

## Sellars' Metaethical Quasi-Realism\*

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I expound and defend an interpretation of Sellars as a metaethical quasi-realist. Sellars analyzes moral discourse in non-cognitivist terms: in particular, he analyzes “ought”-statements as expressions of collective intentions deriving from a collective commitment to provide for the general welfare. But he also endorses a functional-role theory of meaning, on which a statement’s meaning is grounded in its being governed by semantical rules concerning language entry, intra-linguistic, and language departure transitions, and a theory of truth as correct assertibility relative to such semantical rules. On these non-representationalist theories, even though moral statements are expressions of intentions and not fundamentally descriptive, they nevertheless count as assertorically meaningful, and some count as positively true. I further argue that this interpretation is capable not only of explaining Sellars’ explicitly metaethical writings, but also of unifying his scientific realism with his commitment to the ineliminable and indispensable role of the language of intentions: if this linguistic framework does not play an explanatory role, but only an expressive role, this explains both why Sellars’ commitment to it does not contravene his naturalism, as well as why, given the necessity of such language for our practical engagement with the world, the scientific image of humans in the world will only be completed once such language supplements it to enable us to relate practically to it.

It is perhaps customary for articles on Wilfrid Sellars’ thinking on ethical topics to begin with lamentations of how unjustly overlooked this area of his thought is.<sup>1</sup> But such complaints may not hold true for much longer: after being virtually ignored for decades,

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<sup>1</sup> See Solomon 1977: 149; deVries 2005: 246. Other than in overviews of Sellars’ work (deVries 2005: ch. 9; O’Shea 2007: ch. 7), the only treatment of Sellars’ ethics of which I am aware written between 1980 and 2015 is Hurley 2000.

Sellars' ethical writings are gaining attention fairly rapidly.<sup>2</sup> When one turns to these writings themselves, however, one might be forgiven for quickly becoming puzzled, for they espouse a nuanced and complex metaethical position whose contours are difficult to grasp clearly. In his "Autobiographical Reflections," Sellars tells us that in studying ethics at Oxford, he gained the conviction that "Somehow intuitionism and emotivism would have to be *aufgehoben* into a naturalistic framework which recognized ethical concepts as genuine concepts and found a place for intersubjectivity and truth" (AR: 285).<sup>3</sup> His ultimate metaethical position indeed lies at just this middle ground between classical intuitionism and classical emotivism: it seems to be non-cognitivist, and yet to recognize ethical concepts as genuine; it aims to respect naturalistic constraints on ontology, and yet to leave space for moral truth. But how can all these views be consistently held together?

Let us use the label "quasi-realist" to denote views that analyze moral discourse in non-cognitivist terms, but endeavor to "earn the right" to use the language standardly used by moral realists (in particular, to call particular moral claims true or false).<sup>4</sup> In this article, I expound and defend an interpretation of Sellars as a metaethical quasi-realist. In §1, I show that Sellars is an expressivist about moral discourse: he takes our moral

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<sup>2</sup> See Olen and Turner 2015 and 2016, Koons 2016, and Baumeister 2017. Koons is also presently writing the first monograph devoted to Sellars' ethics.

<sup>3</sup> It is standard practice to cite Sellars' writings by abbreviation. See the entries for Sellars' works in the Bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> This is how Richard Joyce (2015: Supplement to §3) defines the term: "The quasi-realist is someone who endorses an anti-realist metaphysical stance but who seeks, through philosophical maneuvering, to *earn the right* for moral discourse to enjoy all the trappings of realist talk." Simon Blackburn, who introduced the term "quasi-realism," similarly introduces "the quasi-realist" (in general, without specific reference to the moral domain) as "a person who, starting from a recognizably anti-realist position, finds himself progressively able to mimic the intellectual practices supposedly definitive of realism" (1993: 4, 15). Note also the similarities between Blackburn's "fast-track" method of supporting quasi-realism and Sellars' argument for it on the basis of his theories of meaning and truth: the fast-track quasi-realist "would make sufficient remarks about truth to suggest that we need a comparable notion to regulate evaluative discourse (even though this is nonrepresentational) and then say that our adherence to propositional forms needs no further explanation than that" (Blackburn 1993: 185).

statements<sup>5</sup> to be expressions of collective intentions of a certain special sort. This explains how, despite his non-cognitivism, Sellars can preserve the genuineness of moral concepts where the emotivists could not. But the story does not end there, since, as I argue in §2, Sellars' functional-role theory of assertoric meaning and his theory of truth as correct assertibility are non-representationalist in character (in a sense to be explained), and so allow expressions of intentions to count as assertorically meaningful and as truth-apt, provided that they exhibit particular sorts of semantic discipline. In Sellars' view, the expressions of collective intentions that constitute our moral statements do exhibit these sorts of discipline. So, despite being fundamentally non-descriptive,<sup>6</sup> our moral statements are truth-apt—and, further, some of them are true—on Sellars' account. Therefore Sellars is not merely a metaethical expressivist but, further, a quasi-realist.

In §3, I take up the question of how my quasi-realist reading of Sellars fits with his scientific realism and his naturalism. In some places, Sellars expresses his scientific realism in ways that seem to rule out quasi-realism about morality. But in §3.1, I argue that the quasi-realist reading is consistent with a sufficiently careful interpretation of these passages, and additionally is required to explain Sellars' repeated assertion that the scientific image of the human being in the world can be completed only once it is enriched by the language of intentions. I provide this claim with further warrant in §3.2 by contending that the quasi-realist reading is able to handle this aspect of Sellars'

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<sup>5</sup> I will use the term “moral statements” to cover those of our moral utterances that have the surface grammar of assertions. I should note, though, that my use of this term isn't a stipulation that the utterances in question should ultimately be analyzed as assertions or as truth-apt; I'm leaving it open whether our “moral statements” are genuine statements in that sense. (I will sometimes use “moral assertions” or speak of our “asserting moral statements” in a corresponding way.)

<sup>6</sup> Of course, Sellars would grant that our moral statements are descriptive in a derivative sense, since he does hold that they are truth-apt; this distinction is analogous to that between generically factual statements and statements that are *matter-of-factual* in Sellars' special sense (SM: ¶¶V.1–2). Hereafter I will sometimes leave such qualifiers as “fundamentally” implicit when talking of moral statements as non-descriptive and non-representational.

thought better than the recent interpretation of Sellars' metaethics offered by Peter Olen and Stephen Turner. This is because it dispels a key assumption that Olen and Turner's interpretation makes, and owing to which the latter struggles to accommodate Sellars' actual statements concerning the relation of normative language to the scientific image. This is their assumption that Sellars takes normative language, or the language of intentions, to be, or at least to presuppose, an explanatory framework that is irreducible to the explanatory frameworks of science. Once freed from this assumption, we can see how Sellars can advocate the completion of the scientific image by the language of intentions without contravening his scientific realism. Thus, as I briefly conclude in §4, the quasi-realist reading is vital for an adequate understanding of Sellars' view not only of metaethics, but of the relationship between the natural and the normative in general. And with respect to this latter issue, at least, it should be of interest not only to interpreters of Sellars' metaethics, but to anyone interested in the viability of Sellars' major philosophical theories.

### **§1. Intentions, 'Ought's, and Sellars' Expressivism**

The broad strokes of Sellars' mature metaethical position are already visible in some of his earliest statements on the topic. As early as 1949, Sellars was arguing that non-naturalist realism about moral obligation was false: in his view, *pace* the intuitionists, "obligatoriness" would not be included in "an inventory of the basic qualities and relations exemplified by this universe of ours" (LRB: 134). While the intuitionists stand alone among then-prominent metaethical thinkers in being "reasonably faithful to the phenomenology of moral thought and experience," they fail precisely in their account of

“the nature of the *ought* which they so rightly find to be central to the moral universe of discourse” (LRB: 134). Emotivism, by contrast, gets “ought” basically right. The error in emotivism is “not [that] the ethical ‘ought’ isn’t *essentially* an expressor and instigator”; rather, its mistake lies in what, specifically, it takes the moral “ought” to express. In Sellars’ view, “what it expresses and instigates is *the observance of a rule*” (LRB: 134). Sellars thus agrees with the intuitionists that moral discourse *feels* to us like something weightier than “even the second cousin of the ‘hurrah’ of a football fan” (LRB: 134), but thinks this can be accounted for by a non-cognitivism that is centered, not on mere emotions or preferences, but on commitments to rules of action—or, as he will later put it, on (conditional) intentions of a particular sort.

At virtually the beginning of his career, then, Sellars held that, if we correctly diagnose the failures of intuitionism and emotivism, we will arrive at an *expressivist* solution. I shall now argue that this expressivist stance informs Sellars’ fullest articulations of his positive metaethical views as well.

Sellars approaches his metaethical position by first giving an account of expressions of intentions and the logical relations between them. The “most fundamental principle” of Sellars’ “logic of intentions” is that there is a connection between having a *volition* to do *A*—that is, an intention to do *A* here and now—and actually doing *A* (ORAV: ¶¶29–30; cf. SM: ¶VII.7). If we follow Sellars in using the term “shall” to represent the expression of an intention (TA: 105n1), then we can say that there is a “conceptually necessary tie” between utterances of the form “I shall now do *A*” and

performances (*ceteris paribus*) of *A* (SM: ¶VII.9).<sup>7</sup> Now, we can have intentions, not only to perform some action, but also that some state of affairs should obtain: we can have intentions about what shall *be* as well as what we shall *do*. But these intentions about what shall be are intentions only owing to their conceptual tie with intentions about what to do: “Roughly, ‘It shall be the case that-*p*’ has the sense, when made explicit, of ‘(*Ceteris paribus*) I shall do that which is necessary to make it the case that-*p*’ (SM: ¶VII.19). On Sellars’ account, these intentions about what shall be serve to connect indicative implications, on the one hand, with the tie between intentions about what to do and action, via the following principle:

*S-Imp*: If ‘*P*’ implies ‘*Q*,’ then “It shall be the case that-*P*” implies “It shall be the case that-*Q*.” (ORAV: ¶47).

The logic of intentions about what shall be, then, derives from the logic of facts through *S-Imp*, and these intentions yield consequences for intentions about what to do and, in turn, for action, via the conceptual links just detailed.

Having grasped these basics of Sellars’ account of intentions, their logic, and expressions of them, we are now in a position to see how he attempts to account for statements about practical obligations in terms of expressions of intentions—specifically, collective intentions of a particular sort. But before considering how he does this for statements about moral reasons, let us consider his account of statements about instrumental reasons, which he treats along similar yet importantly different lines.

Inspired by Hare, Sellars proposes to analyze the schema of hypothetical imperatives

If *S* wants to bring about *X*, he ought to do *Y*

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<sup>7</sup> In turn, Sellars holds, there is a connection, *ceteris paribus*, between intending to do *A* at some later point in time and, at that point in time, having a volition to do *A* (and so, if time *t1* is earlier than time *t2*, between sincerely uttering at *t1* ‘I shall do *A* at *t2*’ and sincerely uttering at *t2* ‘I shall now do *A*’).

as follows:

‘Shall [S brings about X]’ implies ‘Shall [S does Y]’

where this implication derives from *S-Imp* and from the causal necessity, given the circumstances in which S finds herself, of doing Y to bring about X (SM: ¶VII.41). Now, hypothetical imperatives, so analyzed, are obviously binding for all rational agents in a sense: since they are grounded in such causal necessities, they hold good for an agent regardless of what she desires. But they are obviously agent-relative in another sense: any imperative generated in this way will make demands on the agent only contingently, depending on the desires she happens to have. Indeed, on this analysis, there is nothing genuinely *imperatival* about “what are technically (but misleadingly) called hypothetical imperatives” at all (SM: ¶VII.41); such statements do not “tell us what to do,” but rather only “give logical advice” (OMP: ¶¶24–25; cf. IILOR: §6).<sup>8</sup> They do not tell us that either the premise intention or the conclusion intention is reasonable in itself.

This makes it seem as though the moral “ought” cannot be analyzed in terms of “shall”-statements and implication relations between them.<sup>9</sup> For the statement “I ought to do *A*,” as Sellars notes, “makes a positive assessment of the intention expressed by” the

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<sup>8</sup> Sellars thus risks misleading the reader when he suggests that hypothetical imperatives contain “an ‘ought’ which pertains to the coherence of our valuing” (OMP: ¶25; cf. ¶¶33, 37). Hypothetical imperatives assert relations of implication, and so they imply relations of incoherence (OMP: ¶¶19–20). But they do not constitute, but rather only presuppose, imperatives of coherence with respect to intentions.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this seems to be true even of the prudential “ought.” Sellars will attempt to secure the “univocity” of the prudential “ought” by a parallel argument to the one he develops concerning the moral “ought,” but one centered on the idea that the intention “Would that I lived a satisfying life all things considered” is categorically reasonable, since “intentions which are arrived at by taking all relevant considerations into account are, in so far forth, reasonable” (ORAV: ¶123). I do not find this argument convincing, since it fails to explain why the intention in question should be rationally required as against the equally all-encompassing “Would that I lived an *unsatisfying* life, all things considered.” (Of course, few are tempted to adopt this latter intention rather than the former. But this does not in itself help to meet Sellars’ burden, which is to adduce rational rather than psychological considerations that favor the former over the latter.) But in any case, the parallel character of the argument lends support to my thesis that Sellars thinks he can capture the dimension of endorsement in moral “ought”-statements, and thus the univocity of the moral “ought,” without going beyond the strictures of expressivism.

statement “I shall do *A*” (ORAV: ¶100). And it is unclear how this dimension of endorsement could be captured in terms of mere intention-expressions and implication-statements.<sup>10</sup> This is closely related to the problem that, unlike the agent-relative “ought” of hypothetical imperatives, “the moral ought is, *in principle*, unequivocal, i.e. . . . [if] we had ideal knowledge, what we [morally] ought to do would be uniquely determined” (SM: ¶VII.78), not contingent on whether we happen, all things considered, to have egoistic or altruistic ends. And yet Sellars is clear in many places<sup>11</sup> that his position is that “ought is a special case of shall” (IILOR: §12), and so that the moral “ought” as well as the “ought” of hypothetical imperatives is bound up with the simple requirement of consistency concerning our intentions (see OMP: ¶¶33, 37). How can this be?

Sellars’ goal is, in effect, to explain how a moral statement, unlike a hypothetical imperative, can characterize intentions as reasonable in themselves. Let us begin by supposing, with Kant, that *categorical reasonableness* is a practical counterpart of truth: it signifies a rationally non-optional character belonging to some intentions, the way truth signifies the rationally non-optional character of some beliefs.<sup>12</sup> And just as, given an implication relation between two statements and the truth of the antecedent, the truth of the consequent follows, let us suppose that, given an implication relation (derived from *S-Imp*) between two intentions and the categorical reasonableness of the antecedent

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<sup>10</sup> Thus Paul Hurley (2000: §§2–3) suggests that Sellars introduced “shall”-talk only while he held that “all practical reasonableness is relative reasonableness” (p. 298); once he came to accept that there can be categorical reasonableness in the practical sphere, he recognized that “ought”-statements go beyond “shall”-statements (and so, seemingly, cannot be analyzed by them), since they do not merely express intentions but also rationally endorse them. On my reading, Hurley is correct to note that “ought”-statements, unlike “shall”-statements, involve rational endorsement. But Sellars’ constitutivist account of categorical reasonableness enables him to capture this dimension of endorsement without having to deny that “ought” is a special case of “shall.”

<sup>11</sup> Besides other passages throughout IILOR, Sellars states this position explicitly at TA: 106 and SE: 408; see also CDCM: ¶78.

<sup>12</sup> I discuss Sellars’ theory of truth in §2, but see also SM: ¶VII.92.

intention, the categorical reasonableness of the consequent intention follows (see SM: ¶¶VII.102, 104). Then, provided we can identify a non-derivatively categorically reasonable intention, the imperatives derived from it (and from the facts about what circumstances we are in and what causal possibilities they allow for) will not be agent-relative. It is these imperatives that Sellars identifies as the distinctly moral ones. The question is thus how to identify a non-derivatively categorically reasonable intention.

It might seem promising to explain this categorical reasonableness in terms of psychological necessity: an intention that is non-derivatively categorically reasonable for me is one whose contrary I am psychologically unable to adopt, or even one that I am psychologically unable to abandon. But, quite apart from the trouble of deriving the particular imperatives of morality from any intention that is plausibly taken to be psychologically necessary, Sellars refuses to psychologize categorical reasonableness in this way (ORAV: ¶¶119–121). He also considers the possibility that an agent's intention that she shall maximize the general welfare is non-derivatively categorically reasonable. But while he thinks it "a worthy intention," he maintains that "it does not seem to have any feature which calls for the predicate 'intrinsically and categorically reasonable'" (SM: ¶VII.106).

But a very similar intention does have such a feature, Sellars argues: namely, my *collective* intention that *we* shall maximize the general welfare. Sellars thinks he can give a constitutivist account of the nonderivative categorical reasonableness of certain collective intentions like this one, since if the members of the collective in question did not share the collective intention in question, the collective would not exist. To use Sellars' own charming example, if the members of the Whooping Crane Preservation

Society did not share the intention that *we shall promote the survival of the whooping crane*, then there would be no Whooping Crane Preservation Society. From the point of view of a member of the Society, then, it is non-derivatively categorically reasonable to adopt this intention, and derivatively categorically reasonable to adopt any intention entailed by it (via *S-Imp*, together with the empirical and causal facts) (ORAV: ¶¶186–187). Similarly, Sellars argues: “It is a conceptual fact that people constitute a community, a *we*, by virtue of thinking of each other as *one of us*, and by willing the common good *not* under the species of benevolence [i.e. not from a merely individual standpoint]—but by willing it as one of us, or from a moral point of view” (SM: ¶VII.132). By the same logic, then, since the moral community exists only through individuals’ sharing the collective intention to provide for the common good, it is therefore non-derivatively categorically reasonable to adopt this intention, and derivatively categorically reasonable to adopt any intention entailed by it, from the point of view of a member of the moral community.

Just who is included in this community constituted by adopting the moral point of view toward one another? Sellars thinks we can see no reason for refusing to treat any rational subject as “one of us” in this way, and so identifies the moral community with the community of rational subjects (see ORAV: ¶206). This is not to say, of course, that all rational subjects in fact intend from the collective point of view to maximize the general welfare. For Sellars holds that “an individual can have an intention of intersubjective form even if no one else in point of fact shares it,” thereby “think[ing] of himself as a member of such [a] community, even though this community does not actually exist” (SM: ¶VII.143). Accordingly, his expressivist account of our moral

statements as expressions of collective intentions from the point of view of a member of the moral community does not presuppose the actual existence of the moral community, and so is not imperiled by evidence that some people do not actually share the collective intention that would constitute it.<sup>13</sup> (Such evidence does present a problem, however, for establishing the genuineness of the non-derivative categorical reasonableness that those who assert moral statements thereby ascribe to this foundational moral intention—and so for the motivation of quasi-realism, rather than mere expressivism, about the moral. I shall return to this problem in the following section.)

Sellars concludes, then, that given that our adoption of it constitutes the moral community and the moral point of view, the collective intention that *we shall maximize the general welfare* is non-derivatively categorically reasonable for any rational subject to adopt. And so is any intention that this intention entails (via *S-Imp*, together with the empirical and causal facts): the intention that, if any of us in particular circumstances, she shall do what, in those circumstances, will maximize the general welfare; the intention that, since *I* am in those circumstances, I shall do what, in those circumstances, will maximize the general welfare; and so on. And to say this just is to say that we, and I, morally ought to do these things.

We see, then, that Sellars' fully-developed metaethical position makes good on his early idea that “ought” is essentially an expressor, but of plans for action rather than of emotions. On his view, “ought”-statements express collective intentions, and so “ought” is a special case of “we shall” (IILOR: §12). For me to commit to the statement that I ought not to murder, for instance, is to express my intention, *qua* member of the

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<sup>13</sup> As he states explicitly in ORAV: “I am not saying that everybody *shares* this shareable intention. I am simply saying that it defines the moral point of view” (§207).

community of rational subjects, to refrain from murdering as a requirement of the collective intention to provide for the general welfare. This is Sellars' expressivist account of moral statements.<sup>14</sup>

## §2. Inferentialism, Pragmatism, and Sellars' Quasi-Realism

But the story does not end there. For before turning to his extended treatment of metaethics in *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars had already suggested that “the propositions of practical discourse” are truth-apt—that it is no less correct to take “causing pain is *prima facie* wrong” to be true than it is to take “snow is white” to be true (SM: ¶IV.30)—and so that his metaethics supplies an account of “ethical truths” (SM: ¶IV.3). (We shall return to these passages at the end of this section.)

Initially these claims may seem to pose a significant threat to the expressivist reading of Sellars just offered: if Sellars is a non-cognitivist, how can he think it correct to take some moral propositions as true? I think an examination of Sellars' “inferentialist,” functional-role theory of assertoric meaning and his theory of truth as correct assertibility will enable us to give a satisfying answer to this question. For it is these theories that make Sellars' expressivism about moral statements compatible with his claim that they are truth-apt. They show us how, despite his denial that moral

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, not all moral statements are of the form “I ought to do *A*”; we might wonder whether Sellars can adequately account for statements of other forms. He can account for statements of the more general form “*S* ought to do *A*” as expressions of the speaker's intention, *qua* member of the collective, that *S* should do *A* as a requirement of the community's non-derivative collective intention. It is less obvious that he can account for past-tense moral statements, since intentions and their expressions seem essentially present- and future-directed; Sellars discusses this difficulty of “practical discourse in the historical mode” briefly in IILOR: §9, but his discussion is far too brief to resolve it satisfactorily. Finally, Sellars holds that both “‘ought’ and ‘good’ are special cases of ‘shall’” (TA: 106; emphasis added; cf. SE: 408). As far as I am aware, he does not state explicitly his view of how “good”-statements should be analyzed in terms of “shall”-statements, but presumably it would rely on the account of preference in terms of intentions he goes on to give in “Thought and Action.” Thanks to Wes Siscoe for pressing me on this point.

statements are fundamentally descriptive or admit of “factual truth,”<sup>15</sup> Sellars still can hold that moral statements are assertorically meaningful and truth-apt: these theories provide the foundations for his metaethical quasi-realism.

A theory of meaning that is *representationalist*, or centered on “the idea that the function of statements is to ‘represent’ worldly states of affairs, and that true statements succeed in doing so” (Price 2011: 4), would rule out the quasi-realist combination of views that Sellars seeks to defend.<sup>16</sup> For on such a theory, if the central function of a class of (ostensible) statements is not to represent worldly states of affairs, then it follows that those “statements” lack assertoric meaning and are not truth-apt. It is not surprising, then, that we find Sellars rejecting this claim that the function of our language is to direct us toward or to represent reality. We see this, for instance, in the analysis of semantic statements he gives in “Meaning as Functional Classification.” Sellars denies that statements like “*Dreieckig*” (*in German*) means *triangular* predicate relations between linguistic items and objects in the real order,<sup>17</sup> holding instead that such statements provide functional classifications of linguistic items. That is, the proper analysis of

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<sup>15</sup> In a certain stipulated sense of the phrase: for Sellars, matter-of-factual discourse is that which *pictures*—or stands in a particular complicated network of non-semantic relations to objects in—the world. I do not have space to explicate or assess Sellars’ theory of picturing here, but it is obviously an important element of the background of my argument, as it is ultimately what prevents Sellars’ quasi-realism from collapsing into full-blown moral realism. An overview of the theory of picturing may be found in deVries 2005: 50–56, and more extended accounts and discussions may be found in deVries 2010, Rosenberg 2007, and Seibt 2009, to name just a few. For objections to the theory of picturing from one sympathetic to Sellars’ general philosophy of language, see Rorty 1988; for criticism of objections in this general vein, see O’Shea 2010, especially pp. 466–467, as well as Levine 2007 and, from a somewhat different point of view, Seiberth 2018: ch. 4.

<sup>16</sup> The distinction between representationalist and use-theoretic theories of meaning is due to Brandom (1976). (Brandom does not label the non-representationalist approach, but its proponents do seem to be unified in accounting for meaning in terms of proper use or assertion.)

<sup>17</sup> On such a view, the statement predicates a semantic relation (meaning) between a linguistic entity (“*dreieckig*”) and a real, abstract entity (triangularity). But, for one thing, “*dreieckig*” means *triangular*, not *triangularity*. So how can the sentence relate it to triangularity? For another, this account seems to founder on statements like “*Und*” (*in German*) means *and*: what is the abstract entity to which this sentence relates “und”? (Conjunctivity? That seems implausible.) For a fuller rehearsal of the problems in this region, together with a brief sketch of the solution Sellars defends at more length in MFC, see G&E: §XII.

“*Dreieckig*” (in German) means triangular is “*Dreieckig*” (in German) is a •triangular•,<sup>18</sup> where a •triangular• is any item in any language that has the function that “triangular” has in our language. On Sellars’ view, then: “Roughly to say what an expression means is to classify it functionally by means of an illustrating sortal” (MFC: 95). It is not to characterize its purported relations to extralinguistic reality—no such semantic word–world relations really exist<sup>19</sup>—but rather to characterize its use in the language.

Sellars opts, then, for a use-theoretic rather than a representationalist theory of meaning. But if the uses or functions of our linguistic terms should not be characterized in terms of representation, how should we characterize them? Here is Sellars’ answer:

Some of the functions with respect to which utterances are classified are purely intra-linguistic (syntactical), and, in simple cases, are correlated with formation and transformation rules as described in classical logical syntax. Others concern language as a response to sensory stimulation by environmental objects . . . . Still others concern the connection of practical thinking with behavior. (MFC: 85).

The functional roles that constitute an expression’s meaning are, thus, its roles in *language entry transitions* (i.e. responses to perceptual and introspective situations with appropriate linguistic episodes), *intra-linguistic moves* (i.e. moving from one linguistic conceptual episode to another in accordance with rules of formally or materially valid inference), and *language departure transitions* (i.e. responses to linguistic episodes with appropriate non-linguistic behavior) (MFC: 87–88). Statements in which the expression figures will be properly usable by me given some possible commitments, but not given

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<sup>18</sup> Actually, Sellars would want to avoid the apparent reference to a linguistic abstract entity in this sentence’s subject by rendering it instead in terms of either “the ‘dreieckig’” or simply “dreieckig”s. (See MFC: 94.) But this complication is not relevant for my purposes here.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Sellars thinks that not merely meaning, but all “semantic relations” are pseudo-relations, and he offers a parallel treatment of reference (for a brief overview, see deVries 2005: 34–36). Compare Rorty 1988: 151–152.

others; in turn, they will rationally require some further commitments but rationally prohibit others. Similarly, their use may be authorized (or required, or prohibited) by some perceptual circumstances but not others, and they may authorize (or require, or prohibit) some actions but not others. These conditions specifying the proper use of an expression specify its meaning, on Sellars' account: as he remarks in *Science and Metaphysics*, they are semantical rules of criticism (SM: ¶IV.61).

This remark is particularly important because it shows that these rules are precisely the ones in terms of which Sellars defines truth. In Sellars' view:

for a proposition to be true is for it to be assertible, where this means not *capable* of being asserted (which it must be to be a proposition at all) but *correctly* assertible; assertible, that is, in accordance with the relevant semantical rules, and on the basis of such additional, though unspecified, information as these rules may require. . . . 'True', then, means *semantically* assertible ('S-assertible') and the varieties of truth correspond to the relevant varieties of semantical rule. (SM: ¶IV.26).

Sellars defines truth in terms of correct assertibility, where the correctness of an assertion is understood in terms of its authorization by the rules governing the types of transitions just mentioned. A true assertion is one that coheres with the subject's other commitments and perceptual evidence,<sup>20</sup> as well as whatever additional information beyond that possessed by the subject may be required for the determination of the correctness of the assertion.<sup>21</sup> Sellars' criterion for assertoric meaning and truth-aptness, then, concerns not

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<sup>20</sup> Though Sellars never makes this explicit, the paragraphs that follow make clear why the sort of proper assertibility that constitutes truth is concerned only with the rules governing language entry transitions and intralinguistic moves, not those governing language departure transitions.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Williams argues that this is in effect an epistemic theory of truth, "even though it is not stated in obviously epistemic terms." This is because it defines truth in terms of assertibility in accordance with semantical rules, and the semantical rules in question are "thoroughly epistemic" (2016: 232): though they may license me in asserting something false, this is only because they make provision for increases in my information, with the result that truth is proper assertibility in epistemically ideal conditions (2016: 239). But in his manuscript "Sellars, Truth Pluralism, and Truth Relativism," Lionel Shapiro notes Sellars' insistence that to confuse the proper assertibility he identifies with truth with the epistemic notion of *warranted* assertibility is "to confuse truth with probability" (NI: 664). Shapiro argues that the additional

whether a statement represents reality, but only whether semantical rules specify its proper use, which opens the door for fundamentally non-descriptive statements to count as truth-apt.

It might seem like a very short step from this account of truth to the conclusion that our moral statements are indeed truth-apt. For Sellars does think that semantical rules govern the assertibility of our moral statements: our moral statements can be justified or impugned using *S-Imp*, and given the conceptual tie between intention and action, commitment to them can rationally require some actions and rationally preclude others. This might seem of itself to require Sellars to count our moral statements as truth-apt. But this inference is too quick. For Sellars recognizes that some classes of utterances are subject to semantical rules of propriety without being truth-apt. This is true, for instance, of imperatives.<sup>22</sup> More germane to the present discussion, it is true of mere expressions of intention: “shall”-statements generally, as distinct from “ought”-statements. We have seen Sellars hold that there is a “conceptually necessary tie” between utterances of the form “I shall now do *A*” and performances of *A*:

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information in terms of which Sellars defines truth is not constrained by what is accessible to the speaker, either at the time or ideally; it is simply information that an assessor would require to determine whether the assertion complies with the relevant semantical rules.

Given that he grants that Sellars’ theory of truth is not transparently epistemic, the burden of proof thus would seem to fall to Williams to establish that Sellars constrains the correctness conditions specified by semantical rules by reference to the information that is accessible in principle to the speaker. In any case, the point that is important for my purposes—namely, that Sellars defines truth in terms of assertibility licensed by semantical rules, and so allows for the truth-aptness of statements that do not describe entities countenanced by his naturalistic ontology—is orthogonal to this dispute. (Thanks to a reviewer for this journal for prompting me to consider Williams’ position more carefully in light of Shapiro’s, as well as to Shapiro for kindly sharing his manuscript with me and permitting me to refer to it here.)

<sup>22</sup> For, on the one hand, imperatives are subject to something like semantical rules of criticism, which rules specify their meanings. Obviously there is a conceptual tie between the meaning of an imperative and some behavioral output: one who uses imperatives without recognizing that they prescribe some particular behavioral responses and proscribe others uses them incorrectly. But, on the other hand, Sellars insists that there cannot be “reasonings which have imperatives as premise or conclusion” (IILOR: §3)—and so, by an inferentialist criterion of meaning, that they are not assertorically meaningful or truth-apt.

A child who has not acquired the propensity, for example, to raise his hand on saying

*Now I shall raise my hand*

has not learned ‘shall’-talk, and until he has acquired this propensity he cannot be said to understand the full meaning of any practical term[.] (SM: ¶VII.9).

The meaning of practical language, including expressions of intentions, is constituted by its role in language departure transitions, and this role gives rise to rules of criticism for the use of practical language: one who uses it without actually transitioning to a performance of the relevant behavior uses it incorrectly. Nevertheless, Sellars recognizes that “‘Shall’ statements are, as such, neither true nor false” (SM: ¶VII.33), and so maintains that there cannot be a special logic of intentions—that all implications involved in practical inference derive from “inferences pertaining to matters-of-fact,” and so “concern only the *content* of intentions and not their status *as intentions*” (ORAV: ¶52; cf. SM: ¶VII.14i). If moral statements are truth-apt, then, it is not simply because their functions include roles in language departure transitions; they must be governed by semantical rules in a deeper sense than this.

Now, a superficial response to this problem is readily available, as Sellars recognizes: namely, that “ought”-statements admit of external negation while mere “shall”-statements do not. If the Balrog says to Gandalf, “I shall pass,” Gandalf cannot reply, “it is not the case that you shall pass!” Since on Sellars’ regimentation “‘shall’ always expresses an intention, while ‘will’ is always a simple future” (SM: ¶VII.14a), this reply would be infelicitous: the Balrog’s statement must be read not as a simple description of the future, but as an expression of its intention, and a mere intention-expression cannot be negated in this way. It is open to Gandalf to reply with the much more intimidating “you shall not pass!” But this utterance, in Sellars’ view, expresses

only Gandalf's intention to do what is necessary to prevent the Balrog from passing (see SM: ¶VII.20). And so it does not contradict the Balrog's initial "shall"-statement; indeed, Sellars concludes, "*no one* can contradict a 'shall'-statement, not even the person who makes it" (SM: ¶VII.33). But if the Balrog, daunted by Gandalf's resistance, offers the rejoinder that it *ought* to pass, Gandalf can felicitously (if less impressively) reply: "it is not the case that you ought to pass!" And since, as Sellars notes, it would be absurd to allow the form "it is not the case that you ought to do *A*" but not "it is false that you ought to do *A*" (SM: ¶VII.37), that "ought"-statements admit of external negation in this way entails that they are truth-apt.

But this simply pushes the problem back a level: if both "ought"-statements and "shall"-statements serve to express intentions, why should "ought"-statements admit of external negation while "shall"-statements do not? The answer lies in the various types of intersubjectivity of which the particular intentions expressed by moral "ought"-statements admit.<sup>23</sup> We have just seen, in effect, that "shall"-statements made from the individual point of view are necessarily egocentric. If you express the intention to do *A*, I can reply, "you shall do *A*," but this expresses only my intention that *I* do what it takes for you to do *A*; I cannot really share your intention, any more than Gandalf could strictly contradict the Balrog's intention. Not only are mere "shall"-statements thus subjective in form, they further lack a sort of objectivity in that their correct assertibility is not determined by semantical rules. The semantical rules governing language departure conditions do set constraints on their correct use: given that one has made a "shall"-statement, then, *ceteris paribus*, one must perform the corresponding action, or one will

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<sup>23</sup> As we saw above, Sellars explains the intersubjectivity of instrumental "ought"-statements differently, grounding it in the intersubjective bindingness of statements of causal necessity.

have failed to comply with a semantical rule. But this failure need not reflect the incorrectness of one's making the "shall"-statement; what is incorrect may instead be one's failure to act accordingly. In any case, since there are no further semantical rules that tell us whether one's making the "shall"-statement was correct or incorrect in itself, it is clear that, their governance by the semantical rules governing language departure transitions notwithstanding, "shall"-statements lack the sort of governance by semantical rules necessary for the degree of objectivity belonging to truth-apt statements.

Now, the special feature of expressions of intention from the collective point of view, in Sellars' view, is that they can express strictly identical intentions: when you and I, in our capacity as members of the Whooping Crane Preservation Society, each make the impassioned exclamation "we shall do whatever it takes to save the whooping crane!" we express the very same intention, and if a disillusioned member replies that "we shall not do whatever it takes to save the whooping crane!" she contradicts our intention.<sup>24</sup> Not only can we strictly agree and disagree in our collective intentions, but further, Sellars suggests, these (dis)agreements in intention are assessable by intersubjectively binding reasons. In Sellars' view, for two agents to form intentions as members of the same community is for them to share an overarching value to whose realization the community's actions are seen as instrumental. And this is to say that, given the foundational moral collective intention, the semantical rules governing moral "ought"-statements specify an in-principle decision procedure with regard to the community members' specific collective intentions: if they knew all the relevant facts about what actions would be means to their shared end, then they would agree in all their collective

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<sup>24</sup> Thus Sellars holds that "'We would that . . . ' lacks the logical privacy of 'I would that . . .'" (SM: ¶VII.127).

intentions (see SM: ¶¶VII.129–130). It is because expressions of collective intentions are in this way intersubjective in their form and in their objectivity (SM: ¶VII.133) that they are the right sorts of expressions to admit of external negation. They are governed by semantical rules pertaining not merely to language departure transitions but also, at least,<sup>25</sup> to intra-linguistic moves. And they are governed by such rules not merely in that the rules place some constraints on their proper use, but in the stronger sense that they *determine* the propriety of their use in an intersubjectively binding way. This is the sort of governance by semantical rules that suffices to render our moral statements assertorically contentful and truth-apt.

It is now time to return to the problem we flagged in the previous section concerning the question of the universality of the foundational collective intention of the moral community. For someone might object at this point that it is not enough for a statement to be truth-apt that it be governed by an intersubjective decision procedure relative to a foundational premise that is simply assumed; it must further be the case that the premise is one that there is reason to accept, or perhaps even one that cannot rationally be rejected. (Surely it is not true that I, a non-member of the Whooping Crane Preservation Society, am obliged to do what it takes to save the poor bird, simply because there is a collective intention to do so that is non-derivatively categorically reasonable for the society's members to adopt; the truth of this claim would further require some obligation on my part to think of myself as a member of this group.) Is there any reason to think that all persons have such reason to accept the foundational moral intention?

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<sup>25</sup> Brandom (2002) argues that, given Sellars' rejection of an ontological account of the distinction between observable and unobservable objects, he must allow that, in principle, moral statements could properly figure in language entry transitions as well.

In some of his earlier metaethical works, Sellars had claimed that there is, justifying this claim by appeal to what we might call a eudaimonist argument. In a passage that recurs in a number of articles (the first of which was published in 1963; the last, in 1967), he suggests that viewing oneself as a member of the moral community can be directly warranted, not by appeal to any instrumental or egoistic considerations, but only by one's attitude of Roycean loyalty or Christian charity—of seeking the good of each other person for its own sake. This attitude can itself be prudentially justified, however, since “the ability to love others for their own sake is . . . essential to a full life.” And so “*really* intelligent and informed self-love supports the love of one's neighbor, which alone directly supports the moral point of view” (SE: 412; cf. IILOR: §14; OMP: ¶48). Now, there are some problems for Sellars' efforts to defend the rational character of prudential obligations.<sup>26</sup> But assuming that these can be rectified and that the posture of love is indeed essential for a satisfying human life, this argument would amount to a defense of the moral standpoint as rational (and perhaps even rationally required). And so it would complete the argument for the truth-aptness of our moral commitments that is required to establish Sellars' quasi-realism.

It would seem, however, that Sellars lost faith in the eudaimonist argument, or at least in his ability to defend it adequately. For by 1968, in *Science and Metaphysics*, when he treats the question of the actual implicit existence of the moral community, he considers only a different argument that he takes to be Peircean<sup>27</sup>—that thinking of

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>27</sup> I take this to be Sellars' summary of Peirce's argument at the end of his article “Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic” (1869) that an individual's reliance on inductive inference in the short term can be justified only by her identification of herself with the whole community of inquiry and her elevation of its interests above her purely personal ones. In Peirce's judgment: “He who would not sacrifice his own soul to save the whole world is illogical in all his inferences, collectively.” And thus the theory that the human

oneself as rational commits one to thinking of oneself as subject to epistemic norms binding on all rational agents, and that this in turn commits one to thinking of oneself as subject to ethical norms—and deems it “incomplete” (SM: ¶VII.144). He never mentions the eudaimonic argument. And as far as I am aware, in subsequent works he never returned to that argument nor attempted to complete the Peircean one. This suggests that a gap remains in Sellars’ defense of his quasi-realism.

If Sellars’ argument for his quasi-realism leaves some room for doubt, however, I do not think it similarly doubtful that he endorsed quasi-realism.<sup>28</sup> For even after ceasing to espouse the eudaimonist argument, not only does Sellars affirm that moral statements

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individual can only be motivated to act by desires for personal gain or pleasure is “reduced to an absurdity” by “our principles of the objectivity of knowledge” (1869: 81).

<sup>28</sup> The textual evidence below establishes this with respect to *Science and Metaphysics*. One might suggest that Sellars abandoned his quasi-realism in the twelve-year period between that work and “On Reasoning about Values” (1980), since in the latter work, Sellars states that the question “Why should I be moral?” is “a perfectly meaningful one,” without offering even the start of an answer to it (¶208). Does this suggest that Sellars ceased to view the foundational collective intention of the moral community as in any way rationally defensible, and so returned to mere expressivism? I do not think so: in the latter sections of this work, Sellars is attempting to argue only that the idea of a moral point of view (as against an egoistic one) is coherent, and not that this point of view is rationally required, or that the considerations it takes to be reasons are genuinely binding. Thus Sellars’ failure to respond to moral skepticism in this article should be seen as determined by the scope of his argument, and not necessarily as due to a lack of conviction in the possibility of such a response.

I should mention one other possible interpretation of Sellars’ late stance on this point: it may be that he returned to the position suggested in a passage in IILOR that precedes the eudaimonist argument, in which he had suggested that, though our moral discourse *presupposes* the existence of a community with shared collective intentions, it does not *guarantee* this; rather, our moral discourse “set[s] this agreement as a *task*. To abandon the idea that disagreement on moral matters is even capable of resolution is not to retreat to a moral solipsism; it is to abandon the moral framework itself, and to retreat to the language or ‘form of life’ of purely personal intention” (IILOR: §12). If Sellars did ultimately take this to be all that can be said in defense of the moral point of view, then, though I still think it would be fair to describe him as a quasi-realist, we would have to caveat this claim by noting that he accorded very different statuses to the two components of his quasi-realism: while his expressivism resulted from a straightforward analysis of moral discourse, his view of moral discourse as truth-apt would have to be seen as a regulative assumption of the moral point of view itself, one that does not admit of independent justification. But it should be noted that Sellars never returns to this line of thought, either, in his later metaethical writings, so that to my knowledge there is no textual basis for concluding that he eventually came once more to endorse it. Indeed, the very fact that Sellars saw the need to supplement it with the eudaimonist argument when he first put it forward raises the question of whether he could ever have thought it constituted adequate support for the moral point of view on its own. (My thanks to Michael Hicks for suggesting to me this possible Sellarsian response.)

are truth-apt, but he further takes some of them to be positively true. Let us return at last to the passages I flagged at the start of this section (SM: ¶IV.30):

Now it is clear that the above account of truth [as semantic assertibility] applies to all kinds of propositions, ranging from singular state-of-affairs intentions to the propositions of mathematics and even the propositions of practical discourse.

Thus the sequence of license and performance

The •causing pain is *prima facie* wrong• is true (S-assertible)

Causing pain is *prima facie* wrong

is no less correct than

The •2 plus 2 equals 4• is true (S-assertible)

2 plus 2 equals 4

and this, in turn, is no less correct than

The •snow is white• is true (S-assertible)

Snow is white

Sellars affirms here that moral statements are truth-apt—that they are legitimate candidates for truth, and so for authorizing disquotation-performances of the type exemplified above. But he seems to affirm more than this in claiming that the first inference is “no less correct” than the other two: not merely that its conclusion equally follows from its premise, but further that its premise is equally true. And indeed—setting aside the worry discussed in the preceding few paragraphs—his account of moral statements gives him the resources to explain its truth: given the categorical reasonableness of the collective intention to maximize the general welfare and the fact that causing pain will, in the vast majority of cases, detract from the general welfare, *S-Imp* tells us that the intention to refrain from causing pain (except in exceptional cases) is categorically reasonable as well, while the intention to cause pain (except in exceptional cases) is categorically unreasonable. And this grounds the truth of the statements “Refraining from causing pain is *prima facie* right” and “Causing pain is *prima facie*

wrong,” expressions of non-cognitive attitudes though they are—just as quasi-realism maintains.

### §3. The Scientific Image and the Language of Intentions

#### *3.1. The Positive Account*

At this point I have completed my exposition of the quasi-realist reading of Sellars. I have also provided this reading with implicit support by showing how it accounts for an otherwise puzzling juxtaposition of texts, some of which signal support for non-cognitivism and account for moral “ought”-statements as expressions of intentions, and others of which suggest that moral statements are governed by intersubjective semantic and epistemic rules, and so are truth-apt (and some of which are positively true). My remaining task is to provide my reading of Sellars’ metaethics with extraneous support, as well as to demonstrate its broader significance and fruitfulness, by explaining how it can resolve another point of significant tension within Sellars’ philosophy: the relation between his scientific realism and his belief that the language of intentions is necessary to complete the scientific image of humans in the world.

Taking up the issue of Sellars’ scientific realism would be necessary in any case, since it may initially appear to cast serious doubt on the quasi-realist interpretation. After all, the scientific realism that Sellars endorsed is not merely the minimal thesis that true scientific statements and theories do correctly describe reality and so carry metaphysical implications. It is the much stronger claim that—as he famously put the point in the *scientia mensura* passage in “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind”—“in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of

what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not” (EPM: ¶41). My position is that Sellars affirms that there are moral truths, but this position may seem to be contradicted by this passage: is Sellars not saying here that the only correct descriptions of reality are scientific ones? I think that he is, on a metaphysically weighty interpretation of the phrase “descriptions of reality.” But Sellars’ point in introducing a generic notion of truth that can cover “even the propositions of practical discourse” (SM: ¶IV.30), and then distinguishing it from a notion of “factual truth” that covers only broadly empirical truths, not ethical ones (SM: ¶¶V.1–2), is precisely to leave room for the position that, while there are moral truths, they are not “descriptions of reality” in the metaphysically weighty sense on which this would conflict with the *scientia mensura* passage.

This is not the only passage, however, in which Sellars describes his scientific realism in terms that seem to rule out the quasi-realist interpretation. In one passage in *Science and Metaphysics*, he suggests that “the Scientific Realist” holds the view that, in principle, “the language of physical theory . . . could *replace* the common-sense [linguistic] framework in *all* its roles” (SM: ¶V.90). This seems to imply that a Sellarsian scientific realist must hold that all our practical language could (and perhaps ideally would have to) be replaced by an ideal scientific language. Where the quasi-realist reading suggests that there is no conflict between scientific truths and moral truths (since only the former are metaphysically weighty), then, this passage appears to maintain the contrary view that scientific language is privileged to the exclusion of practical language.

But matters cannot be as simple as this. For Sellars repeatedly insists that the language of the ideal scientific description of the world is somehow incomplete in itself, requiring supplementation by practical discourse. The most famous passage in which he

makes this affirmation is the concluding paragraph of “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”:

the conceptual framework of persons is not something that needs to be *reconciled with* the scientific image, but rather something to be *joined* to it. Thus, to complete the scientific image we need to enrich it *not* with more ways of saying what is the case, but with the language of community and individual intentions, so that by construing the actions we intend to do and the circumstances in which we intend to do them in scientific terms, we relate the world as conceived by scientific theory to our purposes, and make it *our* world and no longer an alien appendage to the world in which we do our living. (PSIM: 408).

Sellars makes a similar claim in “Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism.” After asserting that instrumentalism about unobservable entities is false, and that opting instead for scientific realism requires denying the existence of the entities posited by our commonsense worldview (at least, as those entities are conceived by that worldview),

Sellars suggests that these assertions

are to be clarified in terms of the concept of its being reasonable at some stage to abandon the framework of common sense and use only the framework of theoretical science, *suitably enriched by the dimension of practical discourse*. (SRII: 354; emphasis altered<sup>29</sup>).

In a footnote, Sellars clarifies this last point: “This aspect of the situation . . . is illustrated by the practical dimension of such common sense concepts as that of what it is to be a hammer” (SRII: 354n24). I do not take him to be claiming here that the scientific image will require supplementation by the concept (e.g.) of a *hammer*, so that it can describe the existence of hammers as well as the existence of the entities of a mature physics; this claim would contravene his assertion in the preceding passage (from PSIM) that the scientific image does not require supplementation by “more ways of saying what is the case.” Rather, I take him to be claiming that we cannot adequately specify what it is for

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<sup>29</sup> Sellars is primarily concerned in this passage with denying that the aforementioned assertions entail that “the time for scientists to abandon the framework of common sense is *now*” (SRII: 354). Since the point at issue for my purposes is different, I have removed some of Sellars’ italics and added my own.

an entity to be a hammer (in our commonsense framework) in purely descriptive terms. For part of what it is for something to be a hammer is for us to ascribe a certain function to it—to adopt the *intention* of putting it to a particular use (namely, pounding things). So, his claim in this passage comes to the same thing as his claim in the preceding one: in order for us to relate to worldly entities as affording us possibilities for action, we must supplement the ideal scientific description of the world with the language of communal and individual intentions.<sup>30</sup>

The quasi-realist reading is well-positioned to accommodate these passages by explaining both why Sellars believes that the scientific image requires supplementation by the language of intentions as well as how this belief is compatible with his scientific realism. On the quasi-realist reading, Sellars holds that the propositions of practical discourse are fundamentally non-descriptive: that “to use the term ‘ought’ is to prescribe rather than describe” (CDCM: ¶79).<sup>31</sup> This explains why they can supplement the descriptions of the world provided by theoretical science, even if science is the measure of all things in the dimension of describing. And it further explains why they *must*

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<sup>30</sup> I am unsure whether I am disagreeing here with Willem deVries’ reading of this passage. DeVries initially states that he rejects the idea that Sellars means that, in the completed scientific image, “we shall let science do *all* the describing and explaining, and the presence of practical discourse in our language need amount to nothing more than the presence of the intention operator ‘shall’” (2005: 274). I think this is exactly what Sellars means. We see additional evidence for this interpretation, for instance, in “Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities,” where Sellars contends that “neither ‘ought’ nor any other prescriptive description could be used” in a naturalistically acceptable description of the world (CDCM: ¶79). This is precisely the idea that science is to do “all the describing,” to the exclusion of our practical or prescriptive discourse.

But as deVries’ argument against this interpretation progresses, he seems really to be claiming only that it would be much more practical to retain the shorthand term “hammer” than to force all those venturing to the hardware store to utter complex scientific descriptions, supplemented by complex statements about intentions (both individual and collective) for pounding activities. This is clearly correct, but if we take “hammer” to be precisely a shorthand for such an impure description (in which a rudimentary naturalistic description is supplemented by the ascription of a function to—that is, the expression of intentions concerning—the object), then we can accommodate this point within the interpretation of Sellars I am proposing.

<sup>31</sup> But recall footnote 6. Like his denial that moral statements correspond to facts, Sellars’ denial that moral statements are robustly or fundamentally descriptive is grounded in his theory of picturing. See footnote 15.

supplement scientific language: to perform their own distinct functions of prescribing and of expressing intentions. A closer look at the passage from *Science and Metaphysics* that seemed to suggest that the language of physical theory must ultimately supplant our practical language reveals that Sellars is actually claiming only that, against empiricist instrumentalists, “the ‘language entry’ role could be played by statements in the language of physical theory” (SM: ¶V.90): the language of physical theory could play all descriptive roles our commonsense language presently plays, observational as well as theoretical.<sup>32</sup> He is not claiming that it could or must take the place of the language of intentions; on the contrary, he recognizes explicitly that “‘ought’ has as distinguished a role in discourse in discourse as descriptive and logical terms” (CDCM: ¶79). Our need for language to fill this distinct, distinguished role explains why the scientific image cannot be completed until it is suitably enriched by the dimension of practical discourse.

I take it, then, that the quasi-realist reading is motivated in significant measure by its ability to unify these disparate and seemingly incompatible strands of Sellars’ thinking about the relationship between practical language and the ideal scientific description of the world. In the next subsection, I shall further support this conclusion by arguing that this reading is able to perform this task better than another recent interpretation of Sellars’ metaethical writings in general and of this concluding passage of “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” in particular: namely, that put forward in two recent articles by Peter Olen and Stephen Turner (2015, 2016).

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<sup>32</sup> That Sellars’ target is limited in this way is confirmed both by the preceding paragraph, which makes clear that the contrast position at issue is an empiricist instrumentalism, as well as by the following paragraph’s summary of the thesis just defended: “the epistemological thesis that such a direct use of theoretical language *in perceptual response to the world* could stand on its own feet” (SM: ¶V.91; emphasis added).

### 3.2. *Olen & Turner's Account*

I should begin by noting that Olen and Turner take their departure from a detailed reading of Sellars' metaethical writings, especially his earlier ones, against the backdrop of Durkheimian accounts of collective intentionality. I will not be able to do justice to the richness of the background they provide here; I can only sketch its broadest strokes. In both articles, Olen and Turner begin with problems Sellars identifies for the moral syllogism (*Everyone in C ought to do X; I am in C; thus, I ought to do X*): in their earlier article, the intelligibility of sentences like "We disapprove of women smoking, but I don't," which seem to accept the premises of the moral syllogism while rejecting its conclusion; in their later article, Sellars' suggestion in his 1951 article "Obligation and Motivation" that our use of the moral syllogism commits us to an error—or, more specifically, "has stolen a syntactical disguise which can be said to embody [a] mistake" (OM<sub>R</sub>: 515). To account for these problems, they suggest, Sellars looks for inspiration to Durkheim's accommodation of the force of moral ideals in terms of collective intentionality. For Durkheim, moral ideals are feelings or attitudes in a collective consciousness. This explains why the individual perceives them as external sources of obligation, and yet feels their force and generally is motivated to act on them. Thus the spirit of the Durkheimian explanation of morality is revisionary: on such an explanation, our values "are not what they present themselves as; instead, they are social facts, facts of collective life, which appear to us in the guise of objective values" (Olen and Turner 2015: 4–5).

Sellars wants to retain this social rather than ontological foundation for our moral language, but without appealing to the notion of a collective consciousness or group

mind. He begins the task of articulating this social foundation in “Obligation and Motivation,” which is the work that figures centrally in Olen and Turner’s exposition in their later article, “Was Sellars an Error Theorist?” (2016). In “Obligation and Motivation,” Sellars argues that in its basic use, “ought” simply expresses a motivational tendency to perform a particular action in particular circumstances based on the thought of everyone’s doing so. Sometimes we make statements of the form “everybody ought to do X,” but this cannot be a premise from which we licitly infer statements of the form “I ought to do X.” On the contrary: “It is because ‘Everybody doing X (in circumstances C)’ plays a motivational role in my conduct [which motivation would be expressed through my uttering ‘I ought to do X’] that there is such a significant sentence as ‘Everybody ought to do X’” (OM<sub>R</sub>: 514). Yet in fact we do come to infer statements of the form “I ought to do X” from corresponding statements of the form “Everybody ought to do X”: as Sellars puts it,

the word “ought” . . . has stolen a syntactical disguise which can be said to embody the mistake of thinking of *ought* not only as a unique relation between myself and an action, but one which is objective and independent of me in that it holds between *me* and *my doing X* because it holds between *everybody* and *their doing X*. . . . To put the matter in a paradox: the *mistake* of thinking of *ought* as a *sui generis* relation is essential to the *correct* use of the word “ought.” (OM<sub>R</sub>: 515).

It is natural to read the last sentence of this quote as Sellars’ endorsement of an error theory like that proposed by J. L. Mackie (1977), on which “ought”-statements are descriptions of non-natural, normative relations, but are all false, since there are no such relations. And this impression initially seems to be confirmed by Olen and Turner’s stated thesis that “Sellars should be read as advocating a kind of error theory about moral and practical reasoning” (2016: 2054). As they go on to draw together Sellars’

discussions of error in “Obligation and Motivation” thoroughly and to link them back to their roots in Durkheim’s “error theory about values” (ibid.: 2063), they may seem to be ascribing to Sellars a view like Mackie’s that, in virtue of its cognitivism, is straightforwardly incompatible with the quasi-realist interpretation I have been arguing for.

In fact, however, Sellars did not mean to be endorsing an error theory of Mackie’s sort,<sup>33</sup> nor do Olen and Turner interpret him as holding such a view. Sellars’ distance from such a view is especially clear in the expanded version of “Obligation and Motivation,” published the following year (1952). While he concluded the first version with the rather incendiary conclusion that “the *mistake* of thinking of *ought* as a *sui generis* relation is essential to the *correct* use of the word ‘ought’” (OM<sub>R</sub>: 515), in the later version, he concedes that “strictly speaking, it is not true to say that a mistake is involved in the correct use of the word ‘ought’” (OM<sub>R</sub>: 517). What is a mistake is not simply to make moral statements, but rather to misinterpret them as descriptions of worldly entities called *obligations*. For what they really are is non-cognitive expressions of our *feeling obligated* (ibid.). Sellars, then, indeed adopts an “error theory” of Durkheim’s sort, on which our values are social facts rather than the non-natural, normative entities most of us prereflectively take them to be. But the error it posits is not part and parcel of our making moral statements; rather, it arises only with our giving them the cognitivist interpretation characteristic of “common-sense moral consciousness”

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<sup>33</sup> I go on to argue for this claim by examining Sellars’ clarifications of his position in the expanded version of “Obligation and Motivation.” It is thus open for someone to object that Sellars might have endorsed an error theory of Mackie’s sort in the 1951 version of the paper, expanding the paper to revise his view rather than simply to state it more felicitously. But given that, as we have seen, Sellars had already signaled his support for an expressivist stance two years earlier, in his 1949 “Language, Rules, and Behavior,” I think it is more plausible to read the expansion of “Obligation and Motivation” as intended to clarify his position in the original version rather than to correct it.

(*ibid.*). Thus we can use the “language of norms”—that is, can make “ought”-statements characterized by the inferential relations codified in the moral syllogism—without *ipso facto* falling prey to this error. And so, Olen and Turner note, Sellars sets himself the task of offering “an alternative explanation of the ‘language of norms’ that exhibits the inferential relations found in the [moral realist’s] conception of obligation without its problematic ontological commitments” (2016: 2055).

He was to arrive at such an explanation in his later metaethical writings via his positive account of the social phenomena that actually do ground individual feelings of obligation and dispositions to act morally. These, of course, are collective intentions. The appeal to collective intentions explains the intelligibility of sentences like “We disapprove of women smoking, but I don’t,” since the former conjunct can be accounted for as the expression of a collective intention and the latter, as that of a contrary individual intention. And yet, if Sellars’ case for the rationality of the moral point of view (and so the implicit universality of the moral community) holds good, then given the in-principle decision procedure that the foundational moral intention grounds, such sentences would not be intelligible with respect to the moral community (at least in an ideal informational situation); his account has the resources to close this intuitively problematic gap between individual and collective intentions in the moral case.<sup>34</sup> The result is that, as Olen and Turner suggest (2016: 2069), if the universality of the moral community were established, then the moral syllogism would indeed be licensed. It seems, then, that the error Sellars follows Durkheim in positing as central to prereflective moral thinking concerns only the ontology our moral thinking is mistakenly taken to

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<sup>34</sup> See Olen and Turner 2015: 8n3.

require, not our asserting moral statements or inferring according to the moral syllogism as such. In accounting for our moral statements as expressions of collective intentions, we do not overlook this error; on the contrary, we find the resources that warrant us in maintaining that—assuming the rationally non-optional character of membership in the moral community—in an ideal state of information, such error would dissipate. Thus far, then, their language of “error theory” notwithstanding, I take Olen and Turner’s rich and detailed account of the sort of error Sellars identifies in our moral language and practices to be quite compatible with the quasi-realist reading of Sellars.<sup>35</sup>

Where Olen and Turner incur commitments that set them to some degree against the quasi-realist reading—in a way that will be important for interpreting the conclusion of “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”—is in their claim that, for Sellars, expressions of intentions presuppose a level of explanation irreducible to the scientific: in this case, to that of behavioral psychology. They note that Sellars is adamant that, though use of the language of intentions presupposes that one is disposed to act accordingly, the intention itself—which, on Sellars’ account, just is the thinking of, or being disposed to think, the corresponding “shall”-statement—is not identical to one’s disposition to act (see IILOR.: §10). They take this “not identical but presupposes” model to be a version of Marx’s base–superstructure model, on which “the superstructure”—in this case, intentions and expressions of them—“is ‘tied’ to behaviour, which is to say the subject matter of the behavioural sciences, but not exhausted by behaviour” (2015: 10). And they connect this model to Sellars’ claim that the language of intentions is a discourse that is

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<sup>35</sup> This is what we should expect, since Olen and Turner commit themselves to the quasi-realist reading’s two major theses. They note both that Sellars analyzes moral statements as expressions of collective intentions (2015: 13; 2016: 2064–2065), and also that he does hold that “there is truth and falsity with respect to obligation” (2016: 2059).

“causally reducible but logically irreducible” (SSMB: 230); somewhat surprisingly, they take this claim to concern not the possibility of *analyzing* intentions (i.e. thinking “shall”-statements) in non-normative terms, but the possibility of *explaining* them in such terms.<sup>36</sup> Their judgment is that Sellars “acknowledges a body of behavioural fact without which there would be no . . . rational action, but wishes to retain a level of explanation that is somehow irreducible to such behavioural fact yet needed to explain . . . rational action” (2015: 10). On this model: “Collective intentions would no longer be in the realm of the scientifically factual, but would be necessary for the explanation of human action because of their role in the logic of certain utterances” (ibid.: 11).

If Olen and Turner take Sellars to regard the framework of intentions as an explanatory framework that is irreducible to scientific ones, it makes sense that they think he is committed ultimately to rejecting it in favor of scientific ones. In the concluding section of “Was Sellars an Error Theorist?” they note that some interpreters<sup>37</sup> have read Sellars as compromising on the status of prescriptive discourse, maintaining that it is logically irreducible to descriptive discourse but that all human behavior can be explained in naturalistic terms. This proposal, which, against Olen and Turner, treats the special status of prescriptive discourse as a question concerning analysis rather than concerning explanation, is quite consonant with the quasi-realist reading. Olen and Turner reply that the compromise is not clearly consistent with Sellars’ commitment to naturalism; his scientific realism “entails an eventual replacement of the common sense framework of persons (the explanatory framework which contains moral values, individual and collective intentions) ‘in *all* its roles’ with the scientific image of man” (2016: 2070; the

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<sup>36</sup> Some may have doubts about the viability of such a distinction; I shall say something by way of addressing these in footnote 39.

<sup>37</sup> They single out Willem deVries and James O’Shea (Olen and Turner 2016: 2070n66).

internal quote is from the passage from SM: ¶V.90 considered above). Now, at the beginning of this section, I argued that, read in context, the passage from Sellars that Olen and Turner quote here does not establish that scientific language can or should replace the language of intentions. But the interesting point is why Olen and Turner reject this compromise: they clearly take the language of intentions and values to be part of, or to presuppose, an *explanatory* framework.<sup>38</sup> And since Sellars thinks science is the measure of all things in the dimension of explaining the world, they conclude that he is committed to rejecting this framework in favor of a purely scientific one: “The status of shared intentions as located within the manifest image would indicate that they could eventually be read as unnecessary explanatory devices” (2016: 2072).

This line of thought explains Olen and Turner’s ambivalent account of the conclusion of “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man.” They grant that, in that passage, Sellars seems to suggest that the final scientific picture of the world will not render normative language dispensable. (Indeed, he goes further in claiming that the language of intentions is necessary to *complete* the scientific image.) They thus concede that “normative standards of correctness would always remain a part of discourse insofar as anyone is saying or doing anything as agents in the world,” since “it is difficult to see how practical discourse—a dimension of discourse that is not explaining, but guiding, behavior—could continue without such standards” (2016: 2073). But once this is conceded, it is unclear why they think the fusion of the manifest image’s framework of

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<sup>38</sup> On the next page, they state this outright, characterizing O’Shea’s interpretation as attributing to Sellars the claim that “Normativity and practical reasoning, as *sui generis* categories of explanation, are needed to account for everyday human agency and action, despite their omission from the final *theoretical* description of the world” (2016: 2071). It makes sense that they would oppose this position: if normativity is really an explanatory category, then there is no basis for exempting it from competition with scientific explanatory categories to earn its keep in an ideal description of the world.

normative language with the scientific image nevertheless “discards [these] parts of the manifest image as error” (ibid.). For to recognize with the quasi-realist reading that the proper function of such language in practical discourse is to remove any conflict between it and the scientific image, as well as to remove any grounds for impugning it as essentially involving an error. On the contrary, in recognizing this, we see how such language can complete the scientific image without constituting another “way of saying what is the case”: the language of intentions does not describe or explain the world—even our behavior, linguistic or otherwise, within it—but rather enables us to “relate the world as conceived by scientific theory to our purposes, and make it *our* world” (PSIM: 408).

Olen and Turner might well reply that none of this conflicts with their central contention, which is that the sort of stereoscopic fusion of the manifest and scientific images Sellars advocates does not involve endorsing a non-scientific explanatory framework appealing to normativity to account for human behavior. And this reply would be quite right: they are correct that, on Sellars’ account, the ideal scientific description of human beings would mention our prescriptive discourse, citing our feelings of obligation as explanations of our actions, but would not use such discourse or cite obligations themselves as explanations. But my suggestion is that this contention should never have seemed controversial; after all, the interpretation of Sellars as compromising on the status of prescriptive discourse, which Olen and Turner were inclined to reject, seems designed to accommodate it. For it holds, on the one hand, that prescriptive discourse is logically irreducible to—and practically irreplaceable by—descriptive discourse but that, on the other hand, discourse of the latter sort suffices for the causal explanation of our behavior,

neither requiring nor permitting supplementation by discourse of the former sort. Once the quasi-realist reading dispels the idea that Sellars thinks normative language constitutes or presupposes a non-scientific explanatory framework, then we can accommodate Olen and Turner's central contention without having to interpret Sellars' insistence on the ineliminable and indispensable role of practical discourse as "paradoxical" (2016: 2072). We need not interpret this insistence in passages like the conclusion of "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" as Sellars' endorsement either of a substantive fusion of the scientific image with a body of normative explanations that he nevertheless dismisses as erroneous, on the one hand, or of the mere mentioning of normative expressions within the ideal scientific description, on the other. We can read it in the most natural way: as advocating the supplementation of the ideal scientific description with purely practical language for purely practical purposes.

Of course, this view of the matter requires a quasi-realist reading of Sellars' claim that the language of intentions is logically irreducible (though causally reducible), one on which it does not entail according that language an autonomous explanatory role. In "Was Sellars an Error Theorist?" Olen and Turner return to this claim, again posing a "tension between Sellars' commitment to scientific realism and his insistence that prescriptive discourse . . . is 'logically irreducible yet causally reducible'" (2016: 2073). But I do not think this formula really accords the linguistic framework of intentions the explanatory role Olen and Turner suggest: in the article in which Sellars argues that moral discourse is causally reducible but logically irreducible, he clearly states that the logical irreducibility of the moral is simply "the [in]definability of Ought in descriptive terms": the causal reducibility of "ought" to "is" entails that "one can give a causal

explanation of the history of moral agents without making ethical assertions” (SSMB: 222–223). *Pace* Olen and Turner, the logical irreducibility of the normative endorsed by Sellars is a thesis about analysis, not explanation; it carries no implication that the framework of intentions plays any role independent of behavioral science in the explanation of our agency.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This distinction between analysis and explanation is obviously the linchpin of my reading of the relation Sellars posits between the natural and the normative. It is because our “ought”-statements cannot be analyzed in naturalistic, descriptive terms that Sellars can preserve the boundary between the natural and the normative (reflected in his statement that “‘ought’ has as distinguished a role in discourse in discourse as descriptive and logical terms” [CDCM: ¶79], and consequently in his claim that the scientific image must be enriched with the language of intentions for it to be complete). And it is because our acts of making “ought”-statements can be fully causally explained without appeal to any non-natural facts or entities that Sellars can maintain that this boundary between the natural and the normative does not compromise the ontological naturalism to which he commits himself in, e.g., the *scientia mensura* passage. Thus it is natural for readers to wonder whether this distinction can really bear all the weight I take Sellars to place on it.

In reply, if Sellars held that “ought”-statements could not be analyzed in naturalistic, descriptive terms for the reasons that the intuitionists held this, then there would indeed appear to be a problem with his attempting to maintain at the same time that our practice of making normative assertions could be fully causally explained in naturalistic terms. If the reason our normative statements cannot be analyzed in naturalistic terms were that they posit non-natural facts or entities, then it would be unclear how we could be warranted in making any such statements without having epistemic access to these facts or entities. And it is not obvious, to say the least, how such access could be secured by the naturalistic causal processes that give rise to our normative assertions. If such a causal explanation of our normative assertions were not incomplete, then, seemingly it would undermine the warrant we have to make such assertions. Therefore, while an error theory on which all our normative statements are false—or at least unwarranted—could easily affirm that such statements are logically irreducible but causally reducible to natural ones, it is certainly not clear that a moral realist could be warranted in affirming this. By contrast, Sellars analyzes “ought”-statements as expressions of intentions, and so as fundamentally non-descriptive. But then it seems straightforward, or even trivial, to hold that such “statements” cannot be analyzed in descriptive terms, and yet that agents’ utterances of such “statements” can be fully causally accounted for in naturalistic terms. This should seem no more mysterious than that my utterance that “I shall go to the Penguins game tomorrow”—following Sellars in reading this as an expression of an intention, rather than a self-ascription of one or a prediction of my future behavior—cannot be analyzed in naturalistic, descriptive terms (since any such would-be *analysans* will be truth-apt, as this utterance is not), without this having the least tendency to show that my utterance cannot be fully causally explained in naturalistic terms. (I do not see that normative statements’ exhibiting the sorts of semantic discipline that “earn us the right” to talk of them as descriptive and truth-apt conflicts with this point.) Thus, on Sellars’ account of normative statements, they do seem to constitute utterances whose making can be explained in naturalistic terms, but that cannot be analyzed in such terms.

But a deeper worry might be raised at this point: even if a *prima facie* case can be made for the distinction between analyzing our normative statements and explaining our acts of making them, what is the point of Sellars’ account of our normative language, if not to explain our practices or our behavior? For one thing, I don’t think Sellars’ quasi-realist account is totally orthogonal to the project of explaining our normative practices or language-use: it bears on that project at two points. First, it provides a general orientation for this project: by analyzing moral statements as expressions of collective intentions, Sellars suggests to us that an adequate causal explanation of our uses of normative language will centrally make

Indeed, while Sellars does endorse the central thesis that Olen and Turner attribute to him—that the ideal scientific description would only mention normative terms, not use them—he states clearly that this thesis is grounded not in a substantive rejection of the explanatory presuppositions of our normative language, but in a simple “logical point about what is to count as a description *in principle* of the world”:

For, whereas in ordinary discourse to state what something *is*, to describe something as  $\varphi$  (e.g., a person as a criminal) does not preclude the possibility that an ‘unpacking’ of the description would involve the use of the term ‘ought’ or some other prescriptive expression, naturalism presents us with the ideal of a *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. (CDCM: ¶79).

Sellars makes no suggestion that the use of prescriptive expressions either constitutes or presupposes an erroneous reliance on a non-scientific explanatory framework. The reason such expressions must only be mentioned rather than used in the ideal scientific description is no more interesting than “the tautology ‘The world is described by descriptive concepts,’” not by prescriptive ones. Prescriptive expressions are “not *inferior*” to, “just *different*” from, descriptive ones; they have a distinct discursive role,

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reference to the causal processes that give rise to and disseminate collective intentions. But second, it justifies naturalistic constraints on this explanatory project: in showing that the meanings of our normative statements and the phenomenologies of agency and of normative judgment can be accounted for without violating naturalistic ontological strictures, it justifies us in maintaining those strictures in the project of causally explaining our normative utterances. In my view, then, the best answer to this deeper worry is to say that the point of Sellars’ account of normative language is to open space for this naturalistic explanatory project by showing that we can do justice to the distinctive logical and phenomenological features of normative language and its use without compromising our ontological naturalism. And since, in Sellars’ view, doing justice to these phenomena requires maintaining such *endoxa* as that “ought”-statements cannot be analyzed in terms of descriptive ones; that they are truth-apt; and that they express weightier states of mind than simple emotions, his quasi-realist account of them is in harmony with—because the necessary precursor to and warrant for—the naturalistic explanatory project, not in tension with it. (Thanks to a reviewer for this journal for pushing me to think more carefully about the analysis/explanation distinction and the purpose it serves.)

one just “as distinguished . . . as descriptive” terms (ibid.)—and one it would be foolish to suppose that descriptive terms could, or need to supplant.

This passage does raise one final, important question. For it suggests that manifest image descriptions of things may smuggle in normative implications. Indeed, this is certainly true of “the primary objects of the manifest image”: namely, persons (PSIM: 378). In joining the manifest image’s conceptual framework of persons to the scientific image, then, will we not be smuggling a metaphysical commitment to normativity into a scientific description? If so, must we not grant with Olen and Turner that the fusion of the images does require regarding aspects of the manifest image that the fusion necessarily preserves as nevertheless rooted in error? This might be true if there were no prospect of disentangling the factual and the normative, descriptive and expressive, elements of the concepts of the manifest image. But this is precisely what Sellars denies in the conclusion of “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man.” That the normative components of manifest image concepts cannot be reconstructed in terms of scientific image ones is precisely why the former pose no threat to the integrity of the latter: with regard to persons, for instance, though the category cannot be reconstructed in scientific terms, this is only because

to recognize a featherless biped or dolphin or Martian as a person is to think of oneself and it as belonging to a community. Now, the fundamental principles of a community . . . are the most general common *intentions* of that community with respect to behaviour of members of the group. It follows that to recognize a featherless biped or dolphin or Martian as a person requires that one think thoughts of the form, ‘We (one) shall do (or abstain from doing) actions of kind A in circumstances of kind C’. To think thoughts of this kind is not to *classify* or *explain*, but to *rehearse an intention*. (PSIM: 408).

The manifest image largely deals with human persons. The scientific image cannot reconstruct this concept in its own terms: it can reconstruct our concept of a human or a

featherless biped, but it cannot reconstruct the remainder, the core of our concept of a person. But this is simply because *person*, rightly understood, is not an explanatory category, but rather a *practical stance* we adopt toward entities: what the scientific image cannot capture in our taking something to be a person is not our endorsing some description of it, but rather our adopting some intention toward it.<sup>40</sup> Thus, as the quasi-realist reading suggests, Sellars takes the normative elements of the manifest image that enrich the scientific image to be purely expressive, not descriptive or explanatory. It is this that explains why the fusion of the framework of persons with the scientific image is only a joining, not a reconciliation. And it is the practical necessity, not merely of knowing the ideal scientific description of the world, but of being able to relate to it as *our* world—and so of being able to regard each other as persons, and to achieve our collective purposes, within it—that makes this fusion necessary for the scientific image to be complete.

#### §4. Conclusion

The quasi-realist interpretation of Sellars' metaethics is recommended, first and foremost, by its ability to reconcile Sellars' expressivism about moral statements with his commitment to the truth of some moral claims while remaining consonant with the texts of his relevant writings. This, in my view, is no mean feat. But we can now see that the account's potential for illuminating Sellars' writings goes significantly further. For it also suggests a way forward on perhaps the central problem for interpreting Sellars: how to

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<sup>40</sup> Here I take my account to agree with deVries' claim that, for Sellars, "persons are practically real, although not fundamental ontological realities," and that this practical reality is "a matter of the truth of prescriptive and normative claims, and that, in turn, is a matter of recognized, intersubjectively held, intersubjectively applicable, shared intentions" (2005: 277).

reconcile Sellars' scientific realism with his commitment to the ineliminable and indispensable character of normative discourse. The quasi-realist reading enables us to see that this commitment does not involve positing any non-scientific entities or explanatory frameworks, and so that it is quite consistent with the core Sellarsian stance of looking to science as the measure of all things in the dimension of describing and explaining the world.

And here is where the interpretation is of not merely exegetical but also some philosophical interest. Quasi-realism is already a well-established contender in metaethics. It is a noteworthy historical fact that Sellars anticipated better-known accounts of this sort, and those interested in such accounts may be interested to examine the details of Sellars' collective intentions-centered variation. But I am not sure whether Sellars' version of metaethical quasi-realism has the resources to influence substantially the current debate over the general merits of, and key challenges for, the position. On the other hand, the philosophical viability of many of Sellars' stances seems to hinge on his ability to find a satisfactory account of the relationship between the natural and the normative. His account of meaning in terms of normative functional roles (and, by extension, his metalinguistic nominalism) may be attractive, but can they fit within a naturalistic ontology constrained from positing irreducibly normative entities? We may be tempted towards his strong scientific realism, but since scientific theories are "the products of persons," while Sellars' scientific realism "den[ies] persons . . . full-blooded ontological reality" (deVries 2005: 277–78), is there not a contradiction at its very heart? A fully worked out Sellarsian quasi-realism about the normative in general would enable us to take at least a substantial step toward solving such puzzles, showing us that neither

the norms underlying Sellars' theory of meaning and his nominalism nor the conceptual framework of persons (once it is rightly analyzed) requires an ontological foundation that would conflict with naturalism. Anyone interested in the viability of such Sellarsian stances, then, should be similarly interested in Sellars' quasi-realism, both as he himself expressed it and as it might be fully and fruitfully developed in the future.

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