits in a digital sound file is difficult to construe as a relation of resemblance and makes sense only within the context of an orchestration of complex electro-mechanical systems, none of them essentially inferential.

In contrast to Millikan, however, Sellars explicitly stipulates that in picturing,
The correspondence for which we have been looking is limited to elementary statements, or, more accurately, to the elementary thoughts which are expressed by elementary statements and which we conceive of by analogy with elementary statements (TC: 223).

According to this stipulation, the picturing relation, *strictu sensu*, holds only between objects (in configuration) and elementary thoughts. Logically compound or complex thoughts, thoughts that contain metalinguistic terms (perhaps in material disguise), do not *picture* anything.

Millikan, however, seems to construe the notion of a map much more expansively. She asserts, "I adopt Sellars' suggestion that adequate intentional representing is a kind of picturing or mapping" (FSD: 67). For Sellars, she says, "The map of the world produced by a language is not found sentence by sentence but only in the whole of the living language cum thought running isomorphic to the whole world in sketch" (FSD: 60). She also cites in support of this interpretation Sellars's assertion that "the representational features of an empirical language require the presence in the language of a [whole] schematic world story" (NAO, V ¶59: 109).

But I think Millikan is in danger of misconstruing Sellars's use of the map metaphor. Sellars would not have agreed that "adequate intentional representing is a kind of picturing or mapping," if that is supposed to mean that *all* intentional states are pictures or maps of something. Sellars wants to maintain a *distinction* between picturing and intentionality. An animal representational system that pictures its environment is not *thereby* possessed of full-fledged intentionality. What he believes is that any system capable of intentional representation must contain some intentional representations that *also* picture objects in the environment. But there is no inference from "*S* is an intentional representation" (or "*S* is an adequate intentional representation") to "*S* pictures something in the environment." In Sellars' view, picturing is a relation, but talk of intentionality is actually classificatory talk (viz., functional classification). To ascribe intentionality to something classifies it in a way

that *rests* on complex relations, one of which is (often) the picturing relation, but it does not attribute any particular relation directly. Some, but not all, of the representations in an intentional system must picture objects in the world.

Second, I think it is a mistake to assimilate Sellars's notion of a world *story* to the notion of a *map* of the world, though in accordance with the previous point, any such story will *imply* a map of the world. Sellars himself invites a comparison between maps and world stories: "If one is going to compare a world story with a map, one must ponder the distinction between 'real' maps and 'fictional' maps. One doesn't try to go places with a map of Hobbit-land" (NAO, V ¶60: 109). But Sellars immediately goes on to admit that the distinction between real and fictional maps "doesn't cut deeply enough" (NAO, V ¶61: 109). What it seems to lack, in Sellars's view, is a recognition that languages permit the formulation of alternative world-stories and discussions of how to choose among them. He believes that any language at any point in time must make a commitment to *one* (sketchy) world-story, but that commitment is *provisional* and the world-story is under constant revision. The relevant passages in Chapter V, section V of NAO are fairly obscure. Let me quote them and then try to interpret what Sellars has in mind.

> 63. That languagings are *evoked* (in contexts) by happenings of certain kinds is a *causal* fact which is nevertheless essential to their conceptual character. This causal aspect of perceptual takings, introspective awarenesses, inferences, and volitions accounts for the selecting of *one* world story *rather than another* and connects the 'is' of this selecting with the rule-governed or 'ought to be' character of the language. The 'presence' of this unique story at each stage in the development of the language makes possible the referential framework of names,

18

descriptions and demonstratives and, by so doing, makes possible the exploratory activity which lead [sic] to the story's enrichment and revision.

64.　Thus, the fact that the uniformities (positive and negative) involved in language-entry, intralinguistic and language-departure transitions of a language are governed by specific ought-to-be statements in its meta-linguistic stratum, and these in turn by ought-to-bes and ought-to-dos concerning explanatory coherence, constitutes the Janus-faced character of languagings as belonging to both the causal order and the order of reasons. This way of looking at conceptual activity transposes into more manageable terms traditional problems concerning the place of intentionality in nature (NAO, V ¶¶63-64: 110).

These paragraphs are not pellucid. What I take from them, so far as our current discussion is concerned, is that the notion of a world-*story*, with its explicit reference to language, is preferable to the notion of a *map* of the world in that the distinctively meta-representational capacities of language, which are not available in maps, are crucial to understanding the "Janus-faced character" not just of languagings, but of rational activity as such.   It is only in language and thought that we worry about what we ought to say and think and whether we are speaking and thinking correctly. There are no maps of the rules governing maps or maps for correcting maps, but there are linguistic expressions of the rules governing language and rational activity.[12] If the causal account of the selection of the world-story we accept must also underpin an account that worries about whether we have a *right* to accept that story, whether it is a *justified*,

---

[12]Notice that the *legend* that gives the semantics of a map does so by pairing map-symbol types with *linguistic* counterparts. The semantics of a map, like the semantics of a language, is expressed explicitly in language.

even a *truthful* story, some of the causes of our acceptance must show up within the story as *reasons* embedded in a system of norms. Such a system, Sellars believes, requires the reflexive or "meta-" capacities of a language and thus goes beyond anything the map metaphor can give an account of.

The picture or map metaphor, which Millikan treats as going a long way towards helping us understand the nature of language, is treated by Sellars as useful to help us understand a transcendental condition of the meaningfulness of empirical language. That under some conditions elementary sentences picture is, he believes, a crucial element in any empirically meaningful language, but it cannot be the whole story of the language. He remains committed to the need to refer to rules and norms.

III.   Games, Conventions, Rules, Norms, and Essential Perspectives

The supposed faultline in Sellarsian philosophy which divides Millikan and Brandom concerns the proper treatment of the fundamental uniformities of behavior that underlie all language use and ultimately, all rational action. Brandom, about whose position I have said little, says that there are norms "all the way down," that is, that there is no point at which to place a transition from non-normatively described dispositions or uniformities to normatively characterized dispositions or uniformities. Millikan, in contrast, thinks that all we ever need are historically grounded but always naturalistically describable dispositions (where that means described in non-prescriptive-rulish terms) or uniformities. For Millikan, it is causes all the way up.   But Sellars insists on the "Janus-faced character" of our dispositions: both the causal-natural and the normative-rational vocabularies are indispensable.

Brandom, like Sellars, motivates his view that rules and normative norms are

indispensable in understanding language, in part, by the constant analogy between languages and games. Millikan, however, thinks her view competes, that is, *conflicts*, with the idea that linguistic rules are like rules in a game. For one thing, the dispositions or uniformities in question *matter*, for what is at stake is *survival*. Millikan disparages games as opportunities for "displaying certain social graces" (FSD: 64), whereas "coming to follow the patterns prescribed by the rules of one's language community is not just a game but has some broader utility for the child or for its community" (FSD: 64). But this criticism seems off the mark; there is no conflict between something's being a *game* and its having significant utility. Some of the most highly remunerated members of our society are sports stars, and playing a decent game of golf has long had significant utility in the business community beyond providing an opportunity for "displaying certain social graces." Games are deeply woven into human social structures and often matter a great deal. In any case, it is not the lack of seriousness that is the feature of most games that the metaphor seeks to exploit, but the facts that certain kinds of acts are possible only in the context of a particular game, and that, though games are perfectly objective realities in the world, they are instituted and constituted by the acceptance of certain rules governing the participants' behavior.

A more apt target for Millikan would be the voluntarism of games. The playing of a game is almost always optional. When it becomes non-optional (or optional only at a discouragingly great cost), we declare that it is "no longer a game." This is not the same as saying that games don't matter. Many things that matter deeply are optional, such as betting the farm on drawing to an inside straight. Second, although some "games" (like peek-a-boo) seem to develop naturally, most of us learn to play various games by being taught the rules, so the moves made in playing games are paradigmatic

21

rule-obeying behaviors, although in accomplished practitioners explicit consideration of the rules often recedes from consciousness except in highly problematic cases.

Learning a language does not seem optional for humans, and most of the rules governing language never rise to explicit consciousness at all. Of course, none of these disanalogies between language and games is news to Millikan. But she does not claim that the game metaphor is *wrong*, only that it can *mislead* us at times. The fundamental point is that what Sellars calls a causal/anthropological approach and Millikan prefers to call simply a biological approach is, in Millikan's view, neither a metaphor nor misleading; it can be elaborated into a full-blown theory, and the right one at that. Importantly, it is an approach in which rules need never be mentioned as such.

Millikan does not shy away from the consequence that, seen from this angle, the vaunted normativity of linguistic rules simply evaporates.

> The norms for language are uses that have had "survival value", as Sellars put it. As such these norms are indeed disposition transcendent, but they are not fraught with ought. They are not prescriptive or evaluative norms. Their status has nothing to do with anyone's assessments. A norm is merely a measure from which actual facts can depart; it need not be an evaluative measure (FSD: 64-65).

Millikan wants to understand language, not as a *rule*-governed system, but as "a sprawling mass of crisscrossing, overlapping conventions, some known to some people, others to others" (DPL: 216), where a convention is a pattern of activity or behavior that is *reproduced* (in Millikan's technical sense of that term) "due in part to the weight of tradition, rather than due, for example, to its intrinsically superior capacity to perform some function, or due to ignorance of any superior way to perform it" (DPL: 219).

In her view, "Language conventions are best thought of merely as lineages of

22

behavioral patterns involving a speaker's utterance and a hearer's response. They do not correspond to rules, and certainly not to prescriptive rules" (FSD: 67). If language is a distinctively human activity, it is not, in Millikan's view, distinctive *in principle*, but only in fact. There is a certain mass of conventions present in human societies that enable a rather striking facility for communication among the members of that society, but there is nothing in principle 'deeper' going on. Millikan is willing to talk about the "natural purpose" (FSD: 65) of these conventions and the social forms that embody them, but in her mouth the notion of a natural purpose is a historical-causal notion with no normative or evaluative content to it.

Millikan seems eager to deny natural languages the kind of normativity that would justify calling it a "rule-governed system." She is not as clear about this as she ought to be. As we've seen, Millikan believes that the *real* story underlying our linguistic behavior is to be told in terms of conventions, non-prescriptive, historically transmitted, *de facto* patterns of behavior. Yet she too often uses the term 'rule' in way that, in this context, has to be called loose, for 'rule' often contrasts with 'convention.'.

Indeed, there is a use of 'rule' in which no normativity is implied, for instance "As a rule, rush hour traffic is over by 9:30." "These rules describe conventional patterns; they do not prescribe them. The bare existence of a convention neither mandates, nor gives permission for anything" (LCMS:173). But Millikan also talks somewhat confusingly about 'conventional rules' (e.g., LCMS: 166, 173), and though she explicitly denies that these have any prescriptive force, her language muddies important waters. To my ear, there is a difference between "In these circumstances, there is a convention that one A's" and "In these circumstances, there is a conventional rule that one A's." The latter implies some normativity, evidenced by the fact that these

sentences have different implications concerning whether it is appropriate to describe not A-ing in those circumstances as a *mistake*. Thus, if, as a rule, rush hour traffic is over by 9:30, then, when 10:00 rolls around and traffic is undiminished, one could say, "Something is wrong, traffic is as bad as it was earlier." But it would be very odd to say "There's been a mistake, traffic is as bad as it was earlier." But the notion of mistake is regularly applied to linguistic performances.

The point here is not to engage in an extended critique of Millikan's conception of language as conventional. Much of her vision is very powerful, and I have no complaints about her notion of conventions. My concern is that her conception of normativity is relatively thin and without much articulation. Too many of Millikan's examples of rules with prescriptive force, unfortunately, are cases of actual legislation, cases where the coercive power of the state is placed behind the sanctions connected to the rule. If, in thinking about language, we're forced to choose between convention vs. legislation, we cannot put language on the legislated side.

But the idea that we are forced to choose between convention and explicitly legislated and enforced patterns of behavior is surely a false dichotomy. It was to avoid such a false dilemma that Sellars carefully distinguished different forms of rule-governedness. The "weight of tradition" can be brought to bear upon the reproduction of a certain pattern of behavior in humans in several different ways, depending on how conscious of the tradition the subjects are and how strongly they endorse and support the tradition. But for Millikan, apparently, one causal ancestry of pattern-governed behavior is pretty much equivalent to any other — as long as the patterns are all explained by reference to their causal ancestry and selective forces, normativity as such seems absent.

In Sellars's view, not all causal ancestries are equivalent: he reserves a special place for two kinds of behaviors:

(1) Behaviors that include among their typical causal ancestry events or dispositions in the subject that are representations of rules, which representations, in conjunction with others (both cognitive and conative representations), tend to bring about behavior that accords with the rule.

(2) Pattern-governed behaviors that include among their causal ancestry events or dispositions in others (the trainers or community members) that are representations of rules, which representations bring about behaviors in those others that lead to the acquisition in the trainee of pattern-governed behavior that accords with the rule.[13]

How can Sellars justify giving these kinds of behavior special treatment? In Millikan's view we need employ only the notion of a convention to understand the basics of linguistic behavior. She singles out conventions by means of a peculiarity in their causal ancestry; conventions differ from other reproduced behavioral patterns in having not only a proper function, but also being reproduced to an important degree simply because of *tradition*. (I noted above that there may not be a single way in which traditions can be involved.) Structurally, Sellars's move is similar. He singles out a subset of pattern-governed behaviors by means of a different peculiarity in their causal ancestry, namely, having in an appropriate position in their causal ancestry a representation of a rule with which the pattern-governed behavior is supposed to accord.

---

[13]This is still rough. Cases where the representation of a rule accidentally causes the behaviors in question would have to be ruled out.

Given Sellars's view of representations and representational systems, it will always be the case that some of the representations in a system will connect perception and action pretty directly. In simple RSs, most the representations will have this character. Millikan agrees and calls these "pushmi-pullyu" representations. But Millikan clouds the issues a bit when she then says that

> Already at this simple level a stringent criterion of correctness for rule following is in effect. The perceptual systems must manage systematically to deliver representations of the world that accord with a rule of correspondence to which the action systems are also adjusted (FSD: 68).

In simple animals, the convergence of perceptual and action systems is a matter not so much of *rules*, properly so-called, as of "laws operative in situ." In animals, the perceptual and the action systems have been designed by evolution to mesh together well enough to keep the organism functioning and reproducing.

But in more complex organisms, Millikan rightly notes, the attunement between the perceptual and the action systems is less direct and more complex.

> Beyond perception for action, humans, at least, make cognitive maps that are not dedicated in advance to the guidance of particular behaviors. We collect great quantities of information with no immediate uses in view, storing it away perhaps for later contingencies. Having separated the descriptive from the directive aspects of representation, these have to be joined together again through practical inference. But representations of fact that are not immediately tested in action and that are then used to form more representations and then still more through inference, need to be screened for accuracy and consistency in some way. Rules or patterns of belief formation need to be strictly regimented as

26

they are developed, well in advance of practical uses for the resulting beliefs (FSD: 68).

But notice here the unexpanded notion of inference. I pointed out earlier Sellars's distinction between "Humean" and "Aristotelian" inferences and RSs. The Humean RS can adjust its inferential patterns only by changing old or acquiring new habits of association; it cannot consider or address its inferences *as such*. This is a slow and painful way to change one's representations. The Aristotelian RS can change its inferential patterns by discarding or acquiring new generalizations, leaving the basic inference patterns untouched. In the Aristotelian RS the *form* and the *content* of an inference can start to be teased apart, unlike the Humean RS.

It is also too simple to say that the descriptive aspects of representation have been, in humans, simply separated from the directive aspects. Humans can have representations with only indirect implications for action, but every representation must have some directive aspect. In cases of representations that are very indirectly tied to action — representations of pi-mesons, unicorns, or chiliagonality — the representations must have directive aspects in another key. Call these directive meta-aspects; they concern how we proceed to act on other representations, rather than how we act directly on the objects of the world. We isolate the descriptive aspect of a representation, not by separating it from all its directive force, but by kicking the directive force up into the meta-level, where it concerns the inferential powers of the representation, rather than ground-level activity.

This invites us to revisit the map metaphor. Clearly, we sell the metaphor short if we restrict the maps we use as models for cognitive representations to the moribund paper maps one gets from AAA. Maps can be not only 3- but 4-dimensional, that is,

27

portraying not just where things are at a time, but also how they move and change over time. Computer simulations of an auto accident or of a weather system are essentially dynamic maps of those events. An animal representational system is a world-simulator, though in simple animals the simulation is very thin and partial. Such dynamic maps have to represent the dynamic principles operative in nature, but they need do so only in a quick and dirty fashion adequate to keep the animal functioning and reproducing. Animal systems, therefore, have approximate procedural representations of some of the dynamic principles operative in the world. Humans, however, can, in language, also represent those principles declaratively, and thereby make them an object of explicit concern. They can then seek to refine their understanding of the dynamics of nature, seeking not merely quick-and-dirty, partial, satisficing representations, but optimally correct and complete representations. Human representational systems aim at an ideal unfathomable by other animals.

While animals adjust their dynamic maps unconsciously in the school of very hard knocks, the linguistic facility of humans enables them to re-program their maps in a methodical and conscious fashion. We can't say that natural human languages are the programing languages for our animal RSs; the relationship is not so direct. But Sellars takes seriously the idea that research in the empirical sciences will ultimately re-structure the representational system we employ in very significant ways, replacing the original image[14] acquired through the blind processes of evolution and conditioning with a consciously elaborated, carefully justified, more thorough and complete scientific image of the world. This process is one that Sellars thinks can be thoroughly intelligible

---

[14]See PSIM, in SPR, 7, 10; in ISR: 375, 378-79.

only to someone who has the normative concept of rule.

Some object that the normativity involved isn't ontologically real— it is only a "believed-in" normativity, for the fundamental being of a rule, on this view, depends on our ability to *represent* rules. Millikan could not make this objection, with her even harsher view of normativity, but there are still normative realists among us. I cannot address this objection fully, but Sellars thinks that within his system we can preserve everything we need to say about norms and values.[15] He simply doesn't believe that norms have any reality independent of minds that can represent them, for the whole point of a norm is prescriptive, to motivate behavior in a cognitive being. However, he also thinks we cannot fully understand the behavior of sophisticated cognitive beings without mentioning the norms they believe in and regulate themselves by.

This brings us back to an earlier theme. Millikan points out that "[f]rom the scientific realist's standpoint, you can understand the nature of the normative practices of a community without participating in them" (FSD: 62). This is true. But it is equally important to appreciate the fact that one cannot stand outside *all* normative practices and understand them only from the outside. Understanding something *is* participating in a normative practice. As cognitive beings, we can see any part of the world in nonnormative terms, save that part that includes our selves as beings responsive to norms, possessed of the *right* to believe some things and not others and engaged in rational activity. To the extent that we can see the part of the world we inhabit in thoroughly nonnormative terms, there would be no *we* left within it, nor any *seeing* or *talking* being done. We *could*, of course, cease to see ourselves as responsive to norms,

---

[15]Principally in the final chapter of SM and in ORAV.

because we could be *caused* to change our ways of interacting with each other and treating ourselves, but we couldn't validly *reason* our way to the idea that reason is an illusion.

An external point of view on any normative practice is always possible, but we cannot infer that points of view from within practices are thoroughly dispensable. To put oneself outside all normative practices is to abandon both practical discourse and practical reason as well as theoretical discourse and theoretical reason. We would no longer recognize the norms to which we feel ourselves to be responsive in reasoning of any kind. Were we thus to cease to represent rules, such representations would not play significant roles in our behavior, so descriptions and explanations of our behavior would no longer advert to oughts or rules. The picturing relation between our internal states and the external world might endure (since picturing is not "fraught with 'ought'" (TC: 212)). But any subsequent change toward more or less adequate picturing would have to be the result of unconscious, impersonal selection pressures, for, though "truth (adequacy of representation) abides as the *would be* of linguistic representation," there could be no recognition that truth or adequacy of representation might serve as the *should be* of linguistic representation.

A theoretical position that undercuts the possibility of possessing a theoretical position is not attractive. Brandom doesn't pay enough attention to the causal underpinnings of linguistic and conceptual activity, but Millikan doesn't pay enough attention to the indispensability of prescriptive, normative concepts and attitudes in any coherent conceptual framework. So I encourage Brandom and Millikan to cultivate their plots on either side of the supposed Sellarsian faultline; there is much to be learned from their efforts. But for the larger picture, I'll stick with daddy: the supposed crack is

30

not a faultline, but a joint in the complex and articulated reality in which humans live.

References

MIE   Brandom, R. B. 1994. *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

deVries, W. A. 2010: Naturalism, the Autonomy of Reason, and Picturing. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies,* **18** (3), 1-19.

LCMS   Millikan, R. G. 1998: Language Conventions Made Simple. *The Journal of Philosophy,* **95** (4), 161-180.

DPL   Millikan, R. G. 2003: In Defense of Public Language. In L. M. Antony and N. Hornstein (eds.), *Chomsky and his Critics*, Oxford: Blackwell.

FSD   Millikan, R. G. 2005: The Father, the Son, and the Daughter: Sellars, Brandom, and Millikan. *Pragmatics & Cognition,* **13** (1), 59-71.

ISR   Scharp, K. And Brandom, R. B. (eds.) 2007: *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

SRLG   Sellars, W. S. 1954. Some Reflections on Language Games. *Philosophical Studies,* **21**, 204–28. [Reprinted with extensive additions in SPR.]

CDCM   Sellars, W. S. 1957: Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities. In H. Feigl, M. Scriven & G. Maxwell (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science,* vol. II, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

BBK   Sellars, W. S. 1960: Being and Being Known. *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 28–49. [Reprinted in SPR.]

TC   Sellars, W. S. 1962. Truth and Correspondence. *Journal of Philosophy* **59**, 29–56. [Reprinted in SPR.]

PSIM   Sellars, W. S. 1962a. Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man. In R. Colodny (ed.), *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy,* 35–78. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. [Reprinted in SPR.]

SPR   Sellars, W. S. 1963: *Science, Perception and Reality.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. [Reissued 1991 Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing].

AE   Sellars, W. S. 1963a: 1963. Abstract Entities. *Review of Metaphysics,* **16**, 627–71. [Reprinted in PP and PPME.]

SM   Sellars, W. S. 1967. *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes,* The John Locke Lectures for 1965–66. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. [Reissued (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1992).]

PP   Sellars, W. S. 1967a. *Philosophical Perspectives.* Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas. [Reprinted in two volumes (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1977)].

LTC   Sellars, W. S. 1969. Language as Thought and as Communication. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* 29, 506–27.

MFC   Sellars, W. S. 1974. Meaning as Functional Classification (A Perspective on the Relation of Syntax to Semantics)", *Synthese,* **27,** 417–37.

NAO   Sellars, W. S. 1980. *Naturalism and Ontology.* [The John Dewey Lectures for 1973–74]. Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing. [Reprinted with corrections in 1997.]

ORAV   Sellars, W. S. 1980a. On Reasoning About Values. *American Philosophical Quarterly,* 17,: 81–101.

MEV   Sellars, W. S. 1981. Mental Events. *Philosophical Studies,* **39**, 325–45.