SELLARS in a new generation

A Conference Hosted by the Kent State University Philosophy Department

APR 30 – 02 MAY 2015
“It is not until we have eaten the apple with which the serpent philosopher tempts us, that we begin to stumble on the familiar and to feel that haunting sense of alienation which is treasured by each new generation as its unique possession.”

—Wilfrid Sellars 1975
SELLARS IN A NEW GENERATION
April 30th – May 2nd 2015 Kent State University

Conference Organizers
Deborah Barnbaum
David Pereplyotchik

Program Committee
Willem deVries
Gene Pendleton
David Pereplyotchik
Deborah C. Smith
# GRADUATE WORKSHOP PROGRAM

**Thursday, April 30, 2015**

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                 *On the Ground of Persons in Nature*                        |
| 9:45 – 10:30  | Mgr. Stephanie Dach, University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic  
                 *Sellars and Ultimate Reality*                                |
| 10:30 – 10:45 | Break                                                                |
| 10:45 – 11:30 | Andrew Parisi, University of Connecticut  
                 *Sellars, Second-Order Quantification,  
                 and Ontological Commitment*                                    |
| 11:30 – 12:15 | Thomas Dabay, Vanderbilt University  
                 *Transposition as Naturalistic Metaphysics: Carnapian  
                 Themes in Sellars' ‘Inference and Meaning’*                  |
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| 1:45 – 2:30  | **Matthew Shields**, Georgetown University  
**Semantics, Pragmatics, and the Philosophical Importance of Creativity: Returning to Sellars on the Question of Conceptual Change** |
| 2:30 – 3:15  | **Kevin Fink**, University of South Florida  
**An Incoherence in Sellars’ Error Theoretical Account of Color Concepts** |
| 3:15 – 3:30  | **Break**                                                            |
| 3:30 – 4:15  | **Ryo Tanaka**, Kyoto University, Japan  
**Normativity and Nature in W. Sellars: Reconstructing Sellars’ Strategy** |
| 4:15 – 5:00  | **Ross Pain**, La Trobe University, Australia  
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| 5:00 – 7:00  | **Wine and Cheese Reception**  
**Zena’s Bar, Kent State University**  
**Hotel and Conference Center** |
# MAIN PROGRAM

**Friday, May 1, 2015**

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<td><em>The Causal Articulation of Practical Reality</em></td>
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<td>10:20 – 11:30</td>
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<td><strong>CARL SACHS</strong>, Marymount University</td>
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<td><em>Cognitive Science in Sellarsian Philosophy of Mind</em></td>
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<td>11:35 – 12:45</td>
<td>Thought, Freedom and Embodiment in Kant and Sellars</td>
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<td>Toward a Sellarsian Ethics for the 21st Century</td>
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<td><strong>DAVID PEREPLOYOTCHIK</strong>, Kent State University</td>
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Saturday May 2, 2015

8:30 – 9:00  Continental Breakfast

9:00 – 10:10  Keynote Presentation
HUW PRICE, Cambridge University
Wilfrid Sellars Meets Cambridge Pragmatism

10:15 – 11:25  BORIS BRANDHOFF, University of Bonn, Germany
Pure Pragmatics and the Phenomenology of Linguistic Functions: On Sellars’ Non-Factualistic Conception of Philosophy

11:30 – 12:40  DANIELLE MACBETH, Haverford College
Natural Truth

12:40 – 2:00  Lunch Break — Downtown Kent

2:00 – 3:10  DIONYSIS CHRISTIAS, University of Athens
Does Brandom’s Kant-Sellars Thesis about Modality Undermine Sellars’ Scientific Naturalism?

3:20 – 4:10  ROBERT BRANDOM, University of Pittsburgh
On the Way to a Pragmatist Theory of the Categories

4:10 – 4:30  Break

4:30 – 6:45  Author Meets Critics
From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars
CHAIR: MICHAEL HICKS, Miami University

4:30 – 4:40  Introduction
ROBERT BRANDOM, University of Pittsburgh
4:50 – 5:20  Discussant
WILLEM DEVRIES,
University of New Hampshire

5:20 – 5:50  Discussant
JIM O’SHEA, University College, Dublin

5:50 – 6:15  Replies
ROBERT BRANDOM, University of Pittsburgh

6:15 – 6:45  Discussion

6:45 – 7:00  Closing Remarks and Thank-you’s
DAVID PEREPLYOTCHIK AND DEBORAH BARNBAUM
ABSTRACTS
of Main Conference Program
On the face of it, there appears to be a deep rift between Sellars’ earliest three essays and the bulk of his work up to EPM. PPE, ENWW and RNWW pursue the ambitious goal of laying the conceptual and methodological foundations for a genuinely non-factualistic approach to philosophical questions — an approach which avoids the pitfall of psychologism much more carefully than does, according to Sellars, the mainstream of Analytic Philosophy in the wake of Frege, Wittgenstein and Carnap. To this end, Sellars sets out to sketch the outlines of a formal metatheoretical framework which is rich enough to clarify the notion of a language as used in a world. In rough outline, this is the guiding idea behind Sellars’ project of pure pragmatics.

There can be no doubt that there occurred a change of direction in Sellars’ published work around the year 1948. Beginning with LRB, the peculiar stress on formalism and the application of formal methods in philosophy fades to the background. What is more, in LRB, and later in SRLG, Sellars even turns directly to the task of sketching the outlines of an adequate “psychology of rule-regulated behavior”. Did Sellars give up on the most cherished ambitions of his first three essays and succumb to factualism, after all? In the present paper, I attempt to sketch an argument for the claim that, despite initial appearances, Sellars’ post-1948 turn does not involve a significant shift in metaphilosophical commitments. In particular, I try to show that the special sense in which Sellars, in his earliest essays, spoke of philosophy as a “formal” enterprise remains by and large valid after 1948. Thus, there is a sense in which Sellars’ philosophy remains committed to the philosophical project of pure pragmatics as envisioned in his earliest essays.

My argument proceeds in three steps: In the first part of this paper, I give a brief overview of the general idea behind Sellars’ earliest three essays. After that, in part 2, I set out to defend the idea that Sellars’ self-confessed formalism in his earliest three essays is based on a peculiar and highly idiosyncratic conception of the formal. To put it in a nutshell, as I understand it, Sellars’ commitment to a formalistic conception of philosophy comes down to a commitment to the idea that the task of philosophy is to clarify, or explicate, the system of functional roles which serves as a norm
for our factual linguistic behavior. In the third and concluding part of this paper, I distinguish between two different, but complementary, routes by which this task can be addressed. The phenomenology of linguistic functions is the attempt to explicate language as a system of functional roles ‘from within’ by employing the resources of syntactical and semantical meta-languages. But, as Sellars sees it, this phenomenological approach fails to take us all the way. In order to achieve complete success, we have to combine it with a naturalistic pragmatics of languages, or conceptual systems in general.

ROBERT BRANDOM | University of Pittsburgh

On the Way to a Pragmatist Theory of the Categories

At the center of the understanding of Sellars’ work that I present in *From Empiricism to Expressivism* is the Kantian idea that besides concepts whose characteristic expressive job it is to describe and explain empirical goings-on, there are concepts whose characteristic expressive job it is to make explicit necessary structural features of the discursive framework within which alone description and explanation are possible. I explain how Sellars developed this idea by combining its rejection of descriptivism with Carnap’s thought that such categorial concepts should be understood as *metalinguistic* in character, and consider the prospects of further developing Sellars’ version for our own time.

DIONYSIS CHRISTIAS | University of Athens

Does Brandom’s Kant-Sellars thesis about Modality Undermine Sellars’ Scientific Naturalism?

In his new book *From Empiricism to Expressivism* (2015), Brandom offers a new argument against the viability of Sellars’ scientific naturalism, as the latter is famously expressed in the *scientia mensura* principle according to which “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 it is not that it is not” (*EPM*, §42). A very interesting feature of this critique is that it utilizes explicitly Sellarsian premises in order to reach its conclusion, suggesting thereby the possibility of a serious internal tension within Sellarsian philosophy itself. More specifically, Brandom uses what he calls the ‘Kant-Sellars’
thesis about modality in order to argue against Sellars’ scientific naturalism (expressed in the above *scientia mensura* principle) which privileges the descriptive and explanatory resources of the scientific image over those of the manifest image in matters ontological.

According to the Kant-Sellars thesis, the correct application of an empirical descriptive concept has necessary conditions that would be expressed explicitly using subjunctive conditionals, and hence depends on what is true in other possible worlds besides the one in which it is being applied. Now, Brandom argues (and in this I think he is right) that the Kant-Sellars thesis about modality has interesting consequences about identity claims: the properties with respect to which identicals must be taken to be indiscernible cannot be restricted to modally insulated ones. And if identity requires indistinguishability by modal-dispositional properties, it follows that two items which differ in their modal properties cannot be identical. Brandom concludes that the relation between the objects referred to in the manifest image and those referred to in the scientific image cannot be that of identity (though it can be that of ‘material constitution’). This is because the descriptive concepts of the manifest image come with criteria of identity and individuation that essentially involve counterfactual conditionals formulated in other descriptive terms which also belong to the manifest image.

I shall argue that Brandom’s ‘Kant-Sellars’ argument about modality and identity does not undermine the Sellarsian *scientia mensura* principle because the latter does not construe the relation between the objects of the manifest image and the objects of the scientific image as one of identity. The descriptive resources of the scientific image are superior to those of the manifest image in matters of ontology because they provide better explanations of the world and our place in it than the latter; however, an explanatory relation is not one of identity. The scientific image explains manifest-image phenomena by eliminating manifest-image normative descriptions and explanations from the inventory of the basic ontological categories (categorial concepts) with which the spatiotemporal world is adequately described and explained. And scientific-image terms do this not by having an identity relation with manifest-image terms but by changing their modal properties, i.e. by changing their very meaning, thereby recategorizing them (in their descriptive and explanatory dimension).
WILLEM DEVRIES | University of New Hampshire

The Causal Articulation of Practical Reality

I defend the legitimacy of the notion of practical reality originally proposed in the final chapter of my Wilfrid Sellars. My defense of recognizing the ontological legitimacy of practical realities, that is, the reality of persons and normatively constituted objects and activities, proceeds within a generally Sellarsian naturalism. But, I argue, it probably does require giving up on Sellars’ heterodox, super-atomistic, Tractarian process ontology, a price I think is worth paying.

JEREMY KOONS | Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Qatar

Toward a Sellarsian Ethics for the 21st Century

After briefly discussing the two types of intention — individual intentions and we-intentions — as they feature in Sellars’ ethical theory, I wish to argue that there are two different types of reasoning — individual reasoning and cooperative reasoning — and that the latter cannot be reduced to the former. Further, I want to suggest that these two types of reasoning correspond to the two kinds of intentions in Sellars’ thought, and that elaborating these two types of intentions in terms of these two types of reasoning provides us with an excellent tool for further elaborating a truly Sellarsian ethics. Next, after briefly elaborating the notion of the logic of intentions in terms of material inference, I will conclude with some comments on the categorical force of moral imperatives.

DANIELLE MACBETH | Haverford College

Natural Truth

The idea of natural truth — modeled on the idea of natural goodness in ethics — is the idea that some truths, although not the same for, or available to be grasped by, all rational beings, are nonetheless valid for, available to be grasped by, all human beings, that is, all rational beings with our sort of body and form of sensibility. My aim is to show that despite Sellars’ own conception of science as the measure of all things, of what is that it is and what is not that it is not, and consequent (if only implicit) rejection of any such thing as natural truth, Sellars provides us with all the tools we need in order to show that there are natural truths. It follows directly that our powers of perception are powers of knowing.
Sellars viewed central aspects of his work as attempting to exhibit the “astonishing extent to which in ethics as well as in epistemology and metaphysics the fundamental themes of Kant’s philosophy contain the truth of the variations we now hear on every side” (SM X). Sellars’ 1970 Presidential Address to the APA, which borrowed its title from the phrase in Kant’s Paralogisms, “...this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks...” (A346/B404), was itself astonishing in this regard. In its compact twenty-five pages Sellars manages to sketch plausible interpretations and reconstructive defenses of central aspects of Kant’s views on self-knowledge, persons, freedom, and morality, along the way suggesting how all of these Kantian views can be rendered consistent with a materialist metaphysics. In this paper I want focus on Sellars’ APA address as an occasion for further reflection on how we ought to conceive the nature of and relationships between our thinking selves, our practical agency, and our material embodiment.

DAVID PEREPLYOTCHIK | Kent State University

Sellars and Psycholinguistics

Wilfrid Sellars had an abiding interest in both language and perception. It is surprising, then, that philosophers working in the Sellarsian tradition — even those of a naturalistic bent — have not undertaken a thorough investigation of the rich body of empirical results emerging from the science of language perception — psycholinguistics. Here, I seek to rectify the situation by initiating a much-needed dialogue between psycholinguistics and Sellarsian philosophy.

One of Sellars’ most profound contributions was the idea that psychological states are theoretical posits (EPM, ME). And, as a champion of scientific realism, Sellars held that we should be realists about the entities posited by explanatorily successful theories. I draw on these insights in examining the practices of contemporary psycholinguists, who explain behavioral and neurocognitive phenomena by reference to a variety of internal states. After summarizing the empirical case for positing such states, I appeal to Sellars’ distinction between ordinary and “auxiliary” positions in a language game (SRLG) in drawing a distinction between two kinds of psycholinguistic
posit — mental phrase markers and a mental grammar.

Sellars distinguished between several varieties of representational state (ME) and different orders of pattern-governed behavior (SRLG, LTC, MFC).
I argue that we can appeal to his conceptual framework in situating the posits of psycholinguistics at a subpersonal level, below that of thoughts and intentions. Indeed, I propose that the distinction between personal and subpersonal levels of description be drawn in part by reference to Sellars’ causal theory of verbal expression (LTC).

I turn next to the grounds for characterizing the posited states in representational terms. Sellars argued persuasively that semantics is a matter of functional classification (SRLG, LTC, MFC, EPM, ME), and he held that such classifications are inherently purpose-relative (MFC). My claim is that Sellars’ flexible functionalism about semantics can underwrite the ascription of representational properties to subpersonal states.

Sellars also held that semantic notions are “fraught with ought” (PSIM, EPM, SRLG). Applying this idea in the present context, I argue that subpersonal representations are subject to a distinctive kind of normative evaluation. This points to a need for a fuller understanding of the distinctive brand of normativity that is characteristic of the subpersonal level — particularly of its relations to the personal-level norms of rationality and to the biological norms of fitness. An account of such norms is crucial to our understanding of the interface between the low-level perceptual processing of linguistic stimuli and the higher-level abilities involved in genuine comprehension and communication. In sketching such an account, I draw on Daniel Dennett’s distinction between intentional-stance and the design-stance explanations

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HUW PRICE | Cambridge University

*Wilfrid Sellars Meets Cambridge Pragmatism*

I begin by noting some affinities between Sellars, on the one hand, and pragmatists and expressivists in the Cambridge tradition, such as Ramsey, Wittgenstein, Blackburn, and myself, on the other. I go on to propose that Sellars’ clear distinction between two notions of truth — notions that, as Sellars says, belong in different boxes — turns out to answer a need that has existed in the Cambridge tradition since 1929. In the Cambridge tradition, it has not received the attention that it deserves, in my view. By understanding why Sellars needs this distinction, however, we can see why Cambridge pragmatists need it too.
It is widely held that the intentionality of thought is prior in every respect to the intentionality of speech. Sellars advanced a more complex view, on which the intentionality of thought is causally and explanatorily prior, but the intentionality of speech is prior in how we come to be able to think about and understand intentionality. I argue that this is correct. Central to Sellars’ account is a distinctively theoretical dimension, highlighted in the folk theorizing of the mythical Jones in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Resistance to that account, I argue, is due to dismissing the theoretical aspect as irrelevant and taking first-person access as decisive for any account of intentionality.

Seeing first-person access as fundamental and disregarding the theoretical dimension of Sellars’ proposal tacitly endorses the Given that he was at pains to discredit. Indeed, we can understand the Myth of the Given itself as due at bottom to the traditional reliance on first-person access as foundational. That precludes any intersubjective understanding of mind and makes it unintelligible how first- and third-person access could even coexist. Sellars avoids the Myth of the Given by showing how to construct an account of first-person access from intersubjective, third-person resources.

I briefly argue that the foregoing tells against several fashionable views about meaning and intentionality: that speaker’s meaning is a matter of communicative intentions, that intentional content is atomistic and absolutely determinate, and that there is a useful distinction between original and derived intentionality. These views seem credible, I urge, only if one accepts of the Myth of the Given as construed above.

Philosophers working in the wake of Sellars, such as Brandom and McDowell, think that there a fundamentally important distinction between ‘sapience’ and ‘sentience.’ Both sentience and sapience are ‘transcendental’ structures — they are posited to explain our cognitively significant experience, including (but not limited to) empirical knowledge — but they also must be adequately...
reflected in, or realized in, causal structures. Hence whatever structures and processes that we posit in the course of reflecting on the minimal necessary conditions for our cognitive capacities and incapacities must be correlated with structures and processes that are empirically confirmed and, to the extent possible, consistent with a scientific view of the world. Within this generally Sellarsian framework, I aim to criticize one key aspect of Sellars’ theory of perception concerning the role of sense-impressions (or sensations) as causally mediating our perceptual encounters with objects. More specifically, I shall argue that Sellars was right to argue that we need to posit what he calls “sheer receptivity” in the interests of transcendental philosophy, but wrong to argue that sense-impressions were the best candidates to implement sheer receptivity in rerum natura. I shall then turn to recent work in the enactivist approach to philosophy of cognitive science, which emphasizes the structural coupling between sensorimotor skills and environmental affordances. This structural coupling is a more promising candidate than sensations per se as the causal correlate of sheer receptivity. I conclude by comparing the possibility of synthesizing inferentialism and enactivism with Huw Price’s “new bifurcation thesis”.
ABSTRACTS
of Graduate Workshop Presentations
THOMAS DABAY | Vanderbilt University

Transposition as Naturalistic Metaphysics:
Carnapian Themes in Sellars’ ‘Inference and Meaning’

In “Inference and Meaning”, Wilfrid Sellars claims that the language of modality is a transposed language of norms. Despite its influence, this claim still raises many interpretive issues because of the obscurity of its central notion, that of transposition. In this paper, I trace how, by returning to Carnap’s *Logical Syntax of Language*, a coherent account of what Sellars means by ‘transposition’ can be reconstructed. Ultimately, I argue that this reconstruction provides us with a naturalistic rival to Carnap’s reductionist anti-metaphysical program.

MGR. STEPHANIE DACH | University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic

Sellars and Ultimate Reality

Although W. Sellars’ system is designed with care, many commentators have pointed to a tension manifest in it. This tension can be paraphrased as a conflict between Sellars’ pragmatist and his (scientific) realist poles of thought. The aim of my paper is to shift the focus of the discussions on how to attenuate it from language-world relations to problems often regarded as side issues. I focus on the following question: Given that Sellars accepts our “situatedness” in contingent systems of norms and practices and given that he understands these as crucial for what we take to be true and real, how can he sustain the idea of ultimate reality or an ultimate conceptual scheme that captures it?

First, I examine and criticize W. deVries’ attempt to introduce the concept of “practical reality” in order to cope with the tensions mentioned. DeVries relies on the notion of the “objects of a conceptual framework”. I show this way of approaching the issue to be out of line with Sellars’ position and to lead us into unnecessary puzzlement. It merges talk about the world and talk about concepts in a way that can hinder us from understanding Sellars.

On the basis of this criticism, I offer further considerations on how to answer our central question, concentrating on three main points: how to understand Sellars’ philosophical task, the role of picturing, and that of practical thought. Sellars’ work is primarily concerned with elucidating or suggesting concepts, which also includes a workable concept of “ultimate reality” suited to our situation with its specific problems. As far as Sellars’ controversial idea of picturing is concerned, if we accept the characterization of his philosophical
endeavor put forward in the paper, we do not have to understand this idea as an attempt to provide us with a framework-independent means of evaluating the proximity of conceptual frameworks to reality. We can regard picturing, in its elaborated form, as a scientific theory which helps us to assess the adequacy of other conceptual frameworks in the light of our own.

The universal dimension needed for a concept of ultimate reality might be gained by understanding the ultimate conceptual framework to help us, in Sellars’ words, maximize the welfare of a universal community. But the pursuit of epistemic ends, which supposedly leads to ever better linguistic pictures of the world, seems neither to be a necessary means to achieve communal welfare from our point of view, nor does it seem to be necessarily implied by the concept of communal welfare. This issue should, therefore, be addressed further in attempts to weaken the tensions between Sellars’ pragmatist and realist commitments.

KEVIN FINK | University of South Florida

An Incoherence in Sellars’ Error Theoretical Account of Color Concepts

This paper examines Wilfrid Sellars’ theory regarding the ontological status of color and especially the extent to which his account of the origin and evolution of our color concepts justifies and supports his considered view on the matter — that color is only a property of sense impressions. According to Sellars’ error theory of color, we falsely project color properties onto physical objects, but these objects possess no such properties. I argue that Sellars’ error theoretical account of color concepts is unintelligible by the lights of his own theory of conceptual content. The argument works by examining what Sellars takes to be the successive stages in the evolution of our color concepts and showing that the concept of sense impressions of color is intelligible only when we are also in possession of the concept of color as a property of physical objects. This is because, for Sellars, concepts are defined by laws where these laws go beyond purely logical relations to include what Sellars calls ‘material invariances’ of the concept. I show that Sellars’ ‘relocation story’ — which denies, for the first time (in his mythical evolutionary account) that physical objects outside the mind are colored, and asserts color to only be a property of sense impressions — removes any grounding Sellars had provided in terms laws and material invariances undergirding our concepts of sense impressions of color without proposing any others in their place. Sellars’ own
notion conceptual content as normative functional role requires these laws and material invariances, thus I conclude that not only does Sellars’ story of the evolution of our concept of color fail to qualify as a coherent account of conceptual change, it fails to coherently define the very color concepts it ultimately endorses.

ROSS PAIN | La Trobe University, Australia
Pragmatism, Naturalism and Abstracta

In 1980 Sellars and Quine exchanged a series of articles and letters on the problem of abstracta. For the most part, they were mutually sympathetic to each other’s broadly naturalistic goals. They differed fundamentally, however, over whether or not abstract entities are ontologically permissible. According to Quine’s methodological naturalism, any entities may be admitted into one’s ontology if they are considered indispensable to a successful theory’s workability. Sellars, on the other hand, regards a requirement for abstract entities as a sign that a theory has strayed from a properly naturalistic framework. This disagreement is interesting in that both thinkers are neo-pragmatists inspired by the linguistic turn, and both are self-professed naturalists. In this paper I argue that Sellarsian metalinguistic nominalism can revitalise the Carnapian project of developing an epistemologically robust nominalism that is consistent with scientific naturalism. I then outline a problem for Quinean methodological naturalism that threatens its naturalistic credentials. Finally, I suggest that Huw Price’s distinction between subject naturalism and object naturalism represents a promising path towards realising Sellars’ synoptic vision.

ANDREW PARISI | University of Connecticut
Sellars, Second-Order Quantification, and Ontological Commitment

This paper explores Sellars’ responses to the claim that the use of second-order quantifiers incurs ontological commitment to abstract entities. It focuses on what he writes in Grammar and Existence: A Preface to Ontology [Sellars, 1960] and Naturalism and Ontology [Sellars, 1996]. These arguments, however, do not positively establish that the use of second-order quantification does not commit one to abstract entities. An argument that fits with what Sellars
does argue in the above works and in *Naming and Saying* [Sellars 1963b] is offered to establish this conclusion. Finally, the account of quantification that is required by Sellars is filled in using ideas developed by Crispin Wright in *On Quantifying into Predicate Position* [Wright, 2007], and formal tools developed by Shaughan Lavine in *Quantification and Ontology* [Lavine, 2000].

**MATTHEW SHIELDS | Georgetown University**

*Semantics, Pragmatics, and the Philosophical Importance of Creativity: Returning to Sellars on the Question of Conceptual Change*

The emergence of new varieties of holism — found, for example, in the recent work of Sally Haslanger — marks the need for a return to the question of conceptual change. Sellars, perhaps more than any other philosopher, tackled the question of how we should square a commitment to holism about meaning with a commitment to the existence of robust conceptual change. In this paper I consider Sellars’ arguments for reconciling these two commitments and propose a way of building on his view that integrates recent work in speech act theory. After exploring Sellars’ view that functional isomorphisms among concepts is sufficient to account for conceptual change, I argue that this semantic solution confronts a troubling bind: either we are plunged into a vicious regress explaining how novel inferential relations are possible, or we are forced to posit a moment of *ex nihilo*, conceptual alchemy. To avoid these worries and accomplish the synthesis Sellars outlines, I argue that we ultimately need to shift away from a traditional emphasis on semantics to a focus on questions of pragmatics. More specifically, I argue that we need to understand the precise class of speech acts that generate genuine conceptual change. We need to confront, in other words, the pragmatic structure of genuinely creative acts. Following formulations from Kukla and Lance, I call these speech acts conceptual invocatives and attempt to map their unique pragmatic features. Such acts, I claim, embody the very autonomy of pragmatics from semantics, and it is this autonomy that finally allows for the possibility of conceptual change on a holist, Sellarsian conception of meaning.
Preston Stovall | University of Pittsburgh

On the Ground of Persons in Nature

In this paper I argue that Sellars offers us a view on what it is to be a person that bears on contemporary debates about grounding in metaphysics. In particular, I use Sellarsian resources in order to defend the claim that rule-following rationality is grounded in evolved and habituated rule-governed dispositionality. On this basis I argue that Sellars’ scientific realism should be of more general interest to analytic metaphysicians. At the end of the paper I connect these Sellarsian resources to the work of the classical American pragmatists, show that these figures were interested in rethinking the relationship between normativity and naturalism, and suggest that one role of philosophical research is that of constructing novel categorical resources for better understanding ourselves and our place in the world.

Ryo Tanaka | Kyoto University, Japan

Normativity and Nature in W. Sellars: Reconstructing Sellars’ Strategy

The notion of normativity seems to be indispensable in fully understanding the human activities; it has been regarded as an essential characteristic of them. However, it seems implausible to postulate normativity as a primitive feature in the natural world. We never get in touch with normativity, at least in the same way as we do with trees, tables and so on; nor do natural sciences tell us that they have discovered normativity. Here an important philosophical question arises: what is the relation between normativity and nature? Wilfrid Sellars claims both that norms cannot be reduced to descriptions and to have naturalized normativity. The aim of the paper is to reconstruct and examine Sellars’ strategy for locating norms in nature.

In section 1, after a brief overview of Sellars’ use of normative concepts in his analysis of modal concepts (his analysis of necessity in terms of validity), I will demonstrate the tension between normativity and nature in Sellars’ philosophical system. Since Sellars adopts ontological naturalism, he must provide an ontologically secure ground for normativity in the natural world. I will consider an important objection to Sellars’ use of normative vocabularies in his philosophical naturalism, viz., it presupposes the very categories he is attempting to legitimatize. In particular, Sellars’ general contention that...
linguistic practice is essentially norm-governed seems to produce the vicious regress problem concerning rule following.

In section 2, I will reconstruct Sellars’ answer to this objection. Sellars’ key insight, I will show, is that normativity emerges from *socially maintained practices*. I will argue that his general strategy for naturalizing norms is to locate them in our actual social and behavioral practice, instead of any Platonic domain abstracted from it. However, a reader who is not antecedently sympathetic with Sellars might still find his position unconvincing: one might object that Sellars is just making a big assumption that normativity is somehow realized in nature in the form of social practice, and does not demonstrate exactly how.

I will provide a Sellarsian response to this objection in section 3, considering what must be added to a general animal representation system (which is plausibly conceived to be realized in nature) in order for it to become a full-fledged normative human cognitive system. I will argue that it follows from Sellars’ position that one of the necessary elements in a full-fledged human cognition is the ability to see norm-governed behaviors as *norm-governed*. I conclude that the plausibility of Sellars’ position hinges upon further empirical investigations on the acquisition of such an ability.