Sellars on Semantical Rules and the Meaning of 'Means'
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Sellars famously insists that intentionally contentful linguistic and mental items are "fraught with 'ought'" (1962c: 212)—that a normative "ambience of principles and standards" is required in order to "make meaningful discourse … possible" (1962a: 40). My paper explores the two basic appeals he makes to intentional normativity: his recognition of "semantic rules" as constitutive of senses and his eventual analysis of truth as the "semantical assertibility" of propositional senses. I argue that Sellars takes a step backwards in the early 1960s when he moves from specifying semantic rules governing truth-talk (in conjunction with meaning-talk) to offering a normative analysis of truth. My principal objection is that Sellars thus deprives himself of an account of the meaning of 'means'.

First, I will need to address the nature of Sellars's "semantical rules." Contrary to those who see Sellars as appealing to inferential norms in a reductive explanation of what possession of conceptual content consists in, Sellars's meaning-constitutive semantical rules can only be specified in content-involving terms. To consider sentences *qua* "statements in the full sense which involves the conception of norms and standards" (1962c: 213) is to consider them semantically: the "oughts" with which linguistic expressions are fraught belong to them only as elements in the semantical or conceptual order. Sellars consistently conceives of "semantical rules" as expressible using statements like 'That something is *g may be inferred from* that it is *f*' (1963a: 634). Such statements tell us "what is correct and proper with respect to the occurrences" of expressions that stand for given "senses" (1963a: 669), and in doing so state norms that are partly constitutive of the identity of these senses.

Next, I will explain a major shift in Sellars's conception of semantic normativity. Starting with his 1963a, he comes to characterize senses as functional classifiers and symbolize them using dot-quotes. For example, the following semantical rule might be partly constitutive of the propositional senses •Grass is green• and •Grass is colored•: from a •Grass is green• one may infer a •Grass is colored•. But at around the same time he introduces this notation, he also introduces a second kind of semantic normativity: he speaks of a •*p*• being "assertible … in accordance with the relevant semantical rules" (1967: 101; cf. 1963b: 224). And he proposes that 'true' means *semantically assertible*.

Sellars describes this approach to truth as "more straightforward" than the one offered in earlier papers. There (e.g. 1962c: 206, 1962b: 246), he refrains from offering a non-trivial specification of what 'true' means. Instead, just as we would expect, he describes the semantical rules governing (what using his later notation we can call) the sense •is true•, in conjunction with senses such as •is a •Snow is white••, •is a •Grass is green••, etc. We can specify these semantical rules schematically as follows:

(1) From a •The •*p*• is true• one may infer a •*p*•, and vice versa.
(2) From a •The *S* (in *L*) is a •*p*•• together with a •The *S* (in *L*) is true• one may infer a •The •*p*• is true•.

A further schema that holds for all pairs of sortals yields

From a •The *S* (in *L*) is a •*p*•• together with a •The •*p*• is true• one may infer a •The *S* (in *L*) is true•.

These three schemata in turn give us

(3) From a •The *S* (in *L*) is a •*p*•• together with a •The *S* (in *L*) is true•, one may infer a •*p*•.
From a •The *S* (in *L*) is a •*p*•• together with a •*p*•, one may infer a •The *S* (in *L*) is true•.

In later work (e.g. 1964: 137-8, 1967: 101-2), Sellars denies that (1) is a semantical rule governing the senses of 'true' or 'means that p'. An instance of the "truth move" from the tokening of a •The •Snow is white• is true• to a •Snow is white• is no longer *authorized by a semantical rule*. Rather, a •The •Snow is white• is assertible• *itself authorizes* the assertion of a •Snow is white•.

I will argue that Sellars's "more straightforward" approach represents a substantial and deleterious departure from the approach based on (1) and (2). My complaint does not concern the difficulty of elaborating a kind of "assertibility" that underwrites both directions of the "truth move." Rather, the problem is that Sellars's new account deprives him of any story about *what it is* for a sense to be the sense •is a •p••, i.e. the sense *means that p*. While Sellars had long expressed dissatisfaction with his account of the sense *means that p* (1957: 532), he claims that his introduction of the sense classifier 'is a •p•' provides him with a more adequate account (1969: 526-7). Yet, while he explains the "criterion" for a linguistic or mental episode to count as a •p•, he never in fact takes up the task of explaining the *sense* of 'is a •p•'. I will argue that (3) is an essential component of a Sellarsian account of semantic discourse, a component sacrificed by Sellars's abandonment of (1) as a semantical rule favor of his appeal to truth as semantic assertibility.

References

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