SELLARS ON MODALITY:

POSSIBLE WORLDS AND RULES OF INFERENCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates Sellars' account of (alethic) modality. Its aim is twofold. First, I will discuss Sellars' analysis by exploring its historical relationship to Carnap's account of modality. More specifically, I aim to show that Carnap's early syntactic treatment of modality profoundly influenced Sellars' own so-called 'regulist' account of modality in terms of rules of inference. Although Sellars makes some important changes to Carnap's original account, his regulist account remains indebted to Carnap's treatment of modal sentences as quasi-syntactical sentences that are more appropriately formulated in the formal (rather than the material) mode of speech. Furthermore, I suggest that Sellars' lesser-known possible worlds analysis of modality was influenced by Carnap's later semantic treatment of modality. Whereas Sellars is wary of the possible confusions involved in speaking about possible worlds, he never abandons it. This paper's historical aim is to better understand Carnap's influence on Sellars' views on modality and to examine the ways in which Sellars departed from Carnap's original analysis.

The second aim is a critical one and follows quite naturally from the first, more historical, one. It concerns Sellars' own views on the exact relationship between his regulist analysis and his possible worlds analysis of modality. I argue that Sellars does not provide a satisfying explanation of the relationship between these two different accounts. I offer such an explanation by arguing that his regulist account should be understood as a *pragmatic* account of what is conveyed by the *use* of modal sentences, while his possible worlds analysis is a *semantic* account of modal statements' *asserted content*. That is, the regulist account and the possible worlds analysis have different explanatory targets. Moreover, I also argue that while Sellars' regulist account of modality is promising, it fails to specify what exactly the relationship between a modal statement and a corresponding normative statement (expressing a linguistic rule) consists of in sufficient detail.

Apart from the historical and independent philosophical interest in these two claims, there are two further reasons to take a closer look at Wilfrid Sellars' views on modality. First, no paper currently provides a systematic discussion of Sellars' full account of modality. This is surprising, given that questions about modality are central to his overall work. Robert Brandom (in his 2015 book *From Empiricism to Expressivism*) offers the most extensive account of Sellars' views on modality, and although his discussion is excellent, it is somewhat selective and influenced by his own philosophical concerns. For example, Brandom does not elaborate upon Sellars' early outline of a possible worlds semantics, instead focusing exclusively on Sellars' expressivist account of modality in terms of rules of inference. In what follows, I will argue that a more complete discussion of Sellars' views on modality must also include his account of possible worlds.

Second, a recent position on modality has self-consciously come to be situated in a philosophical tradition to which Sellars' contribution was central. This contemporary position is known as 'modal normativism', and is most notably defended by Amie Thomasson in *Norms and Necessity* (2020). While Thomasson (*Norms and Necessity*, 35-36) explicitly refers to Sellars as a predecessor of her own view, she focuses exclusively on *metaphysical* modality. She notes, however, that Sellars' work also contains elaborate discussions of physical and logical modality. Returning to Sellars could, in other words, provide a valuable starting point for those who are interested in extending Thomasson's modal normativism. Therefore, I am confident that this paper will be relevant to both the contemporary literature on modality as well as the literature on Sellars.

This paper's scope is limited in several ways. First, my focus remains restricted to Sellars' early period and to the first years of his middle period(s).[1] More specifically, I will focus on Sellars' output between 1947 and 1958.[2] The main reason for this is that discussions of modality were especially pervasive throughout this period, which leads Brandom to claim that Sellars "never revisits the topic substantially" (Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, 188) after this period.[3] Second, Sellars' views on modality can rightly be identified as a kind of *expressivism*.

[1] Different distinctions between the 'early' and 'middle' periods of Sellars' oeuvre can certainly be made. I adhere to one traditional way of making this distinction, based on the 1980 volume *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, in which the early period lasts until 1953.

[2] I take this to include his article, "Méditations Leibniziennes", which is a lecture from 1958 but which was not published until 1965.

[3] While I largely agree with this claim, several of Sellars' later essays, such as "Induction as Vindication" (1964) and "Are There Non-Deductive logics?" (1970), contain further discussions about inductive reasoning and the relationship between law-like statements, probability, and practical reasoning.

They stand in an interesting relation to his expressivist views on moral statements and property-talk. Concerning the relationship between modal and moral statements, Sellars writes that "[i]f I have become more and more happy of late about Kant's assimilation of the ethical 'ought' to the logical and physical 'musts,' it is because I have increasingly been led to assimilate the logical and physical 'musts' to the ethical 'ought'."[4] (LRB, 294) However, a systematic discussion of this interesting relationship lies beyond the scope of this paper.[5] Finally, Sellars' views on modality were not only influenced by Carnap's work on modality, but by other philosophers as well. One notable example is C. I. Lewis, whose work on modality Sellars reacted to explicitly (CIL, 287-289). My main reason for focusing on Carnap's influence is that this influence is somewhat underexplored in the secondary literature and (as I will argue) because Carnap played a huge role in the development of *both* – what I will call – his *pragmatic* account of modality in terms of rules of inference as well as his *semantic* account of modality in terms of possible worlds.

I will proceed as follows. In section 2, I will discuss Carnap's syntactical account of modality, which influenced Sellars' own analysis to a considerable extent. In section 3, I will explain Sellars' account of modality in terms of rules of inference and specify the two central changes that he made to Carnap's account. Sections 4 and 5 raise some possible objections to Sellars' account of modality in terms of rules of inference. In so doing, I will further refine Sellars' position while also showing its limitations. In section 6, I will show that Sellars not only defended a regulist account of modality (in terms of rules of inference), but he also developed a possible worlds analysis of modality. Whereas his regulist account was influenced by Carnap's syntactical treatment of modality, Carnap's semantic account of modality (in his 1947 book *Meaning and Necessity*) was an important influence on Sellars' possible worlds analysis. I argue, however, that Sellars' position does not provide a satisfying explanation of the relationship between these two different accounts. I offer such an explanation by arguing that his regulist account should be understood as a *pragmatic* account of what is conveyed by the *use* of modal sentences, whereas his possible worlds analysis is a *semantic* account of modal statements' *asserted content*. That is, the regulist account and the possible worlds analysis have different explanatory targets.

[4] I use abbreviations to refer to Sellars' works. These abbreviations can be found in the Bibliography section at the end of the paper.

[5] For recent discussions of Sellars' moral expressivism, see Dach, "Sellars, We-intentions, and Ought Statements"; Klemick, "Sellars' Metaethical Quasi-Realism"; Koons, *The Ethics of Wilfrid Sellars*. For an account of Sellars' expressivist nominalism, see Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, 236-272.

2. CARNAP ON QUASI-SYNTACTICAL SENTENCES

Sellars' earlier writings repeatedly emphasize the intimate connection between alethic modal discourse and normative talk. Herein, he offers several claims, namely, that real connections are the "shadow of rules" (LRB, 312), that "[o]ur use of the term 'necessary' in causal as well as in logical contexts is to be traced to linguistic rules" (LRB, 309), that "[c]orresponding to logical necessities in Reality, we have logical norms of the language, and L-rules (Formation and Transformation) in the metalanguage", and that "[c]orresponding to natural necessities we have the non-logical (physical, synthetic) norms of the language" (OPL, 2). He also claims that modal language is a "'transposed' language of norms" (IM, 332), that "the full flavor of actual modal discourse involves the way in which sentences in the first level language game containing modal words parallel sentences containing rule words ('may,' 'ought,' 'permitted,' etc.) in the syntactical metalanguage" (SRLG, 37-38), and that "statements involving modal terms have the force of prescriptive statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language" (CDCM, 283).

These quotes are far from self-explanatory, and Sellars rarely explicates them any further. His most elaborate attempt at further explicating the exact relationship between modal and normative vocabularies can be found in Sections IV and V of his 1953 article "Inference and Meaning". In the first three sections of this article, Sellars argues that *material* rules of inference are indispensable to natural languages, suggesting that such rules of inference "are as essential as formal rules to the meaning of descriptive terms" (IM, 327). Material inferences are those whose validity depends on the actual occurrence of certain non-logical expressions. Such inferences are to be distinguished from *formal* inferences, whose validity does not depend on the essential occurrence of non-logical expressions (i.e. the inference remains a good one after substituting non-logical expressions for other non-logical expressions of the same type). For example, the inference from

(i) This is gold

to

(ii) This is malleable

is a materially good inference which depends on the essential occurrence of the non-logical expressions 'gold' and 'malleable'. If one were to substitute these non-logical expressions for other non-logical expressions, the inference might turn into a bad one (e.g. if 'gold' were to be

substituted by 'zinc', which is non-malleable at most temperatures). In order to turn this into a *formally* valid inference, the extra premise

(iii) If something is gold, then it is malleable

must be added. The inference from (i) and (iii) to (ii) is formally valid, given that its validity no longer depends on the essential occurrence of certain non-logical expressions.

Sellars discusses the status of material inferences in relation to some comments made by Carnap in his 1934 book *The Logical Syntax of Language*. In this work, Carnap distinguishes between L-rules (the 'L' referring to 'logical'), which correspond to formal rules of inference, and P-rules (the 'P' refers to 'physical'), which correspond to material rules of inference.[6] Both L-rules and P-rules are so-called *transformation rules*, which can be understood as "rules of deduction" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 2) that "determine how given sentences may be transformed into others; in other words: how from given sentences we may *infer* others." (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 13) Together with the so-called *formation rules*, "which determine how *sentences*" of a language "can be constructed out of the different kinds of symbols" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 12), these rules constitute the *logical syntax* of languages or language-systems. Sellars criticizes Carnap's alleged commitment to the idea "that natural languages need have no P-rules" (IM, 320) and that the absence or presence of such rules amounts to nothing more than a "question of expedience" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 180).[7] Against this view, Sellars argues that material rules of inference *are* indispensable to natural languages and he further argues that they are expressed paradigmatically by counterfactual conditionals. Sellars then suggests that these rules "are as essential as formal rules to the meaning of descriptive terms" (IM, 327). This idea would go on to become the cornerstone of his semantic inferentialist programme, something which he went on to outline in his later writings on the philosophy of language.[8]

[6] My discussion of Carnap's syntactic account of modality includes references not only to *The Logical Syntax of Language* but also to his "Philosophy and Logical Syntax" (1935), which contains three lectures that Carnap delivered at the University of London in October 1934, and that summarize some of the key ideas from *The Logical Syntax of Language*.

[7] Carnap certainly does not *explicitly* endorse this commitment himself; Carnap's view is that artificial languages that contain descriptive terms need not have P-rules. Sellars argues that his view further *implies* the stronger view that *natural* languages need not have P-rules, given that Sellars thinks that "an artificially constructed calculus with an appropriate syntactical structure becomes a natural language by virtue of (1) the adoption of its syntactical rules by a language speaking community; (2) the association of some of its descriptive terms with sensory cues" (IM, 320).

[8] For some discussions of Sellars' philosophy of language, see Harman, "Sellars' Semantics"; O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars: Naturalism With a Normative Turn*, 28-76; Shapiro, "Sellars on the Function of Semantic Vocabulary".

His discussion of the status of material rules of inference eventually led him to develop his own analysis of modality in sections IV and V of "Inference and Meaning". As Sellars (IM, 331) clearly states, his analysis is based on Carnap's account from *The Logical Syntax of Language* but aims at improving it in certain respects as well. According to Carnap, sentences involving modality are "veiled syntactical sentences" (Carnap, "Philosophy and Logical Syntax", 24) or "quasi-syntactical sentences" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 250) which are misleadingly formulated in the material mode of speech and are more appropriately formulated in the *formal* mode of speech. As Carnap writes, these are "sentences which are formulated as though they refer (either partially or exclusively) to objects, while in reality they refer to syntactical forms" (*The Logical Syntax of Language*, 285). For example, Carnap argued that an object-level modal sentence such as

(iv) It is impossible that a square has five sides,

which is formulated in the material mode of speech, is a quasi-syntactical sentence whose (less misleading) syntactical counterpart is the sentence

(v) 'A square has five sides' is contradictory (or contravalid),

which is formulated in the formal (metalinguistic) mode of speech. Similarly, sentences expressing possibility (e.g. 'It is possible that the square is red'), necessity (e.g. 'It is necessary that a square has four sides') or contingency (e.g. 'It is contingent that the square is green') are quasi-syntactical sentences that are less misleadingly and more properly formulated in the formal mode of speech (e.g. '"The square is red" is non-contradictory (or non-contravalid)', '"A square has four sides" is analytic (or valid)', '"The square is green" is synthetic (or indeterminate)').

Three further points should be made here. First, note that Carnap gives exact definitions of the notions of contradictoriness and analyticity (or the more general terms of (contra)validity and (in)determinateness) throughout *The Logical Syntax of Language*. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to delve into Carnap's more detailed discussions of these general notions. Secondly, also note that while the above examples all concern *logical* modality, Carnap also offers a way to deal with *physical* modality. For example, physically necessary sentences are *P*-valid, which means that they are logically deducible from the system of physical laws. Physically impossible sentences are *P*-contravalid, meaning they are "incompatible with the system of physical laws" (Carnap, "Philosophy and Logical Syntax", 24). Thirdly, Carnap discusses a wealth of other examples of quasi-syntactical sentences apart from modal sentences.

These examples include sentences such as (1) 'The moon is a *thing*' which should be translated into the sentence '"Moon' is a thing-word" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 297), (2) '*Numbers* are classes of classes of things' should be translated into the sentence "Numerical expressions are class-expressions of the second level" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 300), and (3) '*Time* is continuous' should be translated into the sentence, "The real-number expressions are used as time-co-ordinates" (Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 307). As I already mentioned in the Introduction, however, I will limit myself exclusively to the analysis of modality.

3. MODALITY AS THE 'SHADOW OF RULES'

Sellars explicitly developed his account of modality as an attempt to further work out Carnap's analysis. He states that Carnap's account "is essentially sound" (IM, 332) but that it is in need of some improvements. I have already explained how Sellars criticizes Carnap's claim that the adoption of material rules of inference is merely a matter of convenience. Next to this, Sellars suggests two further developments of Carnap's position.

The first modification is the result of taking "the *rulishness* of syntactical rules," more seriously (IM, 331). According to Carnap, a logically necessary sentence such as

(vi) It is necessary that a red square is a square

is quasi-syntactical and translatable into the metalinguistic sentence

(vii) 'A red square is a square' is L-valid (or analytic).

This metalinguistic sentence can, in turn, be reformulated through the use of a transformation rule from 'x is a red square' into 'x is a square' (that is part of the syntax of a language L) which is properly expressed as:

(viii) 'x is a square' is L-derivable from 'x is a red square'.

Sellars then notes that a "rule is always a rule for *doing* something," (IM, 329) and that a rule "prescribes or permits a certain kind of action" (IM, 330). If we accept this, Sellars argues, modal sentences should be interpreted as object-language sentences which parallel sentences that prescribe or permit certain kinds of *assertions* (which are the relevant kind of *doings* in this case).

If we synthesize these claims, we can take Sellars to be arguing that modal sentences which are expressed in the material mode of speech, such as

(vi) It is necessary that a red square is a square,

should be reformulated (in the formal mode of speech) as

(ix) 'x is a square' is derivable from 'x is a red square',

which is, in turn, given a normative interpretation in the sense that it prescribes the following rule of conditional assertion (RCA):

> (RCA) It is permissible to assert 'x is a square', given that one has asserted 'x is a red square', whereas it is not permissible to assert 'it is not the case that x is a square', given that one has asserted 'x is a red square'. (IM, 330)

Hence, this is why Sellars asserts the idea that "[t]he language of modalities is interpreted as a "transposed" language of norms" (IM, 332) and that "statements involving modal terms have the force of prescriptive statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language" (CDCM, 283).

Many comments can be made at this point, but for now, I will limit myself to what I take to be the two most important ones. First, Sellars never developed a *detailed* account of what exactly the prescriptive statements into which different kinds of object-level modal sentences can be translated actually are. The above-mentioned rule of conditional assertion is, as Sellars clearly asserts, only a rough outline of how to think about the case of logical necessity. Secondly, given that modal sentences should be reformulated as rules of conditional assertion, one would need to say more about the notion of *assertion*. Sellars *is* aware of this problem and roughly asserts that the concept of assertion should be understood in terms of the concept of a token, "so that to assert a sentence is to bring about the existence of a token of that sentence." (IM, 331) But, this is a very weak characterization indeed, as it fails to distinguish assertions that p from mere utterances of 'p'. Especially when comparing this characterization to the wealth of different accounts proposed in contemporary debates over assertion, one would need to say much more in order to develop a mature account of modality along the lines suggested by Sellars.

So much for the first modification of Carnap's original view. The second modification which Sellars suggests concerns the exact relationship between modal and normative vocabularies. In Sections IV and V of "Inference and Meaning" (1953), Sellars distinguishes between (i) what

has been *asserted* and (ii) what has been *conveyed* by a speaker's utterance. He gives the example of how a speaker's utterance of the sentence

(x) The sky is clear

asserts something about the weather, but *conveys* something about the speaker's state of mind, namely that the speaker *believes* that the sky is clear. This eventually leads to Sellars' analysis of cases where modal statements do not *assert* but rather *convey* "the existence of a linguistic rule governing the use of 'ϕ' and 'ψ'" (IM, 333).

Sellars' main reason for introducing the assert/convey distinction is to respond to two interrelated objections. The first objection is that "the thought of necessity is radically different from the thought of permission-*cum*-obligation" (IM, 332), which would make it implausible to interpret modal statements as disguised normative ones. And the second objection is that modal sentences mention "neither linguistic expressions nor language users, and consequently cannot mention an obligation of language of language-users to use linguistic expressions in certain ways" (IM, 332). By introducing the assert/convey distinction, Sellars recognizes the strength of these objections against accounts that would treat the content asserted by modal statements as the same as the content asserted by normative statements. And he proposes a way to avoid these objections by arguing that modal statements indeed do not assert but *convey* rules about the proper use of linguistic expressions or sentences.

In order to better understand this move, it is instructive to look at two essays which were published around the same time as "Inference and Meaning", namely "Mind, Meaning, and Behavior" (1952) and "A Semantical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem" (1953). In these articles, Sellars uses the assert/convey distinction in order to analyze semantic statements of the form ''a' uttered by S means *b*'. According to Sellars, semantic statements made by uttering sentences such as ''Es regnet' uttered by S means *it is raining*' do not assert but *convey* psychological information about the dispositions and habits of a person S. In this case, the sentence conveys the psychological information that the dispositions and habits of S with respect to utterances of 'Es regnet' are similar to dispositions and habits of the speaker with regard to utterances of 'It is raining'. If utterances of 'Es regnet' mean that *it is raining*, one should expect there to be important similarities between the dispositions of the speaker who made the first utterance and the speaker who made the second utterance. For example, one might expect that both speakers will have dispositions to open their umbrellas and to put on a raincoat (SSMB, 197) or to stay at home rather than go to the beach, etc. Sellars' negative point

is that semantic statements indeed do not *assert* (or *say*) what is *asserted* (or *said*) by psychological statements, and hence are not *logically reducible* to psychological statements. And his positive point is that even though semantic statements do not assert psychological information (as a semantic statement doesn't *mention* any mental states or dispositions), such statements are "properly designed to convey information of this kind" (SSMB, 211).

At the end of "A Semantical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem" (1953), Sellars explicitly states that a "similar approach would resolve traditional puzzles relating to the logical and causal modalities" (SSMB, 214). Similar to his treatment of semantic statements in "Mind, Meaning, and Behavior" (1952) and "A Semantical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem" (1953), Sellars (in his 'Inference and Meaning') analyzes modal statements as those that do not *assert* but *convey* a linguistic rule about the proper *use* of certain expressions or sentences. It is important to keep in mind here that Sellars has a *broad* understanding of 'linguistic rules'. Such rules incorporate both material rules as well as formal rules of inference (ITSA, 135). According to Sellars, logically necessary statements convey *formal* rules of inference, and physically necessary statements convey *material* rules of inference. While modal statements cannot be ('logically') *reduced* to normative statements, they do convey something about the rules that dictate how we should properly use expressions or sentences. For example, the logically necessary statement made by uttering 'It is necessary that a red square is a square' conveys a formal rule of inference from 'x is a square and x is red' to 'x is a square' (which corresponds to a conjunction elimination rule in propositional logic). And a physically necessary statement made by uttering 'Necessarily, all gold is malleable' conveys a material rule of inference from 'x is gold' to 'x is malleable'.

While the rough outline of Sellars' account of modality is relatively clear, things become more obscure when we begin asking more detailed questions about the specifics. In the following two sections, I will critically discuss some aspects of Sellars' account that are not sufficiently worked out. While I will suggest some amendments to Sellars' position, I will ultimately argue that his account confronts some important limitations and cries out for further (and more detailed) investigations. I should emphasize that my focus until this point has been primarily *historical*; that is, the aim of this paper has been to better understand Sellars' regulist account of modality as a response to Carnap's syntactical account of modality. I will turn to a critical discussion of Sellars' regulist account in the following two sections that correspond to this paper's second critical aim. I will also emphasize the ongoing relevance of Sellars' account,

and how it can be further elaborated upon in the future, given the recent revival of modal normativism in the contemporary literature.

4. A Special Relationship?

One might object by asserting that Sellars fails to show that there is any *special* relationship between alethic modal and deontic normativity. After all, one can argue that (1) there are non-modal statements that convey normative statements, and that (2) modal statements convey non-normative ones as well.

First, modal statements are by no means special when it comes to conveying rules of inference. One clear example concerns contexts of use where a parent makes use of a sentence in order to introduce a new term to their child. This is typically done by using demonstratives. A mother might utter the sentence 'This is a ball' in order to instruct her daughter about the proper use of the word 'ball', or a mathematics teacher might utter the statement 'This is a 3 x 3 matrix' in an introductory course on linear algebra. These are all cases in which a sentence that does not contain any modal expressions is used in order to convey something about how a word (e.g., 'ball' or 'matrix') *ought* to be used. While demonstratives are obviously useful in certain contexts for introducing words that are new to an audience (especially when the object of reference is spatially proximate), they are by no means the only tool available. What's more, sentences that neither include modal expressions nor demonstratives can be used to convey linguistic rules about the proper use of a word, simply by using the word in an exemplary sentence. For example, generic sentences that do not involve any modal expressions (such as 'Bees carry honey') can be said to 'convey' information about the proper use of words (see Stovall, "Characterizing Generics Are Material Inference Tickets" for a recent account of generics in terms of material rules of inference). In short, our objector notes that making modal statements (through the assertoric use of sentences involving modal expressions) is by no means the *only* way to 'convey' linguistic rules.

Secondly, modal statements do not *only* convey (rather than assert) normative statements. Linguists in the (neo-)Gricean tradition have extensively studied the phenomenon of *scalar implicatures*, which a speaker makes when uttering sentences involving quantification. Such implicatures are made in light of a general maxim that governs our conversational practices, namely that one's contribution to a conversational exchange must be as informative as is required. It is widely accepted that such a principle governs what a speaker's assertoric use of

sentences involving scalar operators actually communicates. For example, by asserting the proposition that

(xi) Suzy has two children,

a speaker conversationally implicates that Suzy has *exactly* two children (and thus that Suzy does *not* have three or more children, even though this information is strictly compatible with the speaker's assertion of (xi)).

Similarly, by asserting the proposition that

(xii) Some contenders passed to the second round,

a speaker implicates that *some but not all* of the contenders passed to the second round, even though the assertion of (xii) is compatible with the proposition that *all* contenders passed to the second round.

Here, it is important for the same phenomenon to occur when a speaker makes use of modal terms. For example, asserting that

(xiii) It is possible that the square is red

conversationally implicates that it is not the case that *p* is necessary, even though this denial of the necessity claim is not part of the literal content of the speaker's assertion. Similarly, a speaker's assertoric utterance of the form 'Not necessarily *p*' conversationally implicates that it is not *impossible* that *p*. These scalar implicatures that govern quantificational (including modal) devices have been represented by Aristotelian diagrams, as it allows one to show that the *subcontraries* in Aristotelian diagrams are related in the abovementioned pragmatic manner (see Van Der Auwera, "Modality: The Three-Layered Scalar Square") for a discussion and overview). These examples show that modal statements clearly convey *other* modal statements (and thus non-normative statements) as well.

To sum up, modal statements are not unique in 'conveying information' about normative statements (rather than asserting them), while they convey non-normative statements as well. But whether this twofold objection does indeed put pressure on the idea that there is a special relationship between alethic modal and normative vocabularies depends on one's characterization of what counts as a modal statement in the first place.

The first part of the objection is on target only if a modal statement can be made by using a sentence which explicitly involves a modal expression. If this is how the target of the analysis

should be construed, then the above-mentioned counterexamples do indeed qualify as non-modal statements that also plausibly 'convey' linguistic norms. However, there are some good reasons to think that Sellars takes the *analysandum* to be broader than this. After all, one of Sellars' main aims in developing his analysis of modality was to argue that the *actual* logical form of a certain set of universally quantified statements is of a *modal* character in the sense that these statements should be interpreted as quantifying not just the actual world but possible worlds or histories as well. For example, many ordinary uses of universally quantified sentences such as

(xiv) All gold is malleable

do not just quantify (perhaps spatially proximate) *actual* pieces of gold, but support subjunctive conditionals of the form 'If x were golden, then x would be malleable'. As we will see in section 6, one of Sellars' main reasons for introducing his possible worlds analysis of modality was to make sense of the distinction between mere generalizations and necessary connections between As and Bs. To clarify this distinction, Sellars, in his 1957 paper "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities", distinguishes between "counter-identicals" and "subjunctive conditionals proper" (CDCM, 298). Whereas the use of (xiv) as a *mere generalization* supports counter-identicals of the sort

(xv) If x were identical to one of the (actually existing) pieces of gold, x would be malleable,

a speaker's use of (xiv) to express a necessary (or 'real') connection supports subjunctive conditionals proper such as

(xvi) If x were gold, x would be malleable,

where the domain of quantification is not limited to actual pieces of gold anymore.

In other words, the *analysandum* of Sellars' account of modality is not just limited to sentences that explicitly involve modal terms, but rather to uses of sentences that can be given a modal interpretation even when no modal terms are explicitly being used. Analogous to the example of universally quantified statements, we might give analogous modal interpretations of certain uses of generic sentences and sentences that involve demonstratives. It could be argued that the assertoric use of generic sentences such as 'Bees carry honey', which do not explicitly involve modal expressions, characterizes not only actually existing bees, but supports counterfactuals such as 'If *x* were a bee, then *x* would carry honey' as well. Similarly, in the case of some uses

of demonstrative sentences (for example, 'This is a ball'), it seems plausible to assume that the speaker treats her assertoric use of this sentence as not merely describing the object in her vicinity, but to characterize things of such-and-such kind as balls in general, thereby implying that 'if *x* were to have such-and-such features, then *x* would be a ball'. Of course, it does not follow from the fact that there are uses of demonstrative sentences that should be modally interpreted that all uses of such sentences should be interpreted in this way. Just as universally quantified sentences can be used to quantify actually existing objects, some uses of demonstrative sentences merely describe an actual object in their vicinity.

The second part of the objection has more serious consequences for the completeness of Sellars' analysis: modal statements also seem to convey non-normative information, in the sense that modal statements conversationally implicate *other* modal statements. Here, we see a relatively well understood notion of 'conversational implicature' which characterizes the precise relationship between the assertion and the information *conveyed*. Similarly, we might ask: in what exact sense do modal statements convey normative ones?

Given the centrality of the assert/convey distinction for Sellars' analysis of modality, one would expect to find a detailed account of the exact nature of the distinction. As we have seen, however, Sellars only provides one further example in his "Inference and Meaning": the example of a speaker's utterance of 'The sky is clear' as *conveying* information about the speaker's belief that the sky is clear. And even though the distinction appears in some of his other writings from that time (see section 2), this is the only example that Sellars provides in his analysis of modality.

On the face of it, there seems to be a problem with the parallel between (1) the way in which the speaker's assertion that the sky is clear conveys the proposition that the speaker believes that the sky is clear, and (2) the way in which a modal assertion would convey a normative proposition. First of all, the truth of the proposition conveyed (i.e. the proposition expressing that the speaker believes that the sky is clear) by the assertion that the sky is clear seems to be a necessary condition for the *sincerity* of the assertion. The speaker's utterance that the sky is clear is *sincere* only when she actually believes that to be the case. The question then becomes: in what sense can the relationship between modal and normative assertions be captured in terms

of sincerity conditions? [9] Of course, modal assertions have sincerity conditions. In order for a speaker's assertion that

(xvii) It is necessary that gold is malleable

to be sincere, the proposition that

(xviii) The speaker believes that it is necessary that gold is malleable

must be true as well. But it does not follow from this that the relevant normative truth should also be understood as a necessary condition for the speaker's sincerity.

Let's consider, for example, the normative proposition that

(xix) One ought to accept that x is malleable if one has accepted (and has good reasons to accept) that x is gold.

The problem here is that it does not seem that the normative proposition (xix) is a necessary condition for the speaker's sincerity but rather a necessary condition for the truth of the proposition believed by the speaker. The following *psychological* proposition would seem to be a better candidate to constitute a necessary condition for the sincerity of the speaker's modal assertion:

(xx) The speaker believes that one ought to accept that x is malleable if one has accepted (and has good reasons to accept) that x is gold.

I do indeed think that such a proposition is a better candidate for a sincerity condition for specifically modal assertions. On this account, a speaker sincerely makes a modal assertion only if the speaker also believes the corresponding normative statement. But now imagine the following dialogue:

PERSON A: You certainly know that gold is malleable, right? And that this is not just a contingent fact? It is *necessary* that gold is malleable.

PERSON B: Absolutely. I did know that. But I guess I should thank you for reminding me.

PERSON A: Right, no problem. Now, don't get me wrong. It is not because this watch is golden (*points at his watch*) that you should believe that it is also malleable!

[9] I would like to thank Lionel Shapiro for encouraging me to think about this issue in terms of the difference between truth conditions and sincerity conditions.

The intuition here is clearly that Person A is inconsistent, and that there is an important sense in which his modal assertion about gold necessarily being malleable is in tension with the denial of the norm of inference from something being gold to it being malleable. But one might object that a sincerity condition does not accurately capture the relationship between the modal statement and the speaker's belief in the normative truth in this dialogue. Another interpretation would be that the belief in the normative proposition is a necessary condition not so much of the sincerity of the modal assertion, but of the fact that a modal assertion was made by the speaker in the first place.

After all, a plausible account of the notion of an assertion needs to adequately distinguish (1) mere utterances of 'p' from (2) assertions that p. In order to count as asserting a proposition, the speaker has to fulfill certain cognitive criteria. For example, if the speaker does not understand English, the mere utterance that 'The sky is clear' will not even count as an assertion that the sky is clear, given that she cannot be said to take any real responsibility for the truth of 'The sky is clear'. If it then turned out that the speaker did *not* believe that the sky is clear, we would not say that this entails that the speaker was *insincere*, but rather that the speaker did not know what he was saying at the time of uttering 'p'. Depending on one's account of the notion of assertion, one could say that the person has not asserted that p but *merely uttered* 'p'.

Similarly, it would depend on one's account of the notion of an assertion whether or not a person who (1) asserts that it is necessary for gold to be malleable, but (2) denies the norm of inference from being gold to being malleable, can really count as someone who actually made a *modal assertion* at all. In the former case, the speaker's denial of the relevant norm of inference would count as evidence that the speaker *insincerely* made the assertion. But in this latter case, the denial of the norm of inference would count as evidence that the speaker had not made any real modal assertion in the first place. Again, a great deal depends on one's account of *assertion*. Given that Sellars' account of assertion (cf. supra) is not satisfying at all, his account of modality is incomplete in this important sense. Sellars only *hints* towards some account of the relationship between modal and normative statements, but fails to specify it in greater detail.

5. METAPHYSICAL MODALITY

It might be argued that Sellars' account of alethic modality is incomplete in yet another sense. While Sellars provides an account of physical (or causal) and logical modality, he fails to provide an account of the kind of modality that is central in many philosophical discussions today, namely, metaphysical modality. While there are important disputes concerning the proper boundaries of the set of metaphysically modal truths, and even though some philosophers have doubted that there *is* a distinct class of metaphysically modal truths (see Priest, "Metaphysical Necessity: A Skeptical Perspective"), one set of relatively clear examples concerns the class of *de re* necessities. Given that all of Sellars' examples we have discussed so far all concern *de dicto* modal statements, one might ask how Sellars' analysis could be extended to *de re* modality. Furthermore, since Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1980), many philosophers have agreed that there are such things as a posteriori necessities and a priori contingencies. Does Sellars have anything to say about this? Before looking at some of the hints in Sellars' own writings, it would be useful to first take a look at Amie Thomasson's recent modal normativist treatment of *de re* and *a posteriori* modal statements. Given that Thomasson explicitly refers to Sellars' regulist analysis of modality as an important predecessor of her own views, it might give us some clue as to how Sellars' account could be extended.

In her 2020 book *Norms and Necessity*, Thomasson (*Norms and Necessity*, 92-112) develops a detailed account of *de re* and *a posteriori* modal claims in terms of semantic rules. Similar to Sellars' account, Thomasson interprets modal claims as disguised metalinguistic statements which concern the proper use of linguistic expressions. The main function of metaphysical statements, Thomasson argues, is to convey semantic rules while remaining in the object-language. Such semantic rules are implicitly mastered by competent language users and are described by Thomasson as 'application' or 're-application' conditions that specify the appropriate circumstances of applying or re-applying particular terms. For example, Thomasson argues that *de dicto* modal statements such as

(xxi) Necessarily, all dogs are mammals

are object-level statements whose proper linguistic function is to convey information about the proper use of the predicates '… is a dog' and '… is a mammal' in the sense that an appropriate application of the former commits a language-user to the application of the latter as well. Thomasson limits herself not just to *de dicto* modal claims but has also developed (*Norms and*

Necessity, 92-112) a detailed account of *de re* modal statements as conveying semantic rules. She interprets claims such as

> (xxii) Water is necessarily H_20

as *conveying* a re-application (or re-identification) rule that can be made explicit in the metalanguage as

> (xxiii) One ought to apply the predicate '… is water' to whatever shares the same chemical substance with *this* (cf. Thomasson, *Norms and Necessity*, 110).

The *a posteriori* character of this necessity can be explained by referencing the world-deferential nature of this rule—the rule can be satisfied whenever empirical information about the actual chemical structure of water is available (e.g. the discovery that it has the microstructure H_20). All that is needed to accommodate *de re* necessities is to broaden one's conception of semantic rules in order to incorporate such world-deferential and therefore to some extent open-ended linguistic rules as well.

Even though Thomasson does not explicitly refer to Sellars in her treatment of *de re* necessities (rather than her modal normativist account in general), Sellars preferred a similar approach in order to make sense of *de re* and a posteriori necessities. In his paper "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities" (1957), he emphasizes the so-called "promissory note dimension" of "thing-kind expressions" (CDCM, 263), which would become the cornerstone of his approach for dealing with *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities in his later writings. For example, in a 1974 reply to Putnam, Sellars elaborates an inferentialist framework in order to deal with such claims, therein developing what Matsui ("Inferentialism and Semantic Externalism") recently called a kind of 'ideal successor externalism'. Sellars' idea is that speakers who utter the sentence 'Water is H_20' *defer* "to a successor conceptual framework in which their successors could infer from 'X is water' to 'X is H_20' and from 'X is H_20' to 'X is water'" (Matsui, "Inferentialism and Semantic Externalism", 137). In other words, the reference of natural kind terms such as 'water' is determined not just by the actual inferences that we make, but by the inferences that make up an ideal successor conceptual framework. Just as we can sometimes defer to experts when using terms such as 'Higgs Boson' or 'elm' (an activity which Putnam ("The Meaning of 'Meaning'") referred to as the 'linguistic division of labor'), we can also *diachronically* defer to an ideal future community of experts.

Seen in this light, one can interpret the function of adding a necessity operator to form *de re* necessity claims as having the function of conveying semantic rules about the re-identification of natural kind terms such as 'water'. Such re-identification can be deferred to future communities of experts. To this, Sellars would have happily added that he embraces the consequent idea that certain necessities can be discovered, in part, through empirical investigations. Already in his 1953 paper 'Is There a Synthetic A Priori?' he writes that "there would seem to be no absurdity in speaking of knowing *a posteriori* that all A *must* be B" (ITSA, 122).

6. Possible Worlds and Rules of Inference

We have seen that Sellars makes a distinction between (1) what has been asserted, and (2) what has been conveyed by a modal statement. Given his claim that his regulist account of modality is an account of the *use* of modal statements, one could argue that Sellars does not provide an account of what is thereby *asserted*. Brandom makes this exact point in his 2015 book on Sellars:

> Sellars ends up saying nothing at all about what one *says* in making first-hand use of modal vocabulary. Properly understood, I think, his is not a *semantic* expressivism about alethic modal vocabulary, but a kind of *pragmatic* expressivism about it. (Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, 190)

While I agree with Brandom that Sellars' analysis of modal statements is indeed to be understood as a kind of *pragmatic* expressivism, I disagree with his claim that Sellars does not say anything about what is *said* by using modal vocabulary.

Whereas Sellars' account of modality in terms of rules of inference is the most widely discussed in the literature on Sellars' early philosophy, one of Sellars' earliest and clearest attempts at analyzing modality occurs in his "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (1948). In this essay, Sellars explicitly analyzes modality in terms of truth and possible worlds. He does, however, add some words of caution about certain confusions that might follow from the notion of possible worlds. He therefore prefers to use the purportedly less misleading term 'possible histories,' and speaks of "truth and falsity with respect to possible histories" (CIL, 294). Sellars' system includes a set of simple, non-relational universals (U_1, U_2, U_3 ...). He uses superscripts to distinguish different possible histories (H^0, H^1, H^2 … with

H^0 referring to the actual world) and to designate sets of particulars in a particular possible history (K^0 consists of the particulars x_1^0, x_2^0, x_3^0 ... in H^0, K^1 consists of the particulars x_1^1, x_2^1, x_3^1 ... in H^1, etc.). Sellars also relativizes modality to a family of possible histories. This allows for the possibility of making different evaluations of statements such as *Blue* x_6^3, which can be possible relative to H^3 in which *Yellow* x_6^3 is true (if the family of possible histories includes a history in which Blue $x_6{}^3$ is true) but impossible relative to H^3 if the family of histories does not include a possible history in which *Blue* x_6^3 is true. Furthermore, a large part of the 1948 paper addresses the exact question of how a restricted domain of physically possible histories relative to the actual world can be carved out. The paper connects these physical invariances to the question concerning the demarcation of universals.

There is some evidence to believe that Sellars was influenced by Carnap's semantic account of modality. Sellars refers to Carnap's *Meaning and Necessity* in a footnote in his 1948 essay (CIL, 295n10) as well as in two footnotes from his 1947 essay "Epistemology and the New Way of Words" (ENWW, 646n2, 655n18). His acceptance of a possible worlds analysis of modality is not without its reservations, though. Firstly, I have already mentioned Sellars' remark that talk about possible worlds might generate certain philosophical confusions. This idea will also remain crucial in later remarks about possible worlds (cf. infra). Secondly, Sellars explicitly departs from Carnap's account by talking about actuality and possibility as being relative to a particular history. For Carnap, actuality refers to the actual or true 'state description' (which is Carnap's preferred notion) and possibility refers to merely possible or false state descriptions. Sellars' *relativized* notion of actuality and possibility allows for any possible history to be the "*fundamentum* of a set of state descriptions" and, thus, as an "actual state of the universe" (CIL, 295n10) in this relativized sense.

It is tempting to think that Sellars simply abandoned his 1948 possible worlds analysis in favor of the regulist account in terms of inference rules, which he developed in, for example, his 1953 "Inference and Meaning" but this characterization would be mistaken. Sellars returned to his possible worlds analysis several times after "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them" (1948). In "Language, Rules, and Behavior" (1949), he emphasizes the legitimacy and necessity of speaking of possible worlds (LRB, 308). In "Particulars" (1952), Sellars further stresses the usefulness of the possible worlds framework for distinguishing logical laws from natural laws. To do so, he argues that we need to identify the notion of a *family* of possible worlds, which is a subset of the set of all (logically) possible worlds. Sellars writes:

> Now, we are all familiar with the Leibnitzian manner of explicating the laws of logic in terms of possible worlds. Can this same device be used to clarify the difference between laws of logic and laws of nature? Not only can it be done, but it is extremely helpful to do so, particularly in dealing with the problem we have in mind […] We must interpose between the notion of a possible world, and that of the totality of all possible worlds, the notion of a family of possible worlds. (P, 195)

A final example occurs in "Méditations Leibniziennes", a lecture which Sellars delivered in 1958 and published in 1965. In this piece, he both makes elaborate use of the possible worlds framework in understanding the reference of proper names while also sketching the outline of a *fictionalist* theory of possible worlds. He writes that "to imagine a possible but not actual world is to place discourse which, if seriously intended, would purport to describe this world, in a rubric which marks it as fiction" (ML, 117).

These examples clearly establish that Sellars did not abandon or reject his early possible worlds analysis, but on the contrary, continued to stress its usefulness. He even developed a rudimentary fictionalist position concerning the 'metaphysical' status of possible worlds.

If all this is correct, a question arises regarding Sellars' position on the *exact relationship* between his possible worlds analysis and his analysis of modality in terms of rules of inference. This question, however, is more obscure as it is rather difficult to find extended discussions of the relationship between these analyses in Sellars' oeuvre. There are, however, three passages which offer us a glimpse into what he thought.

The first passage can be found in Sellars' 1948 "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them". Herein, he writes that "[…] a complete account of possibility and real connections" would "have to abandon the traditional or naively realistic frame of reference in which we shall be operating—in Carnap's phrase, the *material mode of speech*—and reformulate our conclusions in terms of the contemporary empiricist apparatus of formal linguistics" (CIL, 292).

The second passage occurs in the Preface to *Essays in Philosophy and Its History* (1974), in which he makes a parallel point regarding his early essays on modality:

> But the structural insights gained by exploring possible worlds (and families of possible worlds) must ultimately be cashed in terms of rational choices with respect to the adoption or modification of linguistic structures. The modalities are, at

> bottom, practical concepts and belong in that part of metaphysics which relates the "is" to the "ought." (EPH, viii-ix)

The final passage comes from 'Particulars' (1952), which I quote in its entirety. It stands as Sellars' richest account of the relationship between his two analyses of modality:

> Now, all this jargon of worlds and families may strike the reader as an unusually complicated way of making points which might better have been left in the idiom of the distinction between the vacuous and essential occurrence of predicates in arguments warranted, respectively, by formal and material rules of inference. Let me emphasize once again that I am not disputing this. The fact remains, however, that the "ontological" jargon of worlds and possibilities has long been used by philosophers and logicians in their attempts to understand the structure of conceptual systems. Indeed, it is by no means entirely foreign to common usage; it was not constructed out of whole cloth by minute philosophers. Most of the puzzles which are the inherited stock in trade of contemporary philosophy either belong in this frame, or else concern the very status of the frame itself. Even should this "ontological" frame be but the shadow of rules of language, it by no means follows that there is no point in the effort to develop it more consistently and systematically than has been done in the past. Puzzles and antinomies within the frame (though not perplexities concerning the frame itself) can be resolved within the frame, even though the resulting clarification is but the shadow of an insight into linguistic usage which might have been obtained directly. The problems with which I am concerned in this paper, problems relating to universals, classes and particulars, and their mutual connexions, are part and parcel of this "ontological" frame, and this is where I am proposing to resolve them, leaving to others or to another day the attempt to translate the fruits into insights concerning linguistic usage. However, it would be disappointing, would it not, to discover that this translation was really the same thing all over again? (P, 195)

In these passages, Sellars repeatedly refers to the regulist analysis of modality as being in some sense a *reformulation* of the possible worlds analysis. The possible worlds framework must be "cashed in terms of rational choices with respect to the adoption or modification of linguistic structures," (EPH, viii-ix) it must be reformulated "in terms of the contemporary empiricist apparatus of formal linguistics," (CIL, 292) and translated "into insights concerning linguistic usage." (P, 195) He uses Carnap's distinction between the material and the formal mode of

speech in order to understand this difference: the possible worlds framework captures modal claims in the *material* mode of speech but must ultimately be translated in terms of the *formal* mode. Modal statements are statements in the *object-language* which convey rules of inference that are properly formulated in the *metalanguage*. Physically necessary statements convey *material* rules of inference (P-rules); logically necessary statements convey *formal* rules of inference (L-rules); and, both kinds of rule belong to the metalanguage.

This proposal is informed by a metaphilosophical thesis from one of Sellars' first published articles, "Realism and the New Way of Words" (1948). Although this article was "tentative" (RNWW, 623n7), he used it to explore the idea that central philosophical concepts such as "meaning" and "designation" must be understood as *formal, metalinguistic* terms. He explains, for instance, the notion of a formal term:

> "Means" or "designates" is one of the bones of the skeleton of the language, enabling it to contain a logic of meaning and truth, just as logical words enable any language to contain a logic of implication. *Meaning* in this sense is no more to be found in the world than is a referent for "or." (RNWW, 611)

According to Sellars' work in the philosophy of language, a meaning-statement made by uttering a sentence (of the form '*x* means *y*') should not be understood as stating a relation between a linguistic item *x* and an extra-linguistic item or referent. Instead, a meaning-statement should be understood as a *classification* of the linguistic item, *x*, as playing the same conceptual role played by *y*. He later captures this with his famous dot-quotation device. Sellars' original contribution in this area is best understood as an extension of *logical* inferentialism to a more ambitious *semantic* inferentialism. That is, he expands the attempt to characterize the meaning of logical expressions in terms of their inferential roles to *all* expressions, including empirical ones.[10]

Sellars adds that central philosophical concepts should be analyzed as having their proper place in a "pragmatic metalanguage" (RNWW, 617). However, pragmatics should not be confused with an *empirical* study of language-use. The study of what Sellars calls "pure pragmatics" (in his 1947 article "Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology") is instead "concerned with other concepts which are *normative* as opposed to the factual concepts of psychology" (RNWW, 617).[11] This

[10] The most sophisticated attempt to formulate such a theory can be found in Brandom's *Making it Explicit* (1994).
[11] For a historical discussion of Sellars' notion of 'pure pragmatics' and its reception, see Olen, *Wilfrid Sellars and the Foundations of Normativity*, 37-97.

understanding of the proper place of philosophical concepts illuminates Sellars' shift to an analysis of the *use* of modal sentences. A proper philosophical analysis of concepts should "abandon the traditional or naïvely realistic frame of reference." (CIL, 292) Philosophically central concepts should instead be reformulated in terms of their proper role as rules in a *pragmatic* metalanguage (CIL, 292). After all, a "rule is always a rule for *doing* something" (IM, 329).

This methodological idea accounts for Sellars' shift from his possible worlds analysis to his regulist analysis. The regulist analysis characterizes modal statements as statements in the object-language that convey formal or material rules of inference. These rules are properly formulated in the metalanguage for the correct use of expressions.[12] Sellars' claim that "the structural insights gained by exploring possible worlds (and families of possible worlds) must ultimately be cashed in terms of rational choices with respect to the adoption or modification of linguistic structures" (EPH, viii-ix), should be understood in this methodological light. He thinks that a satisfying analysis of a philosophical concept should be "formal"; that is, it should capture the role of the concept in expressing rules whose proper place is the metalanguage.

However, Sellars also appears to suggest that the regulist analysis in terms of inference rules amounts to a *reformulation* of the possible worlds analysis. I, however, think that this is wrong, or at least at odds with Sellars's theoretical commitments that follow from his use of the assert/convey distinction in his analysis of modal statements. Sellars is quite clear that the regulist analysis pertains to what is *conveyed* by the *use* of a modal sentence in making a modal statement. It does *not* offer an account of the *content* of what has thereby been asserted. As we have seen, Brandom concludes from this that "Sellars ends up saying nothing at all about what one *says* in making first-hand use of modal vocabulary," leading him to characterize Sellars' position as a "kind of *pragmatic* expressivism" (Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism*, 190). Brandom is right only to the extent that Sellars' *regulist* analysis does not offer a semantic account of the content of modal statements. The rules of inference are indeed *conveyed* by the *use* of modal sentences in making modal statements, which is a pragmatic matter. However, Brandom overlooks Sellars' possible worlds analysis, which is precisely a *semantic* account of modal statements in terms of the notion of truth relative to a possible world or history.

[12] Brandom further develops this general methodological framework (towards which Sellars only gestures) in his *Between Saying and Doing* (2008).

I do not think that Sellars at any point saw the relationship between his two analyses in exactly these terms. I *do* think, though, that this solution comes naturally if one takes Sellars' own formulation in terms of the convey/assert distinction seriously. His two analyses are not simply reformulations of the same thing. On the contrary, the regulist analysis provides an account of what is conveyed by the *use* of modal sentences, which amounts to an account of the *pragmatics* of modal statement-making. The possible worlds analysis provides an account of the content of what has been *asserted* in making modal statements, which amounts to an account of the *semantics* of modal statements. Whereas a deontic normative metavocabulary is a pragmatic metavocabulary which specifies what one *does* in making a modal statement, the possible worlds metavocabulary is a semantic metavocabulary which specifies what one *says* when making a modal statement. From this perspective, the regulist analysis and the possible worlds analysis have different explanatory aims. As a final remark, note that this claim should not conflict with Sellars' metaphilosophical idea that a proper solution of philosophical puzzlement demands a reformulation in terms of a pragmatic metavocabulary. After all, one might think that an analysis of the *pragmatic* features of language offers better philosophical insights than an analysis of its *semantic* features.

7. CONCLUSION

I have achieved three goals in my discussion of Sellars' account of modality as found in his early work. First, I presented Sellars' account of the use of modal sentences in terms of rules of inference; I then criticized this account by formulating a number of objections. Secondly, I showed that Sellars also developed an account of the asserted content of modal statements in terms of possible worlds. Finally, I showed that Sellars never abandoned his possible worlds analysis for his later regulist one. I argued that his convey/assert distinction allows us to see his possible worlds analysis as an account of modal statements in terms of the semantic notion of truth (relative to a possible world or history), and the regulist analysis as a pragmatic account of what is conveyed in the *use* of modal sentences to make modal statements. I have shown that Sellars' writings between 1947 and 1958 contain the germs of both accounts (semantic *and* pragmatic); in other words, that both are therefore integral parts of his legacy.[13]

[13] I would like to thank Jim O'Shea, Lionel Shapiro and Stefanie Dach for their excellent feedback and help in improving this paper. I have also benefitted from the great feedback of two anonymous reviewers, members of the International Sellars Colloquium, the UCD work in progress group, and the KU Leuven research group on

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