

“What are Heidegger and Sellars Up to?”
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I — Introduction

Heidegger and Sellars are notoriously difficult philosophers, and their difficulty has similar roots. Both advance deeply unified philosophical programs, such that one cannot readily understand their views or reasoning on specific topics without situating the issue within a larger philosophical vision. Often they cannot work out their views on those topics without extensive allusion to characterizations, interpretations or arguments developed at greater length elsewhere. As a result, one must read a great deal of Heidegger or Sellars in order to read *any* of Heidegger or Sellars with a modicum of understanding. Historical reflection upon their predecessors, especially Kant and Aristotle, plays a central role in their philosophical work, but each interprets those figures in ways that are often contentious and difficult in their own right. Their relations to both their contemporary and historical interlocutors also display a common and perhaps annoying feature. In criticizing a position, they rarely argue directly against their opponent’s view as originally expressed. Each instead proceeds diagnostically, seeking to show how an opposing view and the opponent’s preferred ways of expressing those views have deeper roots, which must be uncovered and worked through if the criticism is to avoid repetition of the “same” mistakes in different guises. Both see these deeper misconceptions as often embedded in familiar linguistic forms and philosophical terminology. In their efforts to circumvent these misconceptions, they frequently introduce neologisms, new logical apparatus, formal indications, philosophical etymologies, or unfamiliar uses of familiar terms. Moreover, despite their commitment to a unified philosophical vision, each finds it difficult to give that vision a clearly unified expression. To be sure, Heidegger repeatedly identifies all of his work as directed toward

understanding the ontological difference, but he also repeatedly revises his characterizations of that difference. *Being and Time*, which aspired from the outset to formulate explicitly the question of the sense of being, broke off before ever getting to any general consideration of that question. Sellars identifies the philosophical task with understanding the broadest sense in which any and all things “hang together”, but provided no systematic overview of why he focused upon his central topics, or *how* they were supposed to all fit together within a “stereoscopic vision”. No wonder that despite their wide influence, both philosophers are closely read only by small circles of intense devotees (present company included) whose preoccupations, shared assumptions, and mutual references often exasperate other philosophers.

At first glance, Heidegger’s and Sellars’s philosophical projects oppose one another in far-reaching ways.¹ Viewed from Heidegger’s perspective, for example, Sellars’s scientific naturalism, its expression as a form of realism, his adherence to the linguistic turn with a focus upon judgment, inference, and syntactical forms, and his central concern with epistemology all stand out as fundamental divergences. My aim is neither to deny nor for the most part even to diminish those opposing tendencies. I nevertheless want to explore what I see as some deeper common concerns and thematic parallels. Both are centrally concerned with intentionality and its categorial structure, paying concerted attention to meaning, truth, understanding, normativity, alethic modality, identity and individuation, predication, and “abstraction.”

My aim in attending to these points of contact is not to discern facile equivalences, but

¹ My discussion will primarily concern Heidegger’s work in the period around the 1927 publication of *Sein und Zeit*, roughly from 1925-1930. Although it is my view that this work remains substantially continuous with Heidegger’s later writings, arguing for that claim and establishing the connections amidst Heidegger’s terminological changes is beyond the scope of this paper.

instead to find ways to identify and talk about the issues that most centrally concern them, in ways that can be partially dissociated from their own often formidable modes of expression. I also hope to circumvent the easily taken-for-granted familiarity with which those formulations come to circulate among their devotees as *Gerede*. By partially separating what they are getting at from how they get there, I eventually hope to triangulate toward more adequate understanding and expression of those issues and how they matter. A central consideration of the project is to work out where the important perplexities, difficulties, and unaddressed issues arise, and to use the triangulation of their work to clarify those issues and discern how better to address them. In short, what really interests me is neither Heidegger nor Sellars, but rather what they were “up to” and were trying to “get at”, or in my terms, what is most importantly at issue and at stake in their work. The project is in a very early stage, and what I have to say is very preliminary. In particular, I am still working through many of the key essays in Sellars, and learning how to read them together. I present the project in this very preliminary overview, in hope of eliciting your help in developing the project and avoiding some of its many possible pitfalls.

II — Heidegger and Sellars on Philosophy

Heidegger and Sellars both begin with our unmediated familiarity with worldly entities. Neither denies the existence of “inner” mental or conscious experience, but both treat it as dependent upon a more basic grasp of publicly accessible circumstances. For Heidegger, *dasein*’s basic make-up as being-in-the-world is proximally manifest in everyday dealings with equipment and with others. At the center of Sellars’ work are his criticism of the Myth of the Given, and his methodological behaviorism. The former shows why philosophical understanding of our capacities for knowledge cannot begin with a mere experiential presence. His core arguments

show that understanding of “inner” appearances (e.g. “looking red”) is parasitic upon competent grasp of the relevant worldly circumstances (“red”). Moreover, understanding those circumstances incorporates some grasp of how the appearances *of* a publicly accessible aspect of the world vary with those circumstances. In the case of colors, for example, the relevant circumstances would include lighting, distance, viewing angle, and the visual and functional context. Methodological behaviorism does not deny the existence of mental events or processes, but does deny them any philosophically foundational role. Mental events or states are theoretical entities posited to explain publicly accessible phenomena, and while one can learn to apply the relevant concepts non-inferentially, such non-inferential recognition of mental states is defeasible, contextually situated, first-person-privileged only as a default normative status, and also applicable third-personally without any comparable default standing.

Heidegger and Sellars each ascribes a central role to a holistic capacity for understanding. An understanding of the being of entities is a condition for any and all encounters with entities as entities for Heidegger, and understanding is an *existentiale*. Any interpretation of something as something, including the linguistic assertions that point out and communicate about entities in any definite way, presupposes a more basic, unexplicated understanding. Sellars talks about understanding as conceptual, whereas Heidegger resists that term.² For now, I only emphasize

² I do not think that Heidegger and Sellars use ‘conceptual’ in quite the same way. Heidegger’s use is much narrower, and is conditioned by his critical response to philosophical approaches to intentionality and understanding that give priority to explicitly articulated judgments. I would argue (but not here!) that ‘conceptual’ in Sellars’s sense is much closer to ‘discursive’ (in a sense commensurate with the standard English translation of Heidegger’s ‘*Rede*’ as ‘discourse’ and the suggestion that understanding of being is essentially discursive). This assimilation does not deny that judgment, inference, and rationality figure more prominently in Sellars’s work than in Heidegger’s, but instead calls attention to how this *issue* is focused by recognition of the extent of the common ground from which Sellars and Heidegger

Sellars's insistence that all conceptual understanding is holistic in the sense that "one has *no* concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all and ... a great deal more besides" (1997, 45). Both Heidegger and Sellars take a holistic capacity to understand the being of entities, or to understand things conceptually, as differentiating human beings from other animals despite apparent continuities. Heidegger (1983/1992) notoriously characterized non-human animal life as "world-poor", where "world" is the whole interrelated nexus of significance within which various entities and projects make sense. Early Sellars allows that we productively "*explain* [animal] behavior by ascribing to them beliefs, desires, expectations, etc., *but*, and this is a key point, we invariably find ourselves *qualifying* these explanations in terms which would amount, in the case of a human subject, to the admission that he wasn't *really* thinking, believing, desiring, etc" (ITM, 527) Later Sellars (especially in "Mental Events") allows for the explanatory attribution of representational structures and even propositional attitudes to other animals for the purposes of cognitive science, while still insisting upon an important distinction between these representational systems and those that also have the capacities to *use* logic so as to formulate rules or norms that reflexively govern its own operations. The latter systems are capable of *conceptual* thinking.

We approach the core of the issues that concern me when we consider how Heidegger and Sellars understand the characteristic role, scope, and character of philosophy and its relation to other forms of understanding. Heidegger emphatically claims that "*being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy*" (1975, 15/1982, 11). This demarcation is further explicated in at least three ways that will matter to my discussion. First and foremost is Heidegger's claim that being

diverge on the extent and character of our "rationality".

is not an entity, where entities include anything and everything there is. Strictly speaking, on this view, being is not anything at all, literally *nothing* (a claim that Heidegger makes rhetorically prominent in his well-known lecture, “What is Metaphysics?”). Second is his insistence that being is always the being *of* entities; thinking of and talking about being can only be done with respect to entities. Third is his correlated claim that in any intentional directedness toward entities as entities, the being of those entities is co-intended in “categorical intuition” (1975, 64-99/1982, 47-72). How to construe these claims is controversial; part of the point of my triangulation with Heidegger and Sellars is to use the juxtaposition to guide how we ought to understand, and perhaps revise, this and other comparably difficult and obscure issues in both bodies of work.

Sellars does offer a well-known and comparably succinct canonical formulation of philosophy’s characteristic task: “The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term”. He quickly provides an illustrative enumeration of the broad range of things: “not only ‘cabbages and kings’, but numbers and duties, possibilities and finger snaps, aesthetic experience and death”. The point should be obvious to those familiar with Heidegger. Things “in the broadest sense” are entities, everything there *is*. Sellars also immediately elaborates on the relevant sense of ‘understanding’: “To achieve success in philosophy would be ... to ‘know one’s way around’ with respect to all those things ... in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred. Knowing one’s way around is ... a form of ‘knowing *how*’ as contrasted with ‘knowing that’” (2007, 369). The parallel can only be pushed so far, but Heidegger and Sellars share a broad conception of philosophical understanding as a reflectively

(Sellars) or interpretively (Heidegger) articulated competence over the domain of our pre-reflective/pre-ontological familiarity. Sellars does not similarly gloss the sense in which he talks about things “hanging together” in the broadest sense, but the reason for that omission becomes clear soon enough. It is the subject matter of the entire essay, expressed in terms of a “stereoscopic fusion” of the manifest and scientific images of “man-in-the-world”.³

The philosophical primacy that Sellars accords to the scientific image is perhaps his most striking divergence from Heidegger. That divergence does not disappear upon closer consideration, but it does significantly change shape from its initial appearance. In order to recognize that shape, we need to attend more closely to how each of them characterizes scientific understanding, and how they understand its relation to the various topics of philosophical investigation. I begin with three central considerations for Sellars. First is his characterization of the primacy of the scientific image, most famously expressed in two passages in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. He begins with a line of thought that should lead us to “expect there to be a sense in which the scientific picture of the world *replaces* the common-sense picture: a sense in which the scientific account of ‘what there is’ *supersedes* the descriptive ontology of everyday life” (1997, 82). He then expresses caution, develops a series of qualifications, and concludes that, “*speaking as a philosopher*, I am quite prepared to say, ... less paradoxically, that 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” (1997, 83, original emphasis). To say that science is the *measure* of what is and is not is not the same as saying that science ideally aims to

³ I am not familiar with any commentaries that call attention to the evident parallel between Sellars’s hyphenated formulation of what the manifest and scientific images are images *of*, and Heidegger’s formulation of *dasein*’s basic makeup as being-in-the-world.

describe all that is, let alone that it does so. Sellars highlights his role as a philosopher to make clear that his claim does not call for elimination of common-sense categories in practice, nor does it license claims *in common sense terms* about what is or is not, but only about the appropriateness of the descriptive and explanatory applicability of those terms for the stated aims of philosophy.

The second consideration is that when Sellars limits the primacy of the scientific image to “the dimension of describing and explaining the world,” this limitation is significant. In his most important paper on modalities, Sellars insists that,

[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*. (1957, 282)

The characterization of this difference in conceptual roles, and the import of that difference for understanding “how things hang together,” is central to Sellars’s philosophical project.

The third consideration is that, in working out how various aspects of the manifest image are to be philosophically reconciled with the primacy of the scientific image, Sellars provides two distinct models for reconciliation. Sensory experience, which he thinks remains explanatorily important for understanding human epistemic capacities, is a describable feature of the functioning of bodily agents, and therefore does need to be characterized in terms that can be assessed and judged descriptively correct in terms of the best available scientific understanding. Sellars spends considerable effort, first showing that human sensory experience cannot be adequately understood in terms of available scientific categories, and second, developing

speculative possibilities for how subsequent developments of scientific theory might nevertheless accommodate sensations. This approach to understanding sensation meshes with his earlier telling of the Myth of Jones in EPM, in which sensations were posited by Jones as part of a theoretical model to explain the common *descriptive* content of the various worldly situations in which we would correctly judge that we are seeing a red object, that it looks as if what we are seeing is red, or that it looks as if we are seeing something red. While the relations among these three kinds of case are parasitic upon standards of correct judgment (they belong together *only* by virtue of a common propositional content that we might or might not endorse in each case, and hence cannot play an epistemic role in *determining* those contents), what is to be explained is a common descriptive content to one's causal interaction with those varied circumstances.

Sellars offers a quite different route to reconciliation for thoughts, actions, and other phenomena that collectively belong together through their normative significance for us as persons. Here also there is a descriptive basis for how that normative significance is realized in each case, but there is no comparable expectation for it to constitute a common explanatory basis. In this second class of cases, the reconciliation proceeds via a recognition that the phenomena in question are to be *understood* in something other than descriptive or explanatory terms. In the case of sensations, reconciliation requires a theoretical model that describes entities whose presence and causal role explain a natural phenomenon. In the case of thoughts and actions, no entities are being described or modeled, even though the phenomena in question are intelligibly situated in the scientific image. As a corollary to that point, it is a fundamental philosophical mistake to try to assimilate this second class of cases to the first, by seeking to discern or posit entities whose presence or capacities would make this aspect of "humanity-in-

the-world” intelligible.

We can perhaps now begin to discern the basic shape of my triangulation with Heidegger and Sellars. For Sellars, Heidegger’s ontological difference is the difference between entities, whose properties or relations to other entities are rendered intelligible via scientific description and explanation or everyday sponse to their “practical reality” (DeVries 2005, ch. 10), and those “categorical” aspects of our worldly lives which are intelligible in a different way. For Heidegger, Sellars’s reconciliation of the manifest and scientific images is couched in terms of two different modes of understanding and articulation: ontic understanding, which deals with, describes and explains entities, and ontological understanding and articulation of the being of entities. One of their key points of convergence, then, is that they each locate the characteristic task of philosophy similarly. The central issues for *philosophy* concern this second mode of articulation and understanding, which does not describe or posit entities, but which allows entities to show up and “hang together” intelligibly (which for Sellars means being intelligible conceptually). Moreover, despite the philosophical primacy that Sellars accords to the scientific image, he too allots scientific intelligibility itself, the descriptive and explanatory activities that constitute scientific understanding and their character *as* descriptive and explanatory, to this second mode of understanding and articulation. More strikingly, one can surprisingly but informatively delineate Sellars’s philosophical work in terms drawn from Heidegger’s well-known inaugural lecture in Freiburg; the translation affects the tone much more than the content. On Sellars’s view, the sciences are centrally concerned with the description and explanation of entities, and *nothing* more. Sellars emphasizes that, in Heidegger’s words, “[M]an’s prescientific and extrascientific activities also are related to [entities]. But science is exceptional in that, in a way

peculiar to it, it gives the matter itself explicitly and solely the last word., ... [with] a peculiarly delineated submission to [entities] themselves obtain[ing], such that [entities] are allowed to reveal themselves” (1967, /1998, 83). And so if and when that scientific task were to be completed, there would be *nothing* left to describe or explain. There would nevertheless still be a vital task remaining, something distinctively philosophical, which would need to be conjoined with the scientific description and explanation of entities as they really are, in order to “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” (Sellars 2007, 408). And I hope by now it is not so far-fetched to reconstrue Sellars’s philosophical enterprise as an extended effort to work out the scope and content of a question previously posed by Heidegger as “how is it with the nothing?” (1967, /1998, 84).

III — Topical Parallels and Convergences

I said that I was not seeking a facile comparison of Sellars and Heidegger, but at this point, that is all that has been achieved. I regard what I have said so far as stage-setting. The real task of my project is to explicate and critically assess Heidegger’s and Sellars’s articulated understandings of this “nothing”, by distinguishing the *issues* each is getting at in his own way from their formulations *of* those issues, including the central issue of what is at stake in how to formulate and/or resolve those issues. I want to think through their efforts to bring out reflectively, explicitly and *philosophically* what it is that we already implicitly know how to do in making our way about in the world conceptually competently (i.e., as already pre-ontologically understanding being), and in describing and explaining aspects of the world scientifically. The projects are both reflective and explicative, in the sense that they start *in*

medias res of our involvement in the world, and seek to articulate in words (and thereby also partly transform) how we already are in the world. I emphasize “philosophically” to call attention to a central issue in each project: their insistence that the being of entities, or their “hanging together” intelligibly, is not an entity or relation among entities (Heidegger) whose explication is a matter of description or explanation (Sellars).

To carry out the project, we need to recognize and work with some initial parallels in their formulations of what they are doing, while mostly overlooking some real differences between those formulations. Only in light of the larger structure of their projects can we adequately understand these differences in formulation and their significance. In the background should be the recognition that each formulates the issues that concern them in response to different interlocutors: Heidegger’s primary contemporary interlocutors were Husserl, the neo-Kantians, and Dilthey, whereas Sellars was engaged with the logical work of Frege, Russell and Carnap, classical and 20th C. British empiricist epistemology and philosophy of mind, and utilitarians, intuitionists, and emotivists in ethics. At the most basic level of their philosophical work, Heidegger talks about a plurality of ways of being where Sellars speaks of multiple conceptual frameworks. Both are centrally concerned with understanding the unity-in-difference of those plural modes of revealing: the horizon for the sense of being in general for Heidegger, and the ways our most basic kinds of conceptual framework “hang together” for Sellars. In the course of posing these questions, each gives a distinctive but ultimately limited role to the entity that we ourselves in each case are⁴ and its way of being (the conceptual framework in which it is appropriately manifest): respectively as *dasein* and Care, or Man and the framework of persons

⁴ I will later discuss *why* I take this distinctively Heideggerian turn of phrase to apply also

that is the core of the manifest image. In both cases, it matters that we not conflate the ontological difference. Dasein and Man are entities,⁵ but Care and the framework of persons are not.

We should thus not make the mistake of thinking of Sellarsian conceptual frameworks as some kind of abstract or linguistic entity. Where Heidegger distinguishes ontic and ontological issues, and insists that ontological concerns not be explicated in terms of entities, Sellars develops a far-reaching metalinguistic “nominalism.” Sellars’s nominalism is not quite the traditional metaphysical view that goes under that name, however. Sellars uses a metalinguistic apparatus to show how to understand what Brandom calls the “expressive role” of various kinds of linguistic expression. The traditional nominalist eschews other abstract objects in favor of word-types and their occasions of use. Sellars’s nominalism instead aims to show how we can better understand the phenomena for which various abstract objects have been posited by situating them functionally, and hence normatively, within social practices governed by our accountability to one another (while still accepting the *descriptive* completeness and finality toward which natural scientific understanding aspires, and achieves to a significant extent). Unlike the traditional nominalist, for whom patterns of language use are where analysis ends, Sellars also aims to treat central aspects of *linguistic* practices “nominalistically.”⁶ Language use

to Sellars, and what I think it signifies in each case.

⁵ I have deliberately formulated this sentence in a way that leaves it ambiguous whether each grammatically singular noun (Dasein/Man) denotes a single entity or a plurality. For both Sellars and Heidegger, there is a sense in which each answer is partly correct.

⁶ Brandom (2015, ch. 7) aims to vindicate the project behind Sellars’s efforts to construe the categorial structure of all conceptual disclosure nominalistically, while rejecting the resulting *semantic* doctrine that denies the existence of abstract entities, including mathematical objects, possible worlds, and objective norms. He proposes to do so by suggesting that Sellars’s account “operates primarily at the level of *pragmatics*: as part of a theory of the *use* of these expressions

provides an instructive theoretical model in Sellars's work, but he is not trying to reduce or explain away what is "metaphysically" suspicious; he is instead trying to understand *how* our dealings with one another and our worldly circumstances accomplish what they do.

With these points in mind, it is striking that the list of topics that Heidegger proposes to understand as ontological phenomena is significantly co-extensive with the list of topics for which Sellars proposes a metalinguistically "nominalistic" treatment. Moreover, both of them are undertaking a twofold strategy with respect to these aspects of our understanding. On the one hand, they aim to show how and why these phenomena are indispensably important, and indeed constitutive of our way of life and its disclosure or explanation of the world we inhabit and depend upon. These phenomena cannot be eliminated, reduced to some merely "subjective" or experiential residue, or otherwise excised from what merits serious philosophical attention. On the other hand, they each argue against various efforts to account for these phenomena ontically or descriptively/explanatorily as entities or relations among them. Much of their constructive philosophical work aims to discern an intelligible alternative to ontic or descriptive treatment of these issues, and to show how and why it matters to undertake such alternatives.

I cannot sequentially go through all of these topics, and work out how I am construing Sellars's and Heidegger's treatments of those topics as each exemplifying this twofold strategy. In some cases, the requisite interpretation is novel or controversial and requires considerable explication and defense. In other cases, Heidegger or Sellars or both only gesture in the direction

[such that he] has *not* thereby put himself in a position to be entitled to draw nominalistic *semantic* or *ontological* conclusions from the identification of that distinctive expressive role" (2015, 272). Part of what motivates my triangulation of Sellars with Heidegger is a sense that Brandom's reading has too readily assimilated what Sellars is up to within more traditional philosophical categories, and thereby partially missed the point.

of addressing these issues explicitly. Working out these details would take up a substantial part of the book that I am entertaining as the possible outcome of this project. I will, however, list some of the topics that I think invite treatment as examples of parallel strategies with this twofold character, and give suggestive indications of where to look in Sellars and Heidegger for my construal of what they are up to on that topic. In one crucial respect, however, this presentation as a list is misleading, because each treats these topics in mutually interlocking ways; in the end, I am inclined to think the views of each on all of these topics turn on the interconnections among each's treatment of normativity and alethic modalities:

"Intentionality": neither a relation, a property of an entity (e.g., of consciousness, language, or meanings), nor a formalizable structure, but instead *dasein's* disclosedness, or belonging to the space of reasons (each invoking distinctively *spatial* metaphors which call for unpacking)

Normativity: a complex of multiple considerations in both Heidegger and Sellars, who each eschew any attempt to understand normative authority and force in terms of norms, values, or rules, or as grounded in desires, preferences, etc. — Heidegger's treatment encompasses the *Abständigkeit* of *dasein's* everyday comportments,⁷ and its being appropriated into a genuinely normative phenomenon via conscience, guilt, and resoluteness; that aspect of any disclosedness that belongs to its *Befindlichkeit*; and that aspect of any way of being that allows for deficient modes— for Sellars, it shows up in

⁷ I think Heidegger's account of *Abständigkeit* has been widely misunderstood, or at least its significance unrecognized, because it is *not* simply "conformism" (as Haugeland has prominently argued), but is instead a concern for the adjustment of differences, such that one gets coherent mutual responsiveness in social practices, but *without* ascribing social regularities or "shared presuppositions" or achieving conformity.

how almost everything he considers is “fraught with ought” and “rulishness”, and his effort to construe these phenomena non-descriptively as “rehearsing a collective intention”, but one significant gap in his treatment is any explication of an affective dimension to normative force, comparable to *Befindlichkeit* in Heidegger.⁸

Possibility/necessity (alethic modalities): Heidegger on understanding as always projecting onto and into possibilities (including the rejection of any construal of possibilities as “possible actualities”); Sellars on the connections between conceptuality and lawfulness, and the interpretation of “the language of modality as a ‘transposed’ language of norms” (2007, 21)⁹

Sortals/What-Being: for Heidegger, what-being is an aspect of the articulation of being, and hence presumably a structural articulation of any and all ways of being, with different ways of being marked in crucial part by differences in their modes of what-being, e.g., the differences among *Bewandtnis* for equipment, social or occupational roles for “others”, and mineness as the “who” rather than “what” of Dasein; for Sellars, sortals are among the categorial structures that he hopes to understand metalinguistically— part of

⁸ Sellars’s naturalism provides an interesting but complex entree into the affective significance of how a conceptually articulated world gets its normative grip on our lives. On the one hand, the effects of mood on cognitive function are evident; on the other hand, these considerations have to be integrated within the space of reasons, as constitutive of normative significance rather than merely causal impacts. In the project I am envisioning, I anticipate criticizing Sellars’s treatment of sensation, and his inattention to mood, in similar ways that emphasize understanding both as modes of bodily *reciprocity* with one’s environment (which is a social/ discursive as well as material environment), which are normative all the way down.

⁹ This line is often quoted without recognition of the context, which is Carnap’s claim in *Logical Syntax of Language* that “The material mode of speech is a transposed mode of speech”. Carnap’s transposition is from the formal mode, such that the transposition concerns what one might call “material descent” (the opposite of Quine’s “semantic ascent”). Sellars is thus relating worldly necessity and practical normativity as getting at the same phenomena from different

the point of the metalinguistic treatment of sortals is to understand when and how entities belonging to different sortal categories can be related to one another logically, empirically, and explanatorily

Identity-individuation/That-Being: for Heidegger, that-being is an aspect of the articulation of being, and hence presumably a structural articulation of any and all ways of being, with different ways of being marked in crucial part by differences in their modes of that-being (e.g., *Zuhandenheit*, *Vorhandenheit*, and *Existenz*); for Sellars, this issue turns in significant part on what quantifiers express, and his willingness to accommodate different modes of quantification (here there is a long story to tell, but it encompasses the relation between Sellars's and Heidegger's likely criticisms of Quine's doctrines about ontological commitment, i.e., in Heidegger's terms the *ontic* commitments invoked by understanding being)

Predicates ("Universals"): it is not often recognized that, in his reconstruction of phenomenology in PGZ, Heidegger treated Husserlian eidetic intuition as a special case of categorial intuition, and hence as part of what is understood in understanding being (the case he discusses is the "being-yellow" of a chair); Sellars's metalinguistic account of descriptive predicates brings together his demonstration that they are ineliminably modal with his nominalistic treatment of the normativity of their use, including the normativity of predication itself.

Predication: Heidegger on the relation between the apophantical and the hermeneutical 'as', and

directions, which would each be perspicuous in different settings.

the ontological significance of the grammatical form of the copula¹⁰; Sellars's "nominalistic" treatment of predication itself via the expressive capacities of Jumblese, which makes syntactically vivid a characterization of predication and what is predicated as derivative from what we do in saying something of something. It does so by showing that we can express what is said of something in a form that dispenses with any *expression* that signifies predication.

Categorial intuition/conveying: In PGZ, Heidegger accounts for the phenomenological manifestation of the being of entities in terms of the relations between intentional directedness toward entities, and the correlated modes of categorial intuition which are co-intended with any comportment toward entities; in the formal mode, Sellars distinguishes what is *said* by an utterance or thought from what is *conveyed* by the capacities involved in saying/thinking that content, for example when the counterfactual implications of an empirical concept are conveyed by one's explicit applications of it.

the *a priori*: Heidegger in PGZ identifies the "original sense of the *a priori*" as one of the primary discoveries of phenomenology, which supposedly shows that it has nothing to do with knowing, subjectivity, or entities (as a real structure or component thereof), but instead concerns being, with its character as "prior" ultimately to be explicated in terms of *Zeitlichkeit* and *Temporalität*; Sellars, who often *does* talk about *a priori* knowledge, nevertheless uses the term in a broader role to characterize the "structure" of conceptual frameworks, including both their categorial structure and their ineliminably material-

¹⁰ Wayne Martin (2006, ch. 4) shows how the problem of understanding judgment and the copula goes back to Heidegger's 1913 dissertation on *The Logic of Judgment in Psychologism*, and displays some key themes in Heidegger's ontological problematic as already

inferential structure, which in the end depend upon his interlinked treatments of modality and normativity

self/I/personhood: as Stephan Käufer (2013) has convincingly argued, original temporality is Heidegger's account of selfhood, through the *via media* of Kant on the threefold synthesis in the A deduction, and it serves to unify the Care structure that articulates *dasein*'s way of being; Sellars hardly talks about self, except tellingly in an extensive discussion of Kant on the Transcendental Unity of Apperception (2007, ch. 15), but the topic is implicit in his treatment of persons and personhood as the core of the manifest image, and its place within a properly stereoscopic view of "Man-in-the-world" — for both Heidegger and Sellars, this topic brings us back full circle to their characterizations of *dasein*/Man, its being/conceptual framework (Care/framework of persons), and the disclosedness/self-disclosedness and conceptuality/reflexivity that each respectively takes to be "essential"; for both Heidegger and Sellars, this issue also highlights the ways in which *Dasein*/Man is each a "collective" entity that is essentially individuated "in each case" as loci of possible "owned" resoluteness or responsibility-taking

truth: as we shall see below, I take the issue of understanding truth to be central to both projects, and ultimately as integral to what is at stake in their core commitments to the ontological difference as finite (Heidegger) or to the conceptual roles and ontological "status" of normative, modal, and categorial aspects of conceptual knowhow (Sellars)

Heidegger (I will argue) treats ontic truth as grounded in ontological understanding (an understanding of being both opens a space of intelligible possibilities, and determines the

normative accountability of those possibilities). He postponed his discussion of ontological truth to the unwritten Division III, because it involves the ways in which different understandings of being relate to one another (these considerations range from the ontological “changeover” that allows scientific understanding of entities as occurrent within a thematizing mathematical projection, to the response to ontological crises within a science or within one’s historical situation).¹¹ This account is crucial to his entire enterprise, since it concerns when and how it is appropriate to understand an entity as being in one way rather than another, and what it is and how it matters to get ontological understanding right;

Sellars: Sellars (on my reading) makes a similar partition between truth as warranted assertibility within a conceptual framework, and the more encompassing problem of how (some) different conceptual frameworks “hang together” and others do not in ways that require recognition of the former and abandonment of the latter

Needless to say, working out these parallels and differences in any detail would be a very large project, and one should not undertake such a project without good reason (good reason to undertake the work to write it, but also with an eye to why anyone should ever want to read such a work). For many philosophers today, the suggestion that there are common concerns behind the work of Heidegger and Sellars would only confirm their prejudices that these are turgid, dark, unfathomable philosophical depths to be avoided. Yet even if one does think Heidegger and/or

¹¹ In my view, SZ 69b has been widely misunderstood because interpreters have not taken sufficiently seriously Heidegger’s insistence at the outset that “a fully adequate existential Interpretation of science cannot be carried out until the *sense of being and the ‘connection’ between being and truth* have been *clarified* in terms of the temporality of existence” (SZ 357/BT 408); I take this clarification to have been projected for division III.

Sellars is philosophically important (only a very small handful of folks really think *both* are genuinely important), comparative projects are often philosophically unilluminating. Anyone who reads *much* of the literature on Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein and Dewey, or Whitehead and anyone else will quickly recognize why one might be rightly suspicious of further contributions to that enterprise. So we need to take very seriously the question of what is the point of indicating and clarifying these patterns of partial convergence.

IV — What is at Stake in the Juxtaposition of Heidegger and Sellars?

A first level of interest in reading Heidegger and Sellars against one another comes from the recognition (I think it is a recognition rather than just a proposal) that there is still much about each philosophical project that is not well understood. In particular, the broadly “logical” dimension of Heidegger’s concerns has not been well integrated into the dominant interpretations, and in some ways, we are still not adequately clear about what the *point* of Heidegger’s work is supposed to be (or at least *how* the topics he takes up are supposed to contribute to its supposedly world-historical significance). In Sellars’s case, the issue of the unity of his overall project has only recently emerged as a serious topic for reflection, and where there has been a sense of its unity, I think it has been partly misguided. The right-Sellarsian assimilation of Sellars to an eliminativist naturalism is a remarkably monocular reading of his aspiration to a stereoscopic vision. Recent left-Sellarsian recoveries (e.g., Brandom, de Vries) do much better, but still remain one-sided in their appropriation of Sellars’s project, for example in Brandom’s abstracted emphasis upon pragmatic relations among vocabularies, and his rejection of Sellars’s naturalism. So the comparison may well be useful in advancing philosophical understanding of what each of them was up to. As I indicated earlier, though, that is not *my*

reason. I have never aspired to philosophical scholarship for its own sake; I have always sought to acquire better understanding of someone else's work primarily to the extent that I think I (we) will learn something important from getting at it more rightly.

There are four broad, interrelated topics that I hope to advance in my own understanding by thinking through what Heidegger and Sellars were up to, and where and how their projects diverge: the relation between philosophy and the sciences, the place and significance of language within conceptual capacities/ontological understanding, the practical/existential/temporal aspects of those capacities and their philosophical articulation, and the finitude and vulnerability/riskiness of ontological/conceptual understanding. I will conclude by briefly indicating where and how I think these issues arise in the juxtaposition of Heidegger and Sellars.

As I noted earlier and you all know, Heidegger and Sellars seem to differ sharply in the valence of their conceptions of the sciences and their significance for philosophy. Sellars is committed to the philosophical primacy of the scientific image, and famously takes it as the "measure" of what is and what is not. Heidegger treats the sciences and the way of being they disclose as relentlessly concerned only with entities, in a way that both covers over the central philosophical concern with being, and embodies a constant and corrosive pull toward "idle talk" in which scientific concepts block access to what those conceptualizations aim to uncover. Careful consideration shows that this issue is more complex than it initially appears. To begin with, Heidegger and Sellars were among the early advocates of a "theory-centered" conception of scientific understanding in which the modal and normative commitments of a conceptual framework or "mathematical projection"¹² govern and orient scientific understanding. They

¹² Heidegger uses this phrase not to ascribe a quantitative commitment to the sciences,

dissent from both the empiricist and formalist concerns that figured prominently in the philosophies of science many of their contemporaries. Both projects also recognize the theoretical disunity of the sciences, and the question of whether and how that disunity can or should be overcome is salient but underdeveloped in both projects. Sellars confidently insists that while “there *are* as many scientific images of man as there are sciences which have something to say about man,” each of which employs different procedures and instruments, such “diversity ... is compatible with intrinsic ‘identity’ of the theoretical entities themselves” (2007, 388-89). It is not clear, however, that his recognition of the ineliminably modal character of scientific understanding will allow such unification in a straightforward way, since the entities as disclosed by different sciences are not identical in their modal character. Heidegger in turn seems to offer a general ontological characterization of the sciences, as discovering entities as (“merely”) occurrent, but he also insists upon the way “basic concepts” and an understanding of being that “delimits an area of subject-matter” are ontologically constitutive of specific sciences. And while he often takes up the case of mathematical physics as providing a fully general conception of nature, he also explicitly recognizes that physics is but one example of a scientific domain governed by an understanding of being. As a result, both Sellars and Heidegger make salient the question of the unity and/or disunity of the various sciences in their accountability to the world, and each provides a distinctive philosophical basis for addressing that question, although with many unresolved issues about its outcome.

Heidegger’s and Sellars’s differences over the importance of the sciences for philosophy

but instead to emphasize the “*a priori*” character of a theoretical projection in allowing entities to show up in a definite way (including, but not limited to, numerical measures and algebraic, geometrical or topological expression of their quantitative relationships).

emerge against the background of their commitments to differentiating the task of philosophy from that of the sciences (whether in terms of respectively ontic and ontological concerns, or in terms of specialized disciplinary subject matters and the philosophical “eye on the whole”). Both of them pose this issue against the background of a strongly historical sense of conceptual change in the sciences and philosophy, and the possibility that our best current understanding will not merely be improved or partially modified by subsequent developments, but will be conceptually and methodologically reconstructed. Both do consider the prospect of an eventual completion of scientific inquiry, however, and while Sellars allows a constructive role for the conception of a Peircean limit of inquiry, both actually express some ambivalence about that prospect. Heidegger is well known for claiming both that a finalized scientific enterprise would be correct in its own terms, and that such a scientific and technological totalization would be a catastrophe that his own philosophical thinking aims to resist. Less obviously and only somewhat less apocalyptically, Sellars poses a comparable concern. His aspiration to a stereoscopic fusion of the scientific and manifest images starts from his recognition that the scientific image seems to accord no place whatsoever for man and the manifest image, and his rejection of any accommodation of the two images via an instrumentalism that would subordinate the sciences to our perennial self-conception. Sellars then poses in striking terms what he thinks is at stake in finding a way to accommodate the manifest image within a broadly scientific self-conception: “man is that being which conceives of itself in terms of the manifest image, [such that] to the extent that the manifest does not survive in the synoptic view man himself would not survive” (2007, 386).

The question of the relation between language and philosophical understanding also

raises important issues, with a more complex background than might seem initially evident. Heidegger's ambivalence on this topic is familiar. The derivative role he assigns to assertion and the apophantic 'as', his broadening of intentional "comportments" to include practical dealings with what is available, the "reticence" of owned, resolute dasein, and the treatment of understanding generally as a kind of practical competence, all suggest a secondary role for language and especially for logic in his account of dasein as understanding being and open to entities. Yet Heidegger also treats *Rede* as an *existentiale*, part of the threefold structure of dasein's disclosedness, and language became increasingly central to his philosophical project. Sellars initially seems to give language and logic a much more prominent role, most notably in taking up Carnap's distinction between the material and formal modes of expression, and giving priority to the formal mode through his various "metalinguistic" analyses. His most influential work bases philosophy of mind in a philosophy of language, and his philosophy of language in turn gives pride of place to inference.

Once again, however, this issue is more complicated than it first appears. Sellars explicitly denies that all thoughts are linguistic events (2007, 282-83), and construes the priority he ascribes to language as the use of a more familiar *model* in constructing a theory: the semantics of linguistic assertions can then be extended to ascribe semantic significance to thoughts. We have already seen that Sellars's "metalinguistic" nominalism terminates in larger patterns of language use whose normativity turns on much more than just the linguistic expressions used, and that linguistic sign-designs and expression-types are among the abstract entities that he treats "nominalistically." What matters in Sellars's analysis is not language per

se, but its functional role in a way of life.¹³ His commitment to the ineliminability of material inference and subjunctive conditionals also requires treatment of language and its encompassing form of life as world-involving. I want to attend to this issue because I think Heidegger and Sellars are right in their ambivalence about the centrality and priority of language to understanding and disclosure. I take language to be both integral to and transformative of human capacities for understanding, but also want to insist that language is not autonomous. It only functions as language within a more encompassing way of life, and its constitutive normative and modal considerations extend beyond language to other expressive capacities. Thinking through how Sellars and Heidegger formulate and respond to this question may thus contribute constructively to a more adequate understanding of *how* to comprehend together the world-embeddedness and irreducibility of language, its constitutive role for conceptual/ ontological disclosure, and the possibilities for non-linguistic understanding.

Both Heidegger and Sellars ultimately regard philosophical understanding as a form of practical knowhow rather than theoretical knowing-that.¹⁴ Heidegger is widely thought to push this theme further by treating the kind of understanding both presupposed and achieved to be “existentially” constitutive of a way of life: *dasein* is the entity whose being is at issue in its very being, with the consequence that “the meaning-content of [philosophical] concepts does not directly intend or express what they refer to, but only gives an indication, a pointer to the fact

¹³ One of the important issues to address with Sellars is the very conception of a functional role in human life, and the determination of that for-the-sake-of which such functional roles are to be assessed.

¹⁴ I take both views ultimately to require the recognition that empirical science is also a fundamentally “practical” endeavor, both because it needs to be understood *as* practices that incorporate their conceptual-articulative achievements within a more encompassing field of practical and political issues, and because scientific understanding ineliminably invokes action-

that anyone who seeks to understand is called upon by this conceptual context to undertake a transformation of themselves...” (1983, 430/1995, 297). Sellars does not give anything like Heidegger’s emphasis to such themes, but they are hardly absent in his work, and indeed, they emerge at the culmination of each of his two most programmatically important papers: Sellars concludes the myth of Jones in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* by asking,

Is my myth really a myth? Or does the reader not recognize Jones as Man himself in the middle of his journey from the grunts and groans of the cave to the subtle and polydimensional discourse of the drawing room, the laboratory, and the study, the language of Henry and William James, of Einstein and of the philosophers...? (1997, 117)

“Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” in turn concludes that in *joining* “the conceptual framework of persons [as] the framework in which we think of one another as sharing the community intentions ... within which we live our own individual lives” to the scientific image, “we *directly* 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” (2007, 408).

What Sellars takes to be at issue in our being does not coincide with the issues that exercise Heidegger, but both take them to be world-constitutive and futurally-directed. Understanding how to situate philosophical understanding practically, existentially, and historically, without thereby relativizing or otherwise undermining its authority and significance, is a third concern that might gain better focus through triangulation with Heidegger and Sellars.

Once again, Heidegger gives more explicit and central attention than Sellars to my fourth and final theme, the possible finitude of ontological/conceptual understanding. This issue has

guiding practical reason. I will not argue for these claims here.

multiple dimensions: dependence upon and accountability to entities, inability to “look at [warm, familiar aspects of the human condition] coldly and with the eye of a stranger [rather than from within] the thick of the human situation” (Jonathan Bennett 1985, 619), constitutive inability to achieve full clarity in self-understanding, and its consequent existential riskiness and vulnerability. In at least some of these respects (at the very least, entity-dependence and intraworldliness), Sellars nevertheless also endorses an inescapable finitude to conceptual understanding. Moreover, I think this issue ultimately turns upon a question that is at the heart of both philosophical projects, namely that of ontological truth, the normative accountability of conceptual frameworks or understandings of being, and not just of what it is correct to think, say or do within such settings and ways of life. Getting a better grip upon that issue, and the grip it has upon us, is my most important rationale for trying to think through more clearly just what Heidegger and Sellars are up to, each in his own inimitable and partially problematic way.

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