Week 7 Notes
Sellars's Metalinguistic Expressivism about Alethic Modality

<u>Plan</u>:

I.   Recapitulating the history of philosophical understanding of alethic modality.

II.   Sellars's revival of Kant's understanding of modal concepts as *categorial*.

III.   Sellars: Alethic modal vocabulary makes explicit the inferential articulation of descriptive concepts, which is essential for their role in *explanations*.

IV.   Metalinguistic account and its challenges. A project to extend Sellars.

V.   Sellars's actual defense of metalinguistic account is to appeal to *pragmatic* metalanguages.

VI.   Is *pragmatic* account of what one is *doing* in using modal vocabulary actually inconsistent with a *representationalist semantic* account of what one is *saying*?

I.

1. Tell the opening story from "**From Hume and Quine to Kant and Sellars**."

a) The empiricist critique of modal claims/concepts.
   i.   Hume. Quine.
   ii.   Hume: He couldn't see how we could come to *know* more than what *actually* happened, not about *possibilities* that did *not* actually happen—a distinction within what did *not* happen between what merely *contingently* did not happen, and what *could* not happen, what *necessarily* did not happen.

nor (especially) about *necessities*, in the sense that only *some* of what *actually* happened *had* to happen.

This is partly down to his narrow, extremely straitened conception of what he could observe-experience.

But the demand that we explain how we could *justify* making such a distinction, drawing such a line, is not only legitimate, but is deep and important. (Think about what your answer is, off the top of your head.)

   iii. This issue is couched in *epistemological* terms, but is revealed as being at base a *semantic* critique: it is the intelligibility of the concepts that is being challenged.

The epistemic issues show that we don't know what we are *saying* when we use these concepts. To put it this way is anachronistic, since

Semantics wasn't really distinguished from epistemology before Kant.

   iv.   It was by Quine's time, but he basically rejected the distinction in "Two Dogmas."

The pragmatist successor notion is that we cannot make sense of linguistic expressions (or psychological Rylean psychological states of Jonesean mental episodes) *having* contents identified and individuated more finely than they can be by the *use* of those expressions (the functional roles of the states/episodes).

   v.   But here Sellars is strong: we do *treat* some implications as (more) subjunctively robust than others. As Goodman points out, I do *not* think it follows from all the coins in pocket being copper that *if* any other coin (this quarter) *were* in my pocket it *would* be copper. While we *do* think that it follows that any coin in my pocket *would* melt at 1084° C..
   vi.   Quine in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" finds that a small circle of modally involved terms are used to interdefine (or at least, *interrelate* in a way one might seek to exploit in definitions) each other. He points out that this does not evidentially connect them to terms outside that circle.

b) The three-fold modal revolution of the '60s and '70s:

i.   C.I. Lewis and modal logic in the 'teens. (Recall that he was Quine's and Sellars's teacher.)

ii.   Quine:

- All of Hume's epistemological questions are live. "The Humean predicament is the human predicament." (from "Epistemology Naturalized")
- Extensional logic, the logic of *Principia Mathematica* and Tarskian model theory, *is* logic. And, with the Vienna Circle, he takes it that logic must be what binds together 'atoms' of sensory observation.
- Quine on modal logic as "engendering an illusion of understanding." For Quine:

Axioms S4, S5, but what do they *mean*?

S4: $\Box A \Rightarrow \Box\Box A$.

S5: $\Diamond A \Rightarrow \Box\Diamond A$.

iii.   Carnap:

"In the early 1940s the recognition of the semantical nature of the notion of logical truth led Rudolf Carnap to an informal explication of this notion in terms of Leibnizian possible worlds. At the same time, he recognized that the many syntactical advances in modal logic from 1918 on were still not accompanied by adequate semantic considerations. One notable exception was **Gödel's interpretation of necessity as provability and the resulting preference for** S4. Carnap instead thought of necessity as logical truth or analyticity." [SEP]

iv.   Phase 1: Kripke's semantics for modal logic.

v.   Phase 2: Montague, Kaplan, Lewis, Partee, Stalnaker on intensional semantics for nonlogical expressions. (Cf. the 1970 Harman and Davidson volume *Semantics of Natural Language*)

vi.   Phase 3:

- Kripke's 1971 *Naming and Necessity,* drawing *metaphysical* conclusions from *semantic* arguments. His starting-point is a critique of Carnap's running together of necessity and analyticity in *Meaning and Necessity* (hence Kripke's title). Quine in "Two Dogmas" had not rejected this assimilation, taking it for granted. But had rejected the two together.
- David Lewis's modal metaphysics (developed from his semantics).

c) It is worth dwelling a bit on just how astonished philosophers of the time when Sellars was writing CDCM would have been at the fact that, while for them modal claims were among the fishiest and most philosophically puzzling of all, now when faced with a philosophical problem, about intentionality, semantics, or normativity, the very first move is to try to use *modal* tools to analyze it.

What happened to *justify* this gigantic change in attitude?

d) **Rorty**'s disgusted response to the *volte face* by his Quine-trained Princeton colleagues. It confirmed his conviction that academic philosophy ultimately ran on fads and fashions rather than reasons. The shiny new machinery ("powerful modern methods") was all it took for people to want to play with it.

As to the first point, I think there is a widespread tendency to think that, to paraphrase **Alexander Pope:**

Modality and Nature's laws lay hid in night, God said: "Let Kripke be!" and all was light.

    i.   That machinery did not *in any way* respond to the Hume-Quine empiricist reasons to be skeptical about the epistemological credentials, and therefore the ultimate intelligibility of alethic modal notions.

           His colleague David Lewis thought of possible worlds as *concreta*, just like the actual world ("after all, we can't tell which possible world *is* actual—that would requiring knowing *everything* that is true."), but causally disconnected from it. But how, then can we *know* anything about them.

           Lewis is not good on the *epistemology* of possible worlds.

           And others, like Stalnaker, take merely possible worlds to be *abstracta*.

           But then, what is the story about how we know *them*?

           It seems as though people just stopped worrying about the epistemology of modal claims.

    ii.   It was circular, in that it used a modal notion, <u>possible world</u> to explain other modal notions: <u>necessary</u>, <u>possible.</u>

    iii.   And as for explaining S4 and S5, no-one had *any* good idea what the crucial relation of "accessibility" meant. Even today, what is the metaphysics of accessibility of one world to another?

           (See below.) In particular, its claim to have offered an *extensional* (and so, Quine-acceptable) semantic *meta*vocabulary for modality, while technically true—modal operators in the object language become first-order quantifiers in the semantic metalanguage—was conceptually mere sleight-of-hand, deeply unresponsive to the principled objections of the empiricists. For the objectionable modal notions are just treated as *primitive* in the semantics, built into the notion of *possible* world.

e) They say 2 things:

    i.   *Extensional I*: in that we trade *intensional* modal operators in for extensional quantifiers (over accessible possible worlds), and

    ii.   *Extensional II:* We specify each world in purely extensional terms (terms that appeal only to how things are at that world), and then show how to define intensional terms, whose applicability turns on how things are at *other* worlds.

           Claim: The possible-worlds conceptual apparatus *does* show us how to leverage an understanding of *non*modal, OED vocabulary, into an understanding of modal

vocabulary. For each possible world is thought of as specified entirely in terms that are nonmodal, in the sense that their truth conditions depend *only* on how things are at the world we are evaluating their applicability at. You don't need to look at other possible worlds to tell whether (or say whether) *this* box is made of wood, or is rectangular, or the coin is made of copper. Then, on that *extensional* basis, we can introduce *modal* vocabulary that is *intensional*, in that whether or not *it* applies at a world depends not only on how things are at *that* world, but also on how things are at *other*, related worlds. That is the difference between Leo the lion merely *being* a mammal (extensional) and its *necessarily* being a mammal (is a mammal in all the worlds in which it exists), or between its *being* alive at time t and its *possibly* being dead at that time (if it had been struck by lightning at t-1). Even if we don't have a good story about what makes worlds *possible* rather than *actual* (and saying that actuality is an indexical property doesn't help with *this* issue), or with what sort of relation among worlds makes what is true at one affect statements about what is possible or necessary at *other* worlds just in case they are so-related to the first, we still get *some* explanatory grip, make *some* progress in understanding modal or intensional concepts in this way.

But actually, neither of these advantages is what it seems.
Advantage (i) turns on taking for granted possibility and accessibility, the first being what we want to explain, and the second not being explained.
Advantage (ii) is actually just wrong. (See below.)

II.

2. But **there *is* a good reason, a cogent argument**, for the new comfort with alethic modal concepts. That is **the Kant-Sellars thesis about modality**.

It is that **modal concepts are categorial in Kant's sense**.
This move is an essential part of one of Sellars's big ideas, in response to Carnap:
Kantian **categorial** concepts should be understood as **metalinguistic**.
That is how they contrast to *descriptive* concepts (part of his antidescriptivism): descriptive concepts are expressed in the empirical *object* language.

Take this opportunity to rehearse **Kant's 3 biggest and most important ideas**:
   1. Normativity of discursive. Norm/fact instead of mind/body.
   2. Categorial concepts, in addition to OED vocabulary.
   3. Autonomy: transforming Rousseau's definition of freedom ("Obedience to a law one has laid down for oneself is freedom,") into a criterion of demarcation of genuinely

normative constraint—namely, as obedience to a law one has laid down for oneself, constraint by norms in the form of *commitments* one has undertaken.

For future reference, this font of great ideas had **three more**, some of which will matter to us in the second half of the course:

4. Assimilation of alethic and deontic modalities, as species of necessity: natural and practical, in response to Hume. (I'll introduce that move later today.)
5. All parties agreeing that there can be no *responsibility* without *freedom*, to turn on its head the empiricist's explanatory order of exploitation of this principle. They took it they knew what freedom is—it is the denial of determinism, that every doing is alethically necessitated—and asked whether and in what sense we can then be understood to be responsible. Kant took it that we are responsible—a matter of deontic normativity—and asked what notion of freedom we should therefore be understood to enjoy. (Freedom as constraint by norms.)
6. Moving from Aristotelian principles of individuation to Newtonian ones. (Matters for *SM* Ch. 1.)

Individually, these are all interesting and important moves.
Collectively, they are stunning—not only in his historical context, but in ours.

My list is substantially influenced by Sellars's reading of Kant, though it obviously diverges.

For many readers of Kant, perhaps for Kant himself, what is most striking about this list is **what is *not* on it**:

- I include the explanatory strategy of the second Critique, but not its conclusion. The *categorical imperative* is notably absent.
- And *transcendental idealism* is also absent: the Copernican Revolution and the accompanying conception of the natural world as revealed by science as only *empirically real*, but *transcendentally ideal*.

It is, of course, a version of this last idea that Sellars explores and exploits in *Science and Metaphysics*, as we'll see beginning in 2 weeks.

This course is an extended exercise, *inter alia*, in compiling and defending a list like this Sellar's biggest and most important ideas.
Here, too, my assessment sometimes diverges from Sellars's own.

III.

Distinction between OED concepts and categorial concepts.
In Kant.
In Sellars, for modality:

Main Business, filling in (2) from CDCM quotes:

1) In an autobiographical sketch, Sellars dates his break with traditional empiricism to his Oxford days in the thirties. It was, he says, prompted by **concern with understanding the sort of conceptual content that ought to be associated with "logical, causal, and deontological modalities**." Already at that point he says that he had the idea that "**what was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than supposed origin in experience, their primary feature**."
In *Action, Knowledge, and Reality*, H. N. Castaneda (ed.) [Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1975] p 285.

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

This is the basic idea of Sellars's metalinguistic expressivism about alethic modal vocabulary:
It expresses rules governing the use of the terms.
   a) "Copper necessarily melts at 1084º C.," expresses a rule governing implications (language-language moves):
   b) 'this coin is copper' implies 'this coin would melt at 1084º C.'.
(Compare: 'triangularity is a property' is a disguised metalinguistic principle: " '…is triangular' is a monadic predicate.")
But: what (a) says would still be true even if there were no rule-governed discursive creatures, never mind users of the term 'copper'. So treating (a) as a metalinguistic expression of a rule governing the use of those terms doesn't get the counterfactuals right.

3) It is sometimes thought that modal statements do not describe states of affairs in the world, because they are *really* metalinguistic. This won't do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits. It is more plausible if it is meant that statements involving modal terms have the force of *prescriptive* statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language. Yet there is more than one way of to '*have the force of*' a statement, and failure to

distinguish between them may snowball into a serious confusion as wider implications are drawn.   CDCM §81.

4) **The idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no modal expression is of a piece with the idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no prescriptive expression.** For what is being called to mind is **the ideal of statement of 'everything that is the case' which, however, serves *through and through only* the purpose of stating what is the case. And it is a logical truth that such a description, however many modal expressions might properly be used in *arriving at* it or in *justifying* it, or in showing the *relevance* of one of its components to another, could contain no modal expression**. [§80]

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

6) It is my purpose to argue that the core truth of Hume's philosophy of causation is not only compatible with, but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of those features of causal discourse as a mode of rational discourse on which the 'metaphysical rationalists' laid such stress, but also mis-assimilated to describing." [§82]

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

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

103.   It is therefore important to realize that **the presence in the' object language of the causal modalities** (and of the logical modalities and of the deontic modalities) **serves not only to express existing commitments, but also to provide the *framework* for the thinking by which we reason our way** (in a manner appropriate to the specific subject matter) **into the making of *new* commitments and the abandoning of old. And since this framework essentially involves quantification over predicate variables, puzzles over the 'existence of abstract entities' are almost as responsible for the prevalence in the empiricist tradition of 'nothing-but-ism' in its various forms (emotivism, philosophical behaviorism, phenomenalism) as its tendency to assimilate all discourse to describing.**

For the causal principle gives expression to features of our language (indeed, of our mind) which are independent of success or failure, of optimism or pessimism, of the economics of intellectual effort. Among other things, it gives expression to the fact that **although describing and**

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

Labeling→describing
Space of implications.
They must be subjunctively robust, to permit explanation = reason giving.

3. If this is all right, then one cannot be in the Humean predicament: understanding nonmodal empirical descriptive concepts perfectly well, but having thereby no grip on modal concepts.
    Key: **In knowing how to use OED vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do to use modal vocabulary**. For one already must be able to distinguish, however fallibly and incompletely, the good implications descriptive concepts essentially involve. And modal claims just explicitly codify those implicit commitments.
    This is the sense in which Kant is right to treat 'categorial' concepts, 'pure concepts of the understanding', that is, ***framework-explicating concepts***, as graspable *a priori*. There are no *particular* empirical concepts one must grasp in order to grasp the categorial ones. Grasp of *any* empirical-descriptive concept involves grasp of *all* the categorial concepts.

4. [Cf. (1-e-ii)] One immediate consequence of accepting the modal Kant-Sellars thesis (to the effect that specifically modal concepts make explicit categorial commitments that are implicit in the use of *all* OED vocabulary) is that one way of appealing to the conceptual apparatus of possible worlds as genuinely explanatory of modal concepts—in the sense of being a way of leveraging understanding of *non*modal (modally insulated) concepts into an understanding of modal concepts—is undercut. Namely, the argument rehearsed in (1d) above. For according to the Kant-Sellars view, **there are no modally insulated empirical descriptive concepts** (observational or theoretical). *Every* OED concept has intensional necessary conditions. If the coin is copper, then it *would* melt if it *were* heated to 1084° C. If that is not true, then it is *not* made of copper.

5. Background of Sellars's metalinguistic neokantian antidescriptivist expressivism about alethic modal vocabulary.

a) As we have seen, Sellars got the idea of metalinguistic accounts of the contents expressed by philosophically suspect locutions from Carnap, with the index example being universals.
b) But Sellars combined this with antidescriptivism, which, by contrast to Carnap, was *ungrudging* about the legitimacy of nondescriptive expressions. He did not treat them as "second-class citizens", as Carnap emphatically did.
c) And Carnap did *not* apply this metalinguistic methodology to modal expressions.

Early on, in his syntactic period, he was suspicious of them on empiricist epistemological grounds.

Later on, in his semantic period, he addressed them model-theoretically, using possible worlds (which, admittedly, he thought of as sets of *sentences*—so was this "covertly" metalinguistic after all?).

d) In particular, Sellars saw in Carnap's metalinguistic methodology a neo*Kantian* core that Carnap himself never appreciated in these terms.
e) The original and paradigmatic application of the concept of *categorial* concepts (which we will interpret, inspired by Sellars, as deployed in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary, so as *pragmatic metaconcepts*—Sellars only got as far as the 'meta' part of this) for Kant was modal concepts.

This is the basis of Hume "awakening him from his dogmatic slumbers."

It was **Hume's skepticism about moving from 'is' to 'must'** that led to Kant's idea of categorial, framework-explicating concepts, whose applicability is presupposed by the applicability of ground-level OED concepts.

For Kant, this was wholly (and more than) parallel to **Hume's inability to understand the move from 'is' to 'ought'**.

Kant assimilated these under the rubric 'necessity', distinguishing theoretical and practical species of that genus.

'Necessary' [Notewendig] was his term for 'according to a rule', the normativity or 'rulishness' of *both* cognitive and practical discursive activity ('discursive' in consisting in the application of concepts).

f) Carnap took two sequential attitudes towards alethic modality: **skeptical in his syntactic period and essential in his semantic period**.

This was a manifestation of the issue that most divided the Vienna Circle.

For it was where **empiricism in epistemology and naturalism in ontology most collided**.

Modal necessities, at least in the form of laws of nature, were naturalistically essential, because of their centrality to natural scientific understanding, but were epistemologically suspect for empiricists for Humean reasons.

Where empiricism and naturalism collided, **Moritz Schlick** (later to be martyred) urged choosing empiricism, and the fascinating socialist thinker **Otto Neurath** urged choosing naturalism.

Carnap valiantly attempted to keep these two wings of the Vienna Circle from flying off in different directions.

As I said a minute ago, Quine for his whole career just blithely ignored the opposition and endorsed both positions.

g) So, in adopting a metalinguistic antidescriptivist view (*metalinguistic* strategies being a distinctive species of *antidescriptivist* strategies) specifically of alethic modality, Sellars was moving far beyond Carnap.

h) Further, in treating the metalinguistic concepts as *categorial*, he is adopting a particular species of antidescriptivism's *nondismissive* attitude towards nondescriptive concepts (concepts given nondescriptive explications).

For among the other expressive functions that locutions can honorably play is the somewhat honorific one of being *categorial* concepts in the Kantian sense.

And that is what Sellars takes alethic modal concepts to be.

6. Sellars's account:

a) Antidescriptivism: Instead of asking how the world is being described or represented as being by the use of alethic modal vocabulary, ask what one is *doing* in using it.

b) What one is doing, he thinks, is endorsing subjunctively robust implications relating different bits of OED vocabulary.

c) These are the relations that articulate the conceptual contents of empirical descriptive concepts (observational as well as theoretical). So in "making first-hand use" of alethic modal locutions, one is *making explicit* ones' *semantic* commitments—the otherwise *implicit* inferential commitments in virtue of which descriptive concepts have the conceptual contents they do.

d) In saying that all As are *necessarily* Bs one is endorsing the *rule* that (to put it in my preferred terms) the position one is in if one accepts that something is an A (the coin is copper) and rejects that it is B (conducts electricity), one is *normatively* out of bounds.

e) In addition to marking this normative stance, 'necessarily' expresses a *rule* that comes with some *generality*. It marks acceptance of a rule as a *policy*, endorsing a *pattern* of usage governing *all* uses of A and B.
   (Compare: uses of 'ought' to codify endorsement of the propriety of patterns of *practical* reasoning.)

IV.

7. <u>Anachronistically applying dot quotes to formulate the metalinguistic view:</u>

a) When Sellars wrote CDCM (published in 1957—it was the next big thing he wrote after EPM, during the incredible 6 years from 1956 to 1962) he had not yet invented the apparatus of *dot quotes*. And he never revisited the issue of metalinguistic expressivism about alethic modality—even though his treatment in CDCM is preliminary, incomplete, and unsatisfactory by his own lights in many ways.

(I have in mind principally that he couldn't, at least at that point, clarify the notion of "conveying without saying" that bears the weight of the specifically *metalinguistic* move he is making. See (8) below.)

So we don't know how, or even whether, he would have applied that metaconceptual tool to this case. But dot-quotes were developed to address issues concerning the metalinguistic treatment of

universals that are at least *adjacent* to the issues here. So it is worth at least speculating about how he might have done so, had he revisited the issue with the new kind of quotation in mind.

    b) Sellars's idea is that when I say "It is necessary that copper conducts electricity," I am endorsing a rule of inference. But I am not talking specifically about the English word 'copper' and the English phrase 'conducts electricity.' Rather, I am *using* those words to endorse an inferential policy that would bind me even if I were speaking German. This suggests the "illustrating sign design" principle as picking out *classes* of expressions across languages that I could be adopting an inferential commitment about.

              ●copper●s imply ●conducts electricity●s.

This move here, like the original as applied to talk of universals as nominalized predicate-talk,

      i.   retains an essentially *metalinguistic* approach,

      ii.   while defusing the concern that the analyzed locutions don't say anything about expressions in particular languages.

      If all As were necessarily Bs, then….   becomes

      If .A.s implied .B.s, then….

8. The point in (7), that Sellars is giving us an account of the *use* of modal expressions, rather than their *content* or *meaning*, leads into a discussion of the relations between first and second-wave metaethical expressivism, and embedded contexts.

Tell the Geach "Ascriptivism" story, about '**macarize**':

Expressivists say that in using normative vocabulary we are not *describing* something as good or to-be-done, we are doing something else: praising or approving it.

Geach asks what the rules of this *antidescriptivist* game are.

Can we do this for any apparently descriptive phrase?

He finds the lovely archaic English word 'macarize', meaning to call someone happy.

Should I say that when I call someone happy, I am not *describing* them, I am *macarizing* them?

Expressivist accounts of normative vocabulary such as 'ought' or 'good' as expressing speaker's attitudes of approval ('Boo'/'Hurrah' theories) only deal with *free-standing* uses (in Dummett's phrase).

But we also have to address *embedded* uses.

Following Frege, we can take the paradigm to be occurrences as the antecedent of conditionals. Such uses strip off the *pragmatic force*, leaving only the conceptual content of the embedded sentence, to contribute to the content of the larger whole (the conditional) to which assertional force is attached.

When I say 'If John is happy, then I am glad for him,' I have not macarized him. How are we to understand this occurrence?

Well, notice that I have not *described* him as happy, either.

But that *descriptive* content is contributing to the content of the (conditional) assertion I *did* make.

Similarly,

When I say "If A is a good thing to do, then you have reason to do it," I have not endorsed or approved doing A.

So there *must* be more to understanding 'good' or 'ought' than the approval I am expressing when I use the term free-standing.

(Geach's gem-like essay is 5 pages long.)

Even global expressivists like Huw Price have to worry about these embedded uses.

Attention to this issue is what distinguishes *second-wave* metaethical expressivists like Gibbard and Blackburn from *first-wave* ones like A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson.

<u>Challenge and project</u>:

Can one use the dot-quoted version of Sellars's metalinguistic expressivist analysis of the *free-standing* use alethic modals to address the *embedded* uses. Propositional attitude cases have a myriad of difficulties of their own. It would suffice here, as with Geach's original challenge, to have a plausible story about their use as antecedents of conditionals:

    i.   *If* copper necessarily conducts electricity, *then* electrons move easily through copper.

Can this be paraphrased as:

    ii.   *If* •copper•s imply •conducts electricity•s, *then* electrons move easily through copper.

It would be a worthwhile project to try to make this work:

Using Sellars's apparatus of *dot-quoting-with-illustrating-sign-designs* to produce a *second-wave* Sellarsian metalinguistic expressivism about alethic modal locutions.

One reason to be sanguine about the prospects of such a program is that (ii) looks very like the disquotational inferential schema for 'true' that Sellars discusses late in AE:

    iii.   If 'copper conducts electricity' is true, then copper conducts electricity.

His remarks about this are enigmatic, but suggestive.

He says that here we cross over into things we *do*, rather than things we *say*.

This is the realm of what he earlier called 'lived rules' or 'rules that live in behavior.'

Once the development of human language left the stage when linguistic changes had *causes*, but not *reasons*, and man acquired the ability to reason about his reasons, then, and this is a logical point about having the ability to reason about reasons, his language came to permit the formulation of certain propositions which, incapable of proof or disproof by empirical methods, draw, in the heart of *language militant*, a picture of *language triumphant*. Kant's conception that reason is characterized by certain regulative ideals contains a profound truth which empiricism has tended to distort into the empirical psychology of the scientific enterprise. [§108]

V.

    c) In this early piece, though, Sellars goes another way. And it is a suggestive and telling one.

9.   Sellars faced the same problem with a metalinguistic account of alethic modality as codifying proprieties of inference (implicational relations of being a reason for or against) that he saw plagued Carnap's original metalinguistic account of universals: Saying that all As are necessarily Bs, that all samples of pure copper will melt at 1084° C., is not—certainly not in any direct way—*saying* anything about linguistic expressions such as 'copper', 'melt' and 'degree'.

    a) He responds by distinguishing between what is directly *said* by uttering a declarative sentence and what is or can be *conveyed* by doing so.

<u>Some quotes</u>:

> **It is sometimes thought that modal statements do not describe states of affairs in the world, because they are *really* metalinguistic. This won't do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits.** It is more plausible if it is meant that **statements involving modal terms have the force of *prescriptive* statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language**. Yet **there is more than one way of to '*have the force of*' a statement**, and failure to distinguish between them may snowball into a serious confusion as wider implications are drawn. [§81]
>
>   and
>
> **Shall we say that modal expressions are metalinguistic? Neither a simple 'yes' nor a simple 'no' will do.** As a matter of fact, once the above considerations are given their proper weight, it is possible to acknowledge that the idea that they are metalinguistic in character oversimplifies a fundamental insight. For our present purposes, it is sufficient to say that the claim that modal expressions are 'in the metalanguage' is not too misleading if the peculiar force of the expressions which occur alongside them (represented by the 'p' and the 'q' of our example) is recognized, in particular, that they have 'straightforward' translation into other languages, and if it is also recognized that they belong not only 'in the metalanguage', but in discourse about *thoughts* and *concepts* as well. [§82]
>
>   And
>
> We must here, as elsewhere, draw a distinction between what we are committed to concerning the world by virtue of the fact that we have reason to make a certain assertion, and the force, in a narrower sense, of the assertion itself. [§101]

But one can know that Turks, for example, ought to withdraw '…' when they commit themselves to '---' without knowing the language, whereas the statement that '*p* entails *q*' contextually implies that the speaker not only knows the language to which 'p' and 'q' belong, but, in particular, knows how to use 'p' and 'q' themselves. [§81]

"We must here, as elsewhere, draw **a distinction between what we are committed to concerning the world by virtue of the fact that we have reason to make a certain assertion, and the force, in a narrower sense, of the assertion itself**. Idealism is notorious for the fallacy of concluding that because there must be minds in the world in order for us to have reason to make statements about the world, therefore there is no sense to the idea of a world which does not include minds; the idea, that is, that things might have been such that there were no minds." [§101]

He appeals to a distinction between what is said by the use of some vocabulary, and what is conveyed by its use.

While admitting that talk of what is necessary does not *say* anything about what language users ought or ought not to do, he nonetheless insists that it "conveys the same information" as "rules to the effect that we may do thus and so, and ought not do this and that, in the way of manipulating expressions in a language."

His (only somewhat helpful) example is that **when I say "The sky is clear," I have both said something about the weather and conveyed something about my beliefs.** [This is from the much earlier "Inference and Meaning."]

This is a very different move than his later appeal to dot-quotes.

    b) He is not very clear about this distinction, but elsewhere [where?] he offers as an example of this phenomenon that in saying that things are thus-and-so (the frog is on the log) I *say* something about how things are, but I also *convey* something about me and my beliefs: that I know, or at least believe that things are thus-and-so. I have not directly talked about myself, but I "convey" to my audience something about myself.

    c) I understand this example in inferential terms. It turns on the "notorious 'ing'/'ed' distinction, that we talked about from the opening of EPM.

In this case, we can distinguish between what follows from what I said (the sayable to which I committed myself), and what follows from my saying it.

When John says that the light has turned red, or that it is raining out, I can infer that the light has turned red, or that it is raining out. (After all, he is a reliable reporter of such things.)

But I can also infer that he believes them, that he has an unobstructed line of sight to the traffic-light, has recently been outside, or can see through a window, or has heard on the radio or from some other informant about the weather, and so on.

    d) This is the difference between *semantic* inferences (what the *contents* of his utterances provide reasons for) and *pragmatic* inferences (what the fact of his *uttering* these sentences provides reasons for concluding).

    10. I think Sellars gives us an account of what we are *doing* when we make first-hand use of alethic modal expressions: we are committing ourselves to the propriety of patterns of inference or implication. This is his anti-descriptivism, now directed at *modality*.

    11. I think the issue is a very general one, about the relations between *semantic* and *pragmatic* metavocabularies.

These relations can be very complex, as I argue in *BSD*.

There I offer a formal apparatus for constructing and codifying different relations there can be between these kinds of MV.

It at least does not follow from an expressivist account of the *use* of an expression, what one is doing in using it, that it does not *also* admit of a representational semantic characterization.

Sellars is committed to that consequence.

His antidescriptivism sees pragmatic accounts as precluding representational semantic (descriptivist) accounts. In this regard, he and Price are together.
This is where my MEMRTA story comes in.

12. MEMRTA in a nutshell: Telling Sellars's metalinguistic expressivist story about what one is *doing* in "making first-hand use of" alethic modal locutions, in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary, is in principle compatible with taking there to be ways one is describing or representing the world as being by that use, specifiable in a representational *semantic* metavocabulary.

13. Most prominent contemporary expressivist about alethic modality is Amy Thomasson. Should also mention Pitt Ph.D. Marc Lange on laws of nature (*Laws and Lawmakers*, OUP, 2009)

14. Sellars's view of the *functional role* distinctive of alethic modal vocabulary:
1) It is fundamentally *metalinguistic*. It is a kind of *metavocabulary*.
   a) The sort of base vocabulary *for* which it is metalinguistic is empirical descriptive (OED) vocabulary, including both observational and theoretical empirical vocabulary.
   b) There is no vocabulary to which OED vocabulary stands (as metalinguistic) as alethic modal (AM) vocabulary stands to OED vocabulary. In this sense, OED vocabulary is *ground-level* or a *base* vocabulary, not a *meta*vocabulary.
2) It is, more specifically, a kind of ***pragmatic* metavocabulary**. It makes explicit something essential to the *use* of OED vocabulary.
   "It is sometimes thought that modal statements do not describe states of affairs in the world, because they are *really* metalinguistic. This won't do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits. It is more plausible if it is meant that statements involving modal terms have the force of *prescriptive* statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language. Yet there is more than one way of to '*have the force of*' a statement, and failure to distinguish between them may snowball into a serious confusion as wider implications are drawn. " CDCM §81.
3) The essential feature of the use of OED vocabulary that AM vocabulary makes explicit is an aspect of its *inferential* articulation, in virtue of which it has the content that it does, can be used to *say* what it says. That is, it is an essential feature of the *use* of OED vocabulary in virtue of which it expresses the *semantic content* that it does. It is what makes it *descriptive* vocabulary, and not just *labeling*. This is *material* inferential relations, not *formal logical* inferential relations, for these are the ones that articulate the nonlogical descriptive conceptual content of OED vocabulary, underwriting language-language moves (as well as the RDRDs governing language-entry and language-exit transitions).

4) Still more specifically, the aspect of the inferential articulation of OED vocabulary, the space of implications that each claim and concept stands in relative to other claims and contents, is its *subjunctive robustness*.
   a) This is the aspect of the inferential articulation of OED vocabulary in virtue of which the applicability of some descriptive conceptual contents can be appealed to in *explanations* of the applicability of other descriptive conceptual contents.
   "To make first hand use of these [modal] expressions is to be about the business of **explaining** a state of affairs, or **justifying** an assertion." CDCM § 80.

   b) It is the *subjunctive robustness* of implication relations that are appealed to by explanations. For that is the *explanatory surplus* over saying that A happened and B happened. It is saying that *if* A happened, B *would* happen, not just in these particular circumstances, but in others as well.
   This is the dimension of *generality* that Ryle sees in inferences generally:
   …some kind of openness, variableness, or satisfiability characterizes all hypothetical statements alike, whether they are recognized "variable hypotheticals" like "For all *x*, if *x* is a man, *x* is mortal" or are highly determinate hypotheticals like "If today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday. Gilbert Ryle " 'If', 'So', and 'Because' ", pp. 302-318 in Black, Max (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis* [Prentice Hall, 1950], p. 311.

   c) The principal alethic modal locution is accordingly *subjunctive conditionals*. They codify *ranges of subjunctive robustness* of implications. Basically, this is a matter of how the premises could be different and still support the conclusion.
   d) Here the key point is that in grasping descriptive conceptual contents, one must not only
      i. sort material implications involving those concepts into good ones and bad ones—however *partially* (one might not have a view about some of them) and *fallibly* (one might get some wrong). But also
      ii. For each good implication, associate with it a *range of subjunctive robustness*, that is, have a view—however partial and fallible—of which of the *variants* of the premise-set would still yield good implications, and which would not.
      iii. This involves both saying which premises could be subtracted *salva consequentia,* and saying which could be *added* without infirming the conclusion.
      This last is required because material implications are generally *defeasible* or *nonmonotonic*.
         One cannot finitely state all of the potential defeaters of the implication.

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

He is telling us what we are *doing* when we use alethic modal expressions: we are *endorsing inferences* from the applicability of one descriptive term, A, say 'copper', to another, B, say 'melts at 1084° C.'
That is in a *pragmatic* MV.

16. The final point I want to make is that it is not clear that telling that inferentialist *expressivist* story, in a *pragmatic* MV, about what one is *doing* in using alethic modal vocabulary, is incompatible with *also* telling a *representational* story, in a *semantic* MV, about what one is *saying* thereby: how one is *describing* or *representing* things as being.

VI.

17. In particular, it is not *obvious* that that *pragmatic* story about the *use* of AM vocabulary rules out *modal realism* about the *content* expressed by AM vocabulary, in the sense of the three claims:
By "modal realism" I mean the conjunction of the claims that:
MR1) Some modally qualified claims are *true*.
MR2) Those that are state *facts*.
MR3) Some of those facts are *objective*, in the sense that they are independent of the activities of concept-users: they would be facts even if there never were or never had been concept-users.

18. Might possibilities be observable?
Well, can we have RDRDs keyed to them?
Do Gibsonian *affordances* offer an example, where even nonlinguistic animals can perceive possibilities (e.g. places to hide, places where they *would not* be seen or found by predator)?

19. Modal expressivism (ME) makes claims about what one is *doing* in using modal concepts, while modal realism (MR) makes claims about what one is *saying* by using modal concepts. ME says that what one is doing when one makes a modal claim is endorsing an inference relating descriptive concepts as subjunctively (including counterfactually) robust, or treating two descriptive concepts as incompatible. MR says that when one does that, one is claiming *that* possession or exhibition of one empirical property is a consequence of, or is incompatible with, possession or exhibition of another. The claim that ME and MR are compatible is the claim that one can *both* be *doing* what ME says one is doing in applying modal vocabulary *and* be *saying* what MR says one is saying by doing that.
According to this way of understanding the relations between ME and MR, the claims of modal expressivism are made in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary for modal vocabulary: that is, a vocabulary suitable for specifying the practices, abilities, and performances that make up the *use*

of modal vocabulary. And the claims of modal realism are made in a *semantic* metavocabulary for modal vocabulary: that is, a vocabulary suitable for specifying the *meanings* or conceptual *contents* expressed by modal vocabulary.

[Plan to save the following material for later meetings:]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19

- It is a consequence of the version of Kant-Sellars modal expressivism that I outlined in Part I that instituting semantic government of modal claims by modal facts, and of achieving epistemic tracking of modal facts by modal claims must be an aspect of the process of instituting semantic government of ordinary empirical descriptive claims by the facts they state, and of achieving epistemic tracking of those facts by ordinary empirical descriptive claims.
- Determining and applying descriptive concepts inevitably involves committing oneself as to the subjunctively robust inferential and incompatibility relations they stand in to one another. Rectifying concepts, determining facts, and establishing laws are all projects that must be pursued together. Empirical evidence bears on all of the semantic, epistemic, and explanatory tasks at once, or it bears on none of them.
- Modal claims (and the concepts that articulate them) exhibit semantic government by and epistemic tracking of facts no less than ordinary empirical descriptive ones do. Far from being incompatible with this fundamental modally realistic claim, modal expressivism is just what is needed to make it intelligible. By showing how the use of modal concepts and the use of ordinary empirical descriptive concepts are inextricably bound up with one another, modal expressivism also shows itself and modal realism as two sides of one coin.