THE NATURALISM OF ROY WOOD SELLARS

by Robert J. Kreyche

Dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy

Chicago 1951

SYNOPSIS

Title of Thesis: The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars

Author: Robert J. Kreyche

Naturalism as a philosophy is as old as the history of philosophy itself. Yet through the progress of modern science and through the interplay of philosophic tendencies, twentieth century naturalism stands much in relation to its older forms as does a fully-matured adult to the undeveloped stages of his early childhood. Roy Wood Sellars, whose naturalism is the subject of this thesis, emphatically affirms and re-affirms that, although there is an affinity of principle between the older naturalism and that of the contemporary era, naturalism in the modernist sense has been thoroughly revised to meet the requirements of modern science.

From the standpoint of descriptive analysis it has been my purpose, in general, to give an objective presentation of those features of Sellars' system which mark it off from naturalism in its older forms. From the standpoint of critical analysis, it has been my endeavor to show that the naturalism of Sellars, like the mechanical naturalism of the past, is inadequate to give a truly philosophical account of the world in which we live.

The plan of my work on Sellars rather closely follows the pattern of his own system. After projecting a preliminary chapter on "The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars: Its Spirit and Objectives," I divided my work into three main sections A) Epistemology (Sellars' critical realism); B) Ontology and Cosmology (his physical realism); and C) Theory of Values (his humanism).

Section A: Sellars' Critical Realism

The first three chapters of this section comprise a descriptive analysis of the leading distinctions, principles, and applications of Sellars' epistemology, which he himself labels as

"critical realism." Chapter Two is, in the main, an attempt to bring out the differences between Sellars' critical realism and the unreflecting, naive realism of "common sense." Here it is shown that, although (in Sellars' opinion) the realism of the object can never be called into question, there are all sorts of difficulties and contradictions which render the claim of a "literal inspection" of the object untenable. There is a fundamental mistake, a natural mistake, which characterizes the "plain-man's" view of the world. This "mistake lies in the identification of the content of his perception with the object toward which he is reacting." (1) What Sellars accordingly suggests is a distinction which lies at the very root of his epistemology, i.e., the distinction between the object of knowledge and its contents. According to Sellars' theory, the object of knowledge is never known for what it is in se, but only in the light of the contents which we assign to it. It is by means of the contents that we get information about the object.

Since the above distinction seems at least to suggest the idealistic principle that we never know things, but only our ideas of them, Chapter Three is devoted to presentation of Sellars' claim that his position is essentially different from any and all of the forms of a purely subjective idealism. He bases this claim chiefly on the grounds that the "contents" of knowledge are means to knowledge, but never an object in their own right.

Chapter Four is, as its title indicates, an examination of some of the implications which Sellars' epistemology involves.

---

(1) R. W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1917), p. 26.

What this chapter deals with specifically is Sellars' theory as it stands in relation to the distinction between sense and intellectual knowledge, the distinction between common sense and scientific knowledge, the problem of universals, the categories, the nature of truth, and lastly the problem of knowledge considered simply in itself.

Chapter Five is devoted to a critical examination of Sellars' epistemology in the light of traditional scholastic principles, especially those of St. Thomas. Here the author takes issue chiefly with Sellars' distinction of "object" and "content" and the view that knowledge essentially is a type of organic response.

Section B: Sellars' Physical Realism

Chapter Six of this section is an analysis of the significance which the principles of Sellars' epistemology have for the development of his naturalist ontology. It is an attempt to show a) how, from a negative point of view, the rejection of both naive realism and subjective idealism, prepares the way for the new type of naturalism which Sellars professes; and b) how, from a positive point of view, the conclusions of the critical realist accord with the view which the contemporary scientist takes of the physical world.

Chapter Seven is an attempt to explain that theory which lies at the very heart of Sellars' naturalism, i.e., the theory of emergent evolution. For Sellars this theory signifies "the assumption that there is novelty or origination in the world," (2).

---

(2) R. W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1929), p. 362.

It rests on the view that new forms under favorable conditions periodically arise, and that this process is due mainly to the basic facts of change and organization -- facts which had not been taken seriously enough by the naturalists of the past. Unlike either Morgan or Alexander, Sellars refuses to accept an "extra-physical nisus" as being necessary to account for the evolution which is found in the physical world. For Sellars, reality, including the reality of mind and consciousness itself, is co-terminous with the world of physical existence -- a world which, in Sellars' own language, "exists in its own right." (3).

Chapter Eight is a critical analysis of the matter that had been developed in the two preceding chapters. It is roughly divided into a criticism a) of the methods and b) of the contents of Sellars' naturalist ontology. Regarding a) I have attempted to prove the logical priority of the nature of philosophical inquiry over the use of any predetermined method of approach, especially of the sort which the naturalist employs. Regarding b) specific points of criticism have been raised concerning such vital issues as the fact of change, the meaning of mind, consciousness, etc. I have attempted to show that the pan-evolutionism of the sort which Sellars professes ultimately involves an identification of *esse* and *fieri*.

Section C: Sellars' Humanism

The first half of Chapter Nine is a presentation of Sellars' theory of the nature of values, in general, i.e., his axiology.

---

(3) R. W. Sellars, "Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 53 (1944), p. 361.

The second half of this chapter deals with certain types of values taken in their concrete setting. A value-judgment, according to Sellars, unlike one which is purely cognitional, essentially involves a reference to the evaluating subject. While rejecting mere "factualism" in value-theory, Sellars is careful to avoid an interpretation of values as being good in themselves. His views concerning ethics and religion are but an application of his abstract analysis of the nature of value as such.

Chapter Ten is a criticism of Sellars' value-theory both in its abstract phases and in its concrete setting concerning matters of ethical and religious significance. My chief point of criticism against the value-theory of Sellars is its notorious lack of a metaphysical basis.

The general conclusion of my entire thesis is that naturalism, whether new or old, is by its very nature and contrary to the claims of its present-day advocates, reductionism pure and simple.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

and Democritus expounding a mechanist theory of the atoms and the void. For these men the world of reality is coterminous with the world of matter, i.e., with the world of indivisible, imperceptible particles called atoms which move about in the void.

Greek naturalism in its ethical phase is best represented by Epicurus, who was the enemy of the "supernaturalists" of his times. The "supernaturalists" in the days of Epicurus were those who, in their ignorance of the discoverable operations of physical nature, attributed these wonders in their reckless imaginations to the machinations of a non-verifiable deity. From a more positive point of view, Epicurus advocated as the supreme end of human existence a life of pleasure, -- pleasure understood mainly in terms of those things, such as serenity of soul, which bring permanent satisfaction. (2) The ethical theory of Epicurus was, at any rate, a happiness-on-earth formula, which (in typical naturalist fashion) disavowed all abject subservience to an imagined world of the unknown.

The classical and poetical expression of naturalism in its ancient form is found in the celebrated poem of the Roman Lucretius, De Rerum Natura. Dedicating himself to Epicurus, whom he regards as the greatest of all the philosophers (3), Lucretius sets forth

---

(2) cf. Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy (Westminster, Md.: Newman Bookshop, 1946), Vol. I, p. 407.

(3) "When human life to view lay foully prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who showed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece (Epicurus) ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her face to face. Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell: only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals." Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Book I in The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers ed. by Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 72.

a naturalistic credo which is unequalled in the clarity of its thought and the beauty of its expression. His historical significance is that of being the type of naturalist philosopher for all time to come. The spirit of his naturalism is essentially the spirit of the naturalism of the present day, even though the theoretical content of his doctrine has long since been repudiated. (4)

It was Francis Bacon who, centuries later, "re-discovered" ancient naturalism. It was he who praised the early Greek cosmologists for not seeking after unknown causes after the manner of Aristotle. (5) Indeed, the new era of naturalism, which issued forth with the dawn of modern science, and of which Francis Bacon was at least the prophet, differed little from that of its ancient predecessor.

It was only in more recent times, with the repudiation of the mechanistic view of the world for one which is evolutionary, that any radical changes had been brought about. How radical these changes are (from a philosophical standpoint) the reader will judge for himself.

---

(4) Note, for instance, Lucretius' pre-scientific account of the of the origin of life: "Whatever things we perceive to have sense, you must yet admit to be all composed of senseless first beginnings: manifest tokens which are open to all to apprehend, so far from refuting or contradicting this, do rather themselves take us by the hand and constrain us to believe that, as I say, living things are begotten from senseless things. We may see in fact living worms spring out of stinking dung, when the soaked earth has gotten putridity after excessive rains." The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, pp. 107-108.

(5) Aristotle was "always more sollicitous to provide an answer to the question and affirm something in positive words than about the inner truth of things; a failing best shown when his philosophy is compared with other systems of note among the Greeks. For the homaeoromera of Anaxagoras; the atoms of Leucippus and Democritus;...Heraclitus' doctrine how bodies are resolved into the indifferent nature of fire...have all of them some taste of the natural philosopher, -- some savor of the nature of things." Francis Bacon, Novum Organum, Aphorism LXIII in The English Philosophers From Bacon to Mill ed. by Edwin A. Burtt (New York: Modern Library, 1939), p. 43.

There are a number of reasons why I have selected the philosophy of Roy Wood Sellars, a contemporary American naturalist, as being typical of the new type of evolutionary naturalism. Not the least of these is the fact that his thought, perhaps more so than any of his contemporaries who share the same views as his, is such that it comprises a fairly well rounded-out system. It is hoped, at any rate, thatthis presentation of Sellars' system will serve both to enlighten the reader as to the differences between the new naturalism and the old, and (from a critical point of view) help him to examine those fallacies which the author regards as being inherent in any and all of the forms of naturalism, whether they be new or old.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURALISM OF ROY WOOD SELLARS: ITS SPIRIT AND OBJECTIVES

Chapter One

Before presenting an examination of the specific contents of Sellars' philosophy, I have deemed it advisable in this first chapter to outline for the reader a few of the basic objectives which form the general background of his system. I shall do so in the hope that the reader may at the very outset of this investigation catch something of the spirit and inspiration which have motivated the life-long work of one of America's leading contemporary philosophers.

This presentation of the general objectives and outlook of Sellars' philosophy is, as I conceive it, only part of the task that lies before me in representing as accurately as possible views which differ very sharply from my own philosophic outlook. Since it is, after all, the duty of anyone occupying himself in a serious philosophic inquiry to disengage himself from mere polemic controversy, I shall try to follow out as conscientiously as possible the import of Hocking's remark:

> No one convinces his opponent simply by ruling him out of court, -- this is the reason for the comparative fruitlessness of much argumentation. To be convincing, one must step into the mental ground of his opponent and show why it is that he thinks as he does, where he makes his mistake. (1)

One thing that I have found quite admirable in the thinking of Sellars is the definiteness of his position as a naturalist, and the clarity of expression with which he has delineated that position. Fortunately, for his readers, Sellars leaves little

---

(1) W. E. Hocking, Types of Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1929), p. 83.

or no room for misunderstanding. He is given to the habit of labelling his doctrines and determining them as exactly as possible by means of definition. Frequently, too, he is ready to present his reader with a contrast position, thus making clear how specifically his thought differs from that of someone else on a related topic. (2) Thus Sellars, at least in the basic parts of his system, is his own interpreter.

I have just spoken of the definiteness of Sellars' position as a naturalist. By this I mean to say this his philosophy is naturalistic both in its principles and conclusions, in its theory and its program of practical consequences. His philosophy is not clearly naturalistic, but consistently so.

He himself in the Preface of his Evolutionary Naturalism expresses his dissatisfaction with those "who (though they) are naturalistic in their general outlook are yet sharp in their criticism of naturalism as a philosophy." This "conservative withholding of allegiance to naturalism on the part of the majority of philosophers" (3) is a sort of dualism in practice which neither Sellars nor any other thorough-going naturalist finds easy to tolerate. Naturalism is, after all, no half-way house. If it is true in the order of speculative thought, why not own up to its consequences in the channels of human action? The age of double allegiance as Sellars sees it, is, or should be, past. If traditional values, especially in the field of religion, are out of accord with the tenor of one's scientific thought, why put up with the pretense of trying to preserve

---

(2) As an illustration of this point note the contrast he draws between his position and that of C. I. Lewis on the category of "thinghood"; R. W. Sellars, The Philosophy of Physical Realism (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 145.

(3) R. W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism (Chicago: Open Court Publ. Co., 1922), p. vi.

them? (4)

Fully admitting the consequences of naturalism, particularly as regards traditional ethics and religion, there are two central questions that will present themselves in the course of our analysis:

1) What is naturalism in its contemporary phase?
2) Is it true?

In Sellars' opinion the truth of the naturalistic position as a metaphysical world-view is discoverable to a large extent through an up-to-date interpretation of what naturalism really is. Contemporary naturalism should not, as is often the case, be identified with the naturalism of the past and previous centuries. Indeed, the contemporary naturalist is no less critical than anyone else of the errors that characterized the old mechanical systems. He has every right, therefore, to be met on his own grounds.

So important are the differences between the "old" naturalism and the "new" that the whole weight and emphasis of Sellars' system is brought to bear upon them. The dominant theme of his writings is that which stresses the superior advantages of the "new" naturalism over the "old". This "new" naturalism, however, is not a fait accompli, for it is still in the process of its development. It is, as a part of this development, that Sellars views the contribution of his own thought. From a negative point of view, then, it is Sellars' aim to dispel the

---

(4) Such an attitude as this is that of a person whom we might call a secularist in principle. "Secularism", Sellars defines, "as interest in purely human affairs and activities, in what traditional Christianity called the things of this world." R. W. Sellars, Religion Coming of Age (New York: MacMillan, 1928), p. 36.

the misgivings of many thinkers concerning the traditional limitations of naturalism. This he hopes to accomplish by showing that these limitations are peculiar to naturalism in its older forms, and are not intrinsic to naturalism as such. On the positive side, he devotes himself to the systematic development of a more adequate naturalism.

In conformity with his explicit intention to clarify the issues, rather than by means of rhetoric to confuse them, Sellars makes this initial recommendation: that we get out of the habit of setting up a straw-man and then tearing him to pieces by giving naturalism too narrow a definition. Rather the philosopher should concern himself with the working out of "exact definitions and do justice to the actual content of both science and philosophy." (5) From Sellars' point of view, once we follow this method of procedure, the ground will have been cleared for some real progress in philosophy, and, as far as naturalism is concerned, it will be far less susceptible to the interminable criticism of the idealists. As we shall see later, naturalism in its contemporary phase is regarded by Sellars as incorporating within itself much of what idealism has in the past championed and defended.

As we have already pointed out, the chief aim of Sellars' contribution is the working out along systematic lines of a new and more adequate naturalism. The chief means whereby he endeavors to accomplish this aim is the placing of this new naturalism upon a firm epistemological foundation. While

---

(5) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. vii.

admitting the value of pragmatism in its procedural techniques, naturalism, in his opinion, has suffered in no small measure from its not infrequent alliances with the pragmatic school of thought. The attitude of pragmatism has been one of too much disregard for purely speculative questions. As a case in question, Sellars frequently criticizes Dewey for his failure to appreciate the importance and significance of epistemology for naturalism.

Human knowledge is, after all, a rather unique phenomenon. Surely the preoccupation of philosophers in modern times with the problem of knowledge is in itself striking evidence of its significance. If the naturalist fails to subject this problem in all its phases to a thorough-going analysis, if he fails to understand the conditions of knowledge, and how the fact of knowledge is part of the process of nature itself, his naturalism is rendered suspect to the idealist. Hence if one is going to work out an adequate naturalism, his foundations in epistemology must be secure.

The importance of epistemology in the philosophy of Sellars can hardly be over-emphasized. Although it is his general purpose to present a well-rounded system of philosophy, his preference for and preoccupation with the problem of knowledge is evident even in his treatment of questions that are only indirectly related to that problem. The solution which he gives to the problem of knowledge is closely interwoven within the entire fabric of his system, and constitutes, in my opinion, one of the chief sources of its merit and appeal.

Having confined ourselves thus far to a few general observations concerning Sellars' system of philosophy, we shall attempt now to deal in a preliminary way with some of the chief doctrines which characterize that system, placing particular emphasis upon the historical background within which they are set forth by their author. The main divisions that we shall deal with here, as well as in the remainder of this book, are Sellars' doctrines as they are set forth, a) in epistemology, b) in cosmology and ontology (6), c) in the field of values (axiology).

In epistemology Sellars is a critical realist. Critical realism, as I understand it, is for Sellars a mid-way position (though not after the fashion of a compromise) between two extreme positions that have alternately prevailed in the history of modern thought. It is opposed, on the one hand, to epistemological idealism in all its historical forms, and on the other, to any form of naive realism which lays claim to the literal inspection of the physical object.

Epistemological idealism finds its clearest expression in the Berkeleyean formula "esse est percipi." This for Sellars is the cardinal principle of epistemological idealism, since it expresses the total dependence of being upon the act of knowledge. Expressed in broader terms, it simply means that "being is dependent upon knowing." (7) The chief assumption of Berkeley's idealism and the representative realism of Locke's which preceded it, is that knowledge is in all its forms only of

---

(6) I have intermingled here the terms "cosmology" and "ontology" for the very simple reason that for any naturalist the world of physical reality is coterminous with the realm of being.

(7) R. W. Sellars, Principles and Problems of Philosophy (New York: MacMillan, 1929), p. 75.

ideas, and not the supposed world of common sense as common sense reveals it. To the question whether Berkeley, Hume, and Kant were right in arguing against a "frank, physical realism," Sellars plainly answers:

> In my opinion they were wrong. The dualism between mind and matter, the assumption that we know ideas rather than things, the clumsy scheme of qualities inhering in a substance -- all these unmastered traditions got in the way. (8)

Sellars' main point of criticism against the epistemological idealists was their failure to distinguish between the content of knowledge and its object. Briefly, the content of knowledge is that which is given on the level of the subjective consciousness of the knower. It is this which is mistakenly understood by the idealist to be itself the very object which we know. The reason for this mistaken identification of idea and object ultimately lies in the extreme dualistic conception of mind and matter handed down from Descartes. Locke, for instance, laboring under this dualistic tradition, could not see how the mind, which is spiritual and immaterial, could be in possession of anything other than an idea. Accordingly, he defines knowledge as being merely the agreement or disagreement between ideas. (9)

This conception of knowledge, together with the dualism that underlies it, is to Sellars, completely antagonistic to any adequate sort of realism. The various points of criticism that Sellars has directed against this school of thought which has so dominated the development of modern philosophy constitute,

---

(8) R. W. Sellars, "Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism," in Contemporary American Philosophy (New York: Macmillan, 1930), II, p. 269.

(9) John Locke, Essay on Human Understanding, Book IV, Chapter I, No. 1 in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 451.

I think, one of his chief claims to enduring philosophic merit. Sellars, as clearly as any contemporary with whom I am familiar, undermines the false assumptions of idealism in epistemology, yet, as we shall see later, his own solution of the "mind-body" problem as it affects the problem of knowledge is no less deserving of criticism than the theories it was meant to replace.

Another extreme position to which the realism of Sellars is opposed is what we might call generically naive realism. Naive realism is a theory (or better, an attitude) which, accepting the world as presented by common sense, refuses or simply fails to subject human knowledge to a critical investigation. Such an attitude is, to the mind of a contemporary thinker such as Sellars, justifiable, but only on the level of common sense. Man, after all must act in the light of his every day practical knowledge, since he is forced to cope with the exigencies of his environment. Hume himself had to recognize this fact. But the point is that common sense is hardly a satisfactory substitute for scientific theory. Common sense makes no inquiry concerning the inner mechanism of human knowledge; it has little or nothing to say of the conditions that make knowledge possible. Most important of all, common sense has no explanation for the illusions of sense and the errors of judgment. The naive realist trusting to common sense alone is led to think of physical objects as if they were a molar mass. But the physical sciences speak of a world of atoms and molecules, protons and electrons, nuclear energy, wave-lengths, etc. The

physical scientist, then, is accustomed to speak of a far different kind of world than that which common sense in its limited capacities reveals.

It must not be thought, however, that Sellars' chief criticism of naive realism consists in its unquestioned acceptance of the data of common sense. The mainly objectionable feature in the attitude of the naive realist lies rather in its insistence upon the literal correspondence between these data (as seen through the eyes of the knower) and the objects which they reveal. Naive realism, as Sellars understands it, makes its capital mistake in thinking that knowledge is a literal inspection of the object, -- in short, an intuition of the essence of the thing. (10)

By way of contrast, then the critical realism of Sellars maintains that knowledge is not literally knowledge of the object in its naked existence; rather, it is an act by which we get information about things. (11) It is non-apprehensional, but nevertheless denotative. The act of knowledge always tells us something about the physical world, it is realistic in its point of reference, namely, the object (which is its terminus), but as such and in its very contents, it is different from that to which the reference is made. The contents of perception are, if you will, the instrumental signs of that which they represent. Thus the contents of knowledge are not in any way to be identified with the objects to which they point. Ideas serve as instruments or means whereby the knowing organism adjusts and adapts itself

---

(10) "We do not intuit physical reality, but only have knowledge of it." Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 50.

(11) R. W. Sellars, "Knowledge and Its Categories," in Essays in Critical Realism ed. by Drake, Lovejoy, Sellars, et al. (New York: Peter Smith, 1941); see section 3 of this essay.

to its environment.

It should be clear from this summary of Sellars' outlook upon the problem of knowledge how he regards his solution in relation to the forms of idealism and realism that preceded it. What he attempts to do is to combine the best elements of both of the theories outlined above into a new theory which will serve as the capstone of a new naturalistic system. His theory of knowledge like that of the idealists in epistemology is professedly critical, but it involves a different kind of criticism; like that of the naive realist, it accepts the data of common sense, but it involves a different kind of realism.

2 - Cosmology and Ontology

In the preceding paragraphs we have given a hint of the setting, as Sellars himself visualizes it, within which he gives his own solution to the epistemological problem. We have also indicated a few of the salient features that characterize the realism of Sellars. Leaving these problems for a more thorough-going examination in following chapters, we pass now to a consideration of that portion of Sellars' work which constitutes his cosmology and ontology. Here again we are more interested in the general framework of his approach rather than an analysis of the specific problems which it involves.

Unquestionably the most important aspect of any man's philosophical synthesis is the world-view which forms its very backbone. The world-view of Plato was that of a realm of ideas in which sensible reality was only its phenomenal reflection. For Spinoza the Supreme Reality is God upon whom all finite reality, including man, is dependent in its existence and operations. The world-view

of Sellars is that of Nature as an all-inclusive category which admits of different levels of existence, and which has within itself the capacity for creative synthesis. (12) Sellars, in other words, is a naturalist, but equally important for the understanding of his doctrine, an evolutionary naturalist.

Abstracting from the positive content of its doctrines, Sellars has this to say of evolutionary naturalism, that it is

> the reflection into a focal system and the interpretation of the general results of all the sciences. It is a system of philosophy. (13)

He is especially concerned, before giving any presentation of the doctrine as such, that it be not mistakenly linked with any past systems such as those of Haeckel, Spencer, or Huxley. The "new naturalism," as he presents it, is the "contemporary of pragmatism, genetic psychology, behaviorism, electronic physics, social ethics, and epistemological realism." (14) It is not to be identified with any of the "dead-level" systems of the past.

The fundamental postulate of evolutionary naturalism is that Nature is capable of creative evolution or development. By reason of this fact, to which science itself strongly attests, there spring forth into existence new forms of being. This fact of novelty in Nature, which the older forms of naturalism failed to take into account, is one which we must accept and make an integral part of our philosophic system. Hence philosophy must continually attune itself to the new discoveries of science, thus leaving the emergence of new categories of existence an

---

(12) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 210 ff.
(13) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. vii.
(14) Evolutionary naturalism, p. vii.

open possibility. Although all that exists is the spatio-temporal universe in which we live, we must continually adapt our thinking to the elements of novelty that it periodically reveals, whether those elements of novelty make their appearance on the inorganic or organic level of existence.

Without a doubt, however, the naturalism of Sellars, as well as that of his contemporaries generally, is orientated to Nature as it manifests itself on the organic level. Even more specifically, his main interest lies in working out a solution to the crucial problem of how to include man within the framework of an all-out naturalism. When Sellars remarks that we must penetrate more deeply into the life of nature, and follow it, as it were, from level to level until it rises into mind and consciousness, he is pointing his naturalism to the solution of that problem upon which naturalism itself stands or falls: how can I fit man, with all his admittedly superior capabilities, into the pattern of natural existence? Clearly and explicitly Sellars admits that

> The great difficulty confronting naturalism has been the inclusion of man in nature, an inclusion that would do justice to all his distinguishing characteristics. (15)

The above paragraphs should suffice to give the reader at least a general view of Sellars metaphysical outlook and the chief difficulty which that outlook encounters. But in order to bring this general view into an even clearer light, it may be helpful to devote some attention to those

---

(15) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 3.

traditional views which Sellars regards as being mutually opposed to his own.

Evolutionary naturalism is opposed, on the one hand, to the traditional forms of monism, whether materialistic or spiritualistic, and, on the other, to any form of metaphysical dualism. As regards traditional materialism, such as that of Hobbes, LaMettrie, or D'olbach, it is in Sellars' view only the predecessor of the new materialism, the new naturalism. As he puts it: "It is fairest to regard it (the older materialism) as an immature form of naturalism, pretty definitely connected with mechanical atomism." (16) Its weakness consists in its inadequacy to explain sufficiently the problems of epistemology, the categories, nature, and human values. (17) One can readily infer from Sellars' frequent reference to materialism in its older forms, that he does not so much regard it as completely false, since for him its basic principle of the coextensiveness of reality and the physical world is fundamentally true; rather he looks upon it simply as being inadequate. Its chief defect lies in its over-simplified solutions to problems which are of their very nature highly complex. Although, too, it may have served its purpose in its own day in the light of the meager scientific knowledge that was at its disposal, it has been transcended by naturalism in its contemporary phases.

While there is an affinity of principle between traditional materialism and contemporary naturalism, no such relationship exists in the case of what Sellars prefers to call traditional

---

(16) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 100.
(17) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 133.

spiritualism. "Spiritualism," Sellars defines, "is the doctrine which maintains that all existence is mental or spiritual." (18) Spiritualism, according to him, is founded on the supposed absurdity of physical realism. Its basic assumption is the idealistic epistemology of Berkeley and Kant. Its first thoroughgoing exponent was Leibnitz with his theory of pre-established harmony. Under the influence of these men and many other thinkers spiritualism has enjoyed a high degree of prominence in modern times, and this in spite of the a priori character of its basic principles and its bland rejection of the dicta of common sense. How explain this fact?

Although there are many complex factors involved in any satisfactory answer to this question, the naturalist is easily led to think that the persistent revival of spiritualistic theories of reality is due mainly to the failure on the part of the older naturalisms to do justice to the phenomena of mind, consciousness, and human values. Spiritualism has thrived on the weaknesses of the older forms of materialism. Once, in Sellars' opinion, an adequate metaphysics has been worked out along the lines of evolutionary naturalism, spiritualistic theories will have become a matter of purely historic interest.

There is still another group of traditional thinkers to which contemporary naturalism stands in radical opposition, namely, the dualists. The dualists are those who, reflecting "on the inadequacy of materialism and spiritualism have been led to champion dualism as at least a more valid position." (19) Sellars depicts

---

(18) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 192.
(19) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 190.

their line of reasoning thus: "If one of these two realities cannot be reduced to the other, why, then, we must accept both." (20) But for the naturalist, who habitually thinks of dualism in terms of its classic Cartesian formulation, such a doctrine is doomed to inevitable failure. The "insoluble" problem with which the dualist is faced is how to establish proper and natural relationships between mind and matter, i.e., between two principles of existence which are antithetical. The history of modern philosophy itself has witnessed the repeated failures on the part of the dualist to formulate satisfactory theories concerning the mind-body problem in psychology, and the subject-object relationship in epistemology. It is by reason of these and other oft-repeated failures that metaphysical dualism has, in the mind of the naturalist, long since been discredited. Concerning the naturalist rejection of dualism, as well as the misunderstandings upon which that rejection is based, we shall have much to say in a later chapter. We are simply interested here in indicating the radical opposition between contemporary naturalism and dualism in all its forms.

An outline of the basic objections and motif of Sellars' system would be sadly lacking in completeness, were we not to devote some attention to that part of his general outlook concerning the problem of values. I am not referring here to that part of his technical analysis, which will be discussed later, of the nature of value-situations and value-judgments. Rather

---

(20) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 102.

what I intend to explain now is the typical naturalist outlook which Sellars as a naturalist, shares in common with many present-day thinkers in this country.

For the sake of clarity, I think it important to note that to the contemporary mind the term "values" has a very generic meaning, covering as it does the whole gamut of those activities, whether individual or social, in which man, as a being distinctly superior to the brutes, engages himself. The problem of values, as the naturalist sees that problem, is precisely how he, within the framework of his naturalistic world-view, can do justice to those aspects of human activity and behavior which have been traditionally slighted by naturalism in its older forms.

We might take Hobbes as a classical example of the older naturalistic school of thought. (21) For him all human values are explicable in terms of one basic instinct, that of self-preservation. Such an over-simplified approach to a very complex problem is the very thing the contemporary naturalist seeks to avoid. Indeed, he is fully aware of the fact that repeated attempts on the part of philosophers, such as Hobbes, to explain human values by literally explaining them away contributed in very large measure to the repudiation of naturalism in modern times. Human values, after all, constitute an empirical fact which must be adequately explained on empirical grounds. The limitations of the older empirical philosophies, respecting the question of values, taking the utilitarian school of J. S. Mill as another example, only strengthened the fortresses of idealism.

---

(21) Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I on Man, in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant, p. 199 ff.

Since, then, its slighting of human values constitutes one of the chief failures of the older naturalisms, the case of contemporary naturalism in large measure stands or falls, depending upon the solution it gives to this vital question. A crude materialism from an ethical, social, and cultural point of view can no longer be tolerated, not even by the naturalists themselves. Sellars, for instance, readily admits the incompatibility between the mechanism of the past with any real solution to the problem of values:

> If mechanical relations are the sole determinants of conduct, our values must be epiphenomena at least, if not illusions. (22)

Yet despite its realization of the inadequacies of past systems, it is only in comparatively recent times, mainly within the last generation, that naturalism has taken a more positive stand on the question of values. As a matter of fact, it has even taken the offensive against the idealists. (23) As Sellars observes, it was the common opinion among thinkers of the first part of the twentieth century that "humanism and values" could not "find elbow room in naturalism." (24) But today the situation is changed. The contemporary naturalists, disavowing the non-humanism and anti-humanism of past systems, claim to have worked out a system in which human values receive their full meaning and significance. Naturalism and humanism are no longer mutually exclusive terms: humanism is naturalism in its ethical, religious, social, and cultural phases. Whether from a critical point of view

---

(22) Realism, Naturalism and Humanism, p. 232.
(23) John Herman Randall Jr., "The Nature of Naturalism" in Naturalism and the Human Spirit (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 341-2.
(24) Realism, Naturalism and Humanism, p. 232.

naturalism and a true humanism are compatible is another question which must be thoroughly examined.

I have mentioned in the last paragraph that naturalists today have taken up the offensive against the idealists on the question of values. How explain this rather startling change in tactics? It is true, of course, as we have just indicated, that the very life of the naturalistic philosophy is dependent upon its solution to the problem of man in general, and human values in particular. Naturalism had to join the cause of humanism for its very self-preservation, and, from the standpoint of the idealist, necessity can at times produce some very strange sort of bed-fellows. But the naturalist (as Sellars is quite typical in this regard) would positively rebel against that sort of explanation. His humanism, as he sees it, is a natural outgrowth of his broadened scientific view of the world.

The method of attack which Sellars, as a typical naturalist, employs against the idealist on the question of values is a very interesting one, and, I might add, subtle. From the naturalist standpoint, idealism in its ethical and religious phase stands for mythology, mysticism, supernaturalism, and, if you will, theological dogmatism. Now although it is true that all of these different movements are forever talking about values as having the focal point of their realization in some Power or Being outside the order of nature, there is very little agreement, and a great deal more of uncertainty, as to what the nature of this Being is. For some it is a world-soul. For others it is some sort of deity conceived in a godless variety of ways. As the

naturalist sees it, these radical disagreements among the idealists themselves are a sign of the arbitrariness of their thinking and the suppositious character of their reasonings. Moreover, and also by way of consequence, if the ultimate source and guarantee of human values is something of a very nebulous and uncertain nature, are you not placing the values themselves in jeopardy? Since human values are an empirical fact, is it not logical that we should submit this fact to empirical methods of examination? The naturalist feels confident that the methods of science are equally valid when applied to values as they are to any other data of experience. Indeed, he regards the development of the social sciences as a phenomenon which supports this viewpoint. The conclusion of all this is simply that the idealist approach to the question of values is a faulty dualistic approach, involving a dualism of method in science and philosophy, which is based upon what Sellars refers to as a "dualistic process." (25)

Another point of criticism, closely connected with that outlined above, is the naturalistic reproach that idealism makes the locus of human values accountable to the supernatural of human life. The naturalist cannot see why human values, which are experienced on the natural plane, should be made to measure up to a <u>super-natural</u> criterion. The idealist, according to him, commits the great mistake of taking human values out of their natural setting, human life, and in so doing distorts them. Are they not rather something endowed with an intrinsic worth

---

(25) <u>Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 204.

of their own? Once we see values in relation to human life, will it not be a comparatively easy task to determine their natural status? (26) The affection that a father has for his child is a good, a natural good. Why seek to explain the goodness of this affection on some supernatural level of existence? Actions are not good or bad in a manner that is dependent upon the arbitrary pronouncements of some far-off deity. Rather they have a goodness or badness of their own, which it is the duty of man to discover.

Such then is the attitude of the naturalist as opposed to the idealist on the question of values. There are misunderstandings here, of course, gross misunderstandings which tax the patience of anyone who is well versed in traditional scholastic thought, particularly regarding the indiscriminate use of the term "idealism." But we shall discuss them in a later chapter. I have simply tried to show here what the naturalist general outlook on the question of values is, and how it offers a challenge to "idealism."

In the outline that I have drawn Sellars is little different from any of the other humanists of this era. Values have a natural setting and a natural realization. They are strictly <u>of</u> and <u>in</u> the world in which we live. The traditional belief in the immortality of the soul and a future reward in another world must vanish with the advent of the new humanism. As Sellars proclaims, "the heart of religion is a concern for human values." And with this pronouncement there comes another immediately following it,

---

(26) <u>Religion Coming of Age</u>, p. 15

"The moonday of the gods (has) passed and we enter the twilight of the gods, the Götterdämmerung." (27)

We have completed our survey of the general historical setting, as Sellars himself visualizes it, within which he has worked out his own system of thought. In so doing we have attempted to portray some of the basic aims and objectives which underlie the development of that system, especially as related to certain systems of the past. But the question arises, what are his hopes for the future, or more explicitly, how does Sellars regard his contribution as having a bearing upon the future development of philosophy?

Envisaging the present era as one of syntheses, it is Sellars' hope that the insights of the nineteenth century will, under the transformation of the present, be organized into a unified whole. It is his prediction that such organization will be along the lines of an evolutionary naturalism. He ventures the opinion that before long a system of philosophy will eventuate which has about it a tone of finality. In expressing this opinion Sellars does not, I am sure, mean to imply that such a system will be a closed book, but that all the problems of philosophy will be worked out within its framework. In other words, there will be no new system to replace it.

Abstracting for the moment from the question as to whether or not there will be *de facto* an ultimate system of thought within which the great thinkers of the future will make their respective contributions, and abstracting from the question

---

(27) Religion Coming of Age, p. 133.

of what this system might be, I should at any rate like to indicate its desirability. I could never resign myself, any more than would Sellars, to the opinion of Moritz Schlick, a logical positivist, that philosophy deals merely with pseudo-problems, and is, at its very best, merely dialectic. The problems of philosophy are real problems, which ultimately admit of solution. I entirely agree with Sellars when he states that philosophy

> has a subject-matter and an internal structure which need bear no comparison with the subject-matter and internal structure of any of the sciences. (28)

Whether Sellars himself fully realises the truth of the above statement is a point still open to question, -- a point which will be examined in a subsequent chapter.

At any rate, to reserve philosophy in terms of mere dialectical function, or as a method of pre-scientific thinking is not only to rob it of its proper subject-matter, but to preclude even the possibility of some sort of ultimate agreement on the most vital questions pertaining to human intelligence. A system of philosophy, then, in the sense in which Sellars supposedly intends it, is at the very least a possibility. The present writer has his own opinions concerning the role of naturalism in the future, -- opinions which rather sharply contradict those of the author with whom he is dealing. But he is also convinced that the naturalism of Sellars is highly deserving of thorough-going and earnest consideration.

---

(28) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. vi.

SECTION A

THE NATURALISM OF ROY WOOD SELLARS: HIS CRITICAL REALISM

CHAPTER TWO

CRITICAL REALISM AND COMMON SENSE

Before and since the time of Descartes much has been said in the line of philosophical speculation which has implied an attitude of disregard, sometimes of defiance, in regard, not only to the postulates of scientific thinking, but even of common sense itself. That this discrepancy which sometimes exists between the realm of philosophic opinion and the common man's beliefs is one of the major causes of the unpopularity of philosophy itself, is, in my opinion, an undeniable fact.

But the question which mainly concerns the philosopher as a philosopher is not that of the popularity or unpopularity of his opinions; he is, or at least, should be, primarily interested in determining whether his opinions are true or false. There are, moreover, few philosophers, if any, who will deny that the truth or falsity of their opinions is to be determined by means peculiar to the methods of philosophy itself rather than by criteria of a non-philosophic nature. But the question which immediately arises is this: Does common sense, and a correct interpretation of its contents, have anything to say by way of determining the truth or falsity of a philosophic opinion? And if so, how?

Certainly it would be a mistake to overemphasize the role which common sense plays in philosophy. One does not, after all, refute a philosophic opinion by an exclusive appeal to common sense. If this were the case, philosophers during and since the time of Berkeley have wasted a great deal of effort in refuting his immaterialism, for Samuel Johnson had long since taken care of that by merely kicking a stone. Common sense, therefore, should not, under any circumstances, be regarded as an adequate substitute for refutation on philosophic grounds.

Yet it would be a mistake, equally as great as over-emphasizing the role of common sense, to neglect it altogether. Whatever the aberrations in the history of philosophy, the fact remains that the philosopher, as far as common sense is concerned, bears no seal of academic immunity. Although, as we have just pointed out, common sense gives no philosophical refutations, it nevertheless provides the philosopher with a negative check of the truth or falsity of his opinions. Although common sense cannot give reasons <u>why</u> one is right or wrong, it can nevertheless provide the philosopher with some very important clues, granted he uses his powers of abstraction in the direction that common sense indicates. It is for this reason that a true philosophy is in a certain fashion common sense <u>transformed</u>, "aufgehoben." I suspect that there is a very important analogy between common sense, which deals mainly with the level of sense experience, and a rightly informed reason whose chief concern is being under its intelligible aspects.

Be this as it may, I shall endeavor in this chapter to bring out the relationships which Sellars conceives to exist between his theory of critical realism and the primary postulates of common sense. Correctly viewed, the realism of Sellars is, in part, an attempt to establish a criticism of those philosophies which, on the one hand, have done violence to common sense, and of those, on the other, which accept it in all its literalness and whose epistemology terminates in that acceptance.

The starting point of Sellars' epistemology is an analysis of what he frequently refers to as the "knowledge-claim" on the "level" of common sense. This analysis of what he habitually

refers to as "naive" realism comprises a) a broad description of the knowledge-claim itself, and b) a critical study of that claim to see whether it can measure up to the demands of scientific thinking.

The emphasis which naturalists place upon the need for an empirical approach to the problems they investigate, in this case, the problem of knowledge, is exemplified in this initial paragraph of Sellars' Critical Realism:

> Philosophy properly begins in a description of human experience. It must give close attention to the distinctions, meanings, and attitudes which are characteristic of man's natural view of the world in which he lives. Such a preliminary study prepares a foundation upon which the thinker may work. He is aware that it presents an organization of experience and an outlook which is the expression of habits and judgments slowly formed through the ages... Without this empirical basis and without the respect for the accumulated insight of multitudes of human beings to which it testifies, the thinker, with individual perspective founded on particular problems and facts, is very apt to be led astray. Reason often creates difficulties instead of solving them, and the history of philosophy bears witness to the blind vortices into which genius has at times thrown thought... The starting point (of Philosophy) must be the experience of everyday life. (1)

Having served his readers with these introductory remarks, Sellars proceeds to give his description of what is embodied in the "plain man's" outlook upon the world. The world as seen through the eyes of common sense is a world of physical objects to which the individual person reacts in a variety of ways.

---

(1) R. W. Sellars, Critical Realism (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1915), p. 1. In conjunction with the analysis given in this chapter the following articles are suggested as supplemental bibliography: R. W. Sellars, "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 27 (1918), pp. 502-12; R. W. Sellars, "Critical Realism and the Independence of the Object," Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 34 (1937), pp. 541-50.

These physical things are regarded as having an existence independent of oneself and of the way in which one thinks about them. The plain man believes, moreover, that the way in which he looks at things is not peculiar to himself alone, but rather that he shares his outlook in common with the rest of mankind. Furthermore, it is the conviction of common sense that the objects which we experience continue to exist even when we are no longer thinking about them. They

> are thought of as permanent just as individuals are, to the degree determined by their nature and causal connections. (2)

One could go on marking off further characteristics of the common sense outlook in various points of detail, but to do so would be rather pointless. It is sufficient merely to describe this outlook for purposes of identifying it with that of our own experience. Sellars, therefore, sums up, and in so doing, defines the attitude of naive, or as he sometimes calls it natural, realism when he states that it is the outlook

> toward the physical world, in which it is considered independent of the event of perceiving and hence common. (3)

At this stage of his analysis Sellars calls attention in a preliminary sort of way to what he regards as the underlying need or motive which determines the outlook of natural realism: this outlook

> is based on the exigencies of biological and practical life and is as natural to us as our instincts. (4)

---

(2) Critical Realism, p. 3. Underlining is author's.
(3) Critical Realism, p. 3.
(4) Critical Realism, p. 3.

While entirely agreeing with Sellars' rather accurate description of the outlook of common sense, I find it necessary to observe in connection with this last remark that there is the hint of a prejudice in favor of the view that knowledge ultimately is a function whereby the organism reacts to its environment. It is true, of course, that knowledge, especially knowledge in the order of sense perception, does have its practical implications and is a perfectly "natural event"; yet I think it a mistake, especially at this early stage of the analysis for the author to favor any sort of exclusive consideration of it, even if only by way of incidental remark. The problem as to what it is ultimately that underlies men's realistic outlook upon the world, whether in the order of our sensible or of our intellectual experience, is one which must be examined within the context of the general problem as to the nature of knowledge itself.

Special attention, however, should be given to the emphasis which Sellars places upon the unreflecting character of the outlook of common sense realism. When the plain man looks at and reacts to physical objects and other persons, there is no reflex awareness of the conditions which make this outlook possible. Knowledge for him is always something direct and immediate. "The individual perceives things, and not percepts." (5) While, in point of fact, the person is engaged in an act of perception, his attitude toward the nature of the event which is taking place is completely uncritical. Perception is for him, in other words, not a problem, but a fact which he accepts.

---

(5) Critical Realism, p. 4.

It is also worthy of note that in Sellars' view the uncritical attitude of naive realism extends, not only to the act of the perception, but to the perceiving subject as well. In the outlook of naive realism there is no "intuition of a peculiar ego or subject as the seat of this event." (6) The thing of prime importance is the physical presence of the object which the perceiver as a concrete individual sees. Thus viewed naive realism is a "flat epistemological dualism in which there is no peculiar non-physical relation between the individual and the object - the two terms of the dualism." (7) For fear, however, that his reader may mistakingly regard this last statement as somehow implying that naive realism is a philosophical hypothesis, Sellars serves the reminder that

> we possess in descriptive natural realism, not a theory of what takes place, but a statement of what <u>appears</u> to take place. (8)

Having thus established the nature of the outlook of common sense with a note as to its uncritical character, Sellars takes exception to Berkeley's faulty, and not unsophicated, interpretation of the data we have just been examining. The rhetorical question which Sellars asks could not be more pointed than it is:

> Does not Berkeley assume a standpoint different from the natural one and argue from it as though it were the natural one? (9)

The objects which we perceive such as houses, mountains, and rivers are the things we perceive by sense. All well and good. But following Berkeley's line of reasoning, it would be a

---

(6) <u>Critical Realism</u>, p. 4.
(7) <u>Critical Realism</u>, p. 4.
(8) <u>Critical Realism</u>, p. 4. Underlining is author's.
(9) <u>Critical Realism</u>, p. 5.

manifest contradiction to assume that these things have any reality apart from perception, since all that we perceive is our own sensations and ideas. Here, indeed, is the fatal insertion which does violence to the dictates of common sense by substituting sensations and ideas for the very object itself. Berkeley, however, is boldly persistent in maintaining that the view which he presents is that of common sense itself, mainly on the basis of the contention that the experience of the percipient subject is limited to his own perceptions. (10) Now it is a truism that I do not perceive what I cannot perceive, but it is quite another thing to set forth the claim that all I perceive is my own sensations. No amount of dialectic can talk the plain man out of his conviction that he sees things, and not ideas.

Justifiably, then, Sellars accuses Berkeley of having

> substituted idealism for the meanings and attitude of natural realism... and (creating) a contradiction in the plain man's outlook which did not exist in it before. (11)

Although granting, for the sake of argument, that idealism may in the final analysis be right, Berkeley is nevertheless begging the question in setting forth a distorted interpretation of the realism of common sense as the basis of his idealism.

---

(10) "Woods, stones, fire, water, flesh, iron, and the like things, which I name and discourse of, are things that I know; otherwise I should not have thought of them, or named them. And I should not have known them, but that I perceived them by my senses; and things perceived by the senses are immediately perceived; and things immediately perceived are ideas; and ideas cannot exist without the mind; their existence, therefore, consists in their being perceived." George Berkeley, Third Dialogue between Hylas and Philonus in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant, p. 585.

(11) Critical Realism, p. 5.

The attempt on the part of Berkeley and others, for that matter, to falsify the data of common sense only emphasizes the need for taking it seriously into account as the starting point of a sound philosophy. Here, indeed, is a principle of method concerning which any thomist could express wholehearted agreement with the realism of Sellars. (12) What Sellars has to say concerning philosophy from the standpoint of what is given to it as its starting point is a major premise which hardly need be questioned:

> Philosophy is a product of reflection. Consequently, it arises in an experience already organized. Its task is, therefore, set by the difficulties within this characteristic organization, which have called it forth. To separate these conflicts in which they have arisen is assuredly bad method. If they lead us beyond the standpoint in which they developed, good; but we have no right to cut ourselves loose from this standpoint in an arbitrary fashion. (13)

What Sellars is protesting against in the above passage is any attempt that may be made at the outset of a philosophical investigation to establish a dualism between common sense and a scientific theory of knowledge. What he is emphasizing (to use his own terminology) is the need for a correct evaluation of human experience on the level of knowledge in its uncritical stage. I feel it important, however, to call special attention to the fact that for Sellars this is only an initial point of

---

(12) Note, for instance, the following observation of a contemporary thomist: "Spontaneous certitude about the objective reality of known things is not philosophical certitude; it is not a philosophical position at all. But it is the point of departure for a philosophical inquiry, because it is the relevant datum of the inquiry." Brother Benignus, F.C.S., Nature, Knowledge and God (Milwaukee: Bruce Publ. Co., 1949), p. 308.

(13) Critical Realism, p. 6. Underlining is my own.

emphasis, and is not in any way to be construed as the final result of his own reflective theory. The present stage of the analysis has been exclusively restricted to natural realism in its descriptive phase. As we shall see very shortly, for Sellars "natural realism as a theory of knowledge is another affair." (14)

We may conclude, therefore, that although natural realism is allegedly the terminus a quo of Sellars' epistemology, it need not be, and in point of fact, is not, its terminus ad quem. Whether in the final analysis the epistemology of Sellars is in or out of agreement with the basic postulates of natural realism, i.e., whether natural and critical realism are ultimately compatible or incompatible, is still an open question, a question which will be taken up on its own merits in Chapter Five.

The next problem which naturally arises is whether natural realism can be converted from the status of its initial description into a scientific theory of knowledge. This much is at least clear, that in view of its unreflecting character an "appeal to the experience of the ordinary man is besides the point." (15) Indeed, natural realism has many difficulties to face, however much it may be unaware of them. As testimony to the existence of these difficulties Sellars cites the relativism of Protagoras which is a protest against the belief that things are the way we see them. (16)

But before presenting what he regards as the chief difficulties which confront natural realism, Sellars makes it a special point of emphasis that these difficulties are attendant,

---

(14) Critical Realism, p. 6.
(15) Critical Realism, p. 6.
(16) Critical Realism, p. 7.

not upon realism as such, but only in its uncritical stages. We would only be repeating a mistake that has often been made in the past by the idealists, if we were to think that, in breaking down the bland assertions of natural realism, we would be undermining the foundations of realism itself. What then are these difficulties, inadequacies, and contradictions which confront the outlook of common sense realism? Sellars presents six of them, each of which we shall briefly summarize:

> (1) Perception has conditions which do not appear in that which is immediately perceived. (17)

The object of perception from the standpoint of common sense is experienced as if it were being perceived immediately and as it is in itself. Yet it involves only a minimum of reflective thought to realize that the act of perception involves "mediatory, causal processes." These mediatory processes are, in relation to the body of the percipient, both external and internal. The position of the object, for instance, in relation to the person who sees it is one of the factors determining the way in which it is to be viewed. This is an instance of what Sellars calls the "external mediation of perception." The "internal mediation of perception" is clearly exemplified in the focalization of the eyes or "sets" in the brain of the observer. These, in Sellars' view, are facts which are not taken into account, or, at least, are not consistently maintained in the assumption that what is seen are physical things in themselves.

---

(17) Critical Realism, pp. 9-10. This and the other objections to follow are presented in virtually the same form in Sellars' Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 44-45.

> (2) The plain man makes the distinction between appearance and reality. Yet this distinction is incompatible with his belief in the immediacy of perception. The distinction between thing and appearance is found to be a popular recognition of the fact that objects are perceived differently at different times and that the difference is not assignable to the object. (18)

The impression, for instance, which a person gets of a house is dependent upon the way it appears to him at any particular moment, and as viewed from a particular angle. Yet despite this fact, and the awareness that one has of it, a person will persist that what he sees is the thing in itself.

> (3) There is a lack of concomitant variation between things and that which is actually perceived. We know from our own experience that appearances do vary when we have every reason to believe that the thing does not. (19)

Although my present view of a table might lead me to think that it is oblong, I know that it is actually a square.

> (4) The difference between the perceptions of individuals also points to the individual who perceives as an important factor in the determination of what is perceived. (20)

Here is another factor which natural realism fails to account for -- a factor which eliminates the theory that the individual is always passive in the act of perception. As a striking example of how perceptions of an event vary from one individual to the next Sellars cites the well known fact of the conflicting testimony given in court by witnesses of the same event. There are, in short, personal elements involved in the act of perception which natural realism does not consider.

---

(18) Critical Realism, p. 10.
(19) Critical Realism, pp. 12-13.
(20) Critical Realism, p. 14.

> (5) Natural realism is unable to explain many events which take place in the imagination and memory. (21)

There are a number of difficulties which Sellars brings up under this head. To mention only one, how account in terms of natural realism for the imagined presence of the object in the event of a dream?

> (6) Natural realism has nothing to offer in the way of accounting for the synthetic or composite character of that which is perceived, and the presence in it of inferential elements. (22)

Here Sellars calls attention to the illusion that what we think we see happening in a given event is the result of pure perception in the passive sense of the word. As a matter of fact, our past perceptions of similar events are factors which determine our perception of an event in the present moment. Percepts, in other words, have a history of which the percipient himself is usually unaware.

The above objections are, all of them, very closely connected with each other. But whether taken singly or collectively, they constitute for Sellars a blank refutation of any theory which proposes that the object of perception is that which is seen in itself. The simple truth of the matter, as Sellars sees it, is that an analysis of the act of perception reveals the presence in it of subjective elements which altogether forbid our regarding it as an intuition of the object.

Summarizing the results of Sellars' analysis of natural or naive realism, we have first to note the emphasis he places

---

(21) Critical Realism, p. 14.
(22) Critical Realism, p. 18 ff.

upon utilizing the experience of everyday life as the starting point of one's philosophy. On this point, we have seen him vigorously protesting against Berkeley's attempt to falsify the data of perception by introducing an "airy hypothesis of a theological character." There are, after all, some things which are given to man in his experience, such as the conviction that things exist independently of our thinking, and concerning them, i.e., the existence of these data, there can be no dispute. The philosopher has no choice but to accept them. On the other hand, there are claims which natural realism sets forth which, when put to the test of scientific thinking, cannot stand on their own ground. Chief among these claims is the common sense conviction that we literally know things as they are in themselves.

To say the very least, it would seem that Sellars, even before he has a chance to present his own theory of knowledge, is faced with an insurmountable difficulty: how is it possible, while sacrificing to science the belief so basic to common sense that we really intuit things, to uphold a theory of knowledge which nevertheless professes to be realistic? Although there are certain key distinctions whereby Sellars attempts to bridge the gap between naive and critical realism, his entire epistemology is, in a sense, an attempt to answer this fundamental question. We shall restrict ourselves here, however, only to the essentials of Sellars' approach to the problem.

We have already noted in our first chapter that distinction which pervades all of the epistemological thinking of Sellars, -- the distinction between the object and content of knowledge. (23)

---

(23) "There are two elements in perception: the affirmation of a coreal and the assigned set of characters or aspects. Suppose we call these respectively, the object of perception and the content of perception. Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 196. Underlining is the author's.

For Sellars the object of knowledge is that which we purport to know, the reality which we regard as existing independently of ourselves:

> I open my eyes and perceive concrete things. What are concrete things? They are not merely character-complexes. They are co-reals to be adjusted to, independent, common and full of vigorous capacities...Perceived things are co-real with the percipient and independent of him. (24)

We have here in Sellars' vivid description of the object of knowledge a statement which forcefully affirms agreement with the basic outlook of naive realism, -- that what we know are things. Since, however, knowledge is not as purely objective as it is usually thought to be, it is essential to note what is meant by the other branch of Sellars' distinction, viz., that which regards the content of knowledge. Here our attention is directed to that aspect of knowledge which regards the subjective response of the individual percipient. Basically, the content is the subjective medium in which the knower thinks the object, the means whereby he interprets it and synthesizes it for himself.

Keeping this distinction in mind, it is possible to get at a better understanding of Sellars' approach to and explanation of the problem of knowledge as it pertains to our common sense convictions. It is a point of emphesis with Sellars that "there is a profound truth in the outlook of common sense realism despite its inadequacy." (25) The plain man, in regarding things as real, is "reacting toward his environment, making all sorts of motor adjustments." (26) The "practical category of thinghood" which

---

(24) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 196. Underlining is author's.
(25) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 26.
(26) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 27.

dominates the perception of the individual is fully justified by the fact that he (the individual) is responding to realistic meanings that are given to him in his experience. "Thinghood," (and this for Sellars is the equivalent of "real object") "and perception go together." (27) It is this phase of naive realism which Sellars as a realist whole-heartedly accepts and sees no need to question.

Yet there is a fundamental mistake, a natural mistake, which characterizes the plain man's view of the world. This

> mistake lies in the identification of the content of his perception with the object towards which he is reacting. (28)

On the "level" of unreflecting common sense the distinction which the critical realist is forced to make between the object and content of perception is completely overlooked. Everything is thrown over to the side of the object. Indeed, considering perception from the standpoint of the practical function it serves, there is no need for such a distinction. (29) Naive realism is, therefore, justified if considered solely in terms of biological functions. Even the critical realist himself is in his everyday, practical life a naive realist. (30) When, however, he leaves aside his practical interests and comes to regard perception from a

---

(27) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 197.
(28) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 27.
(29) "Common sense makes no distinctions not forced upon it." Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 191.
(30) "The naive realist's interpretation of the perceptual experience is as much right as wrong and as much wrong as right. I hold that the precise nature of perceiving is not at first understood, but that it is taken in a rough-and-ready, or practical, way in terms of workable results... It seems as though external things were given to inspection. It is only reflection that destroys the natural illusion and forces a more critical interpretation." The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 63. Underlining is the author's.

disinterested, scientific point of view, he find that perception is not the simple thing that common sense makes it out to be. It is no longer a mere fact which one accepts in all its literalness, but a fact which must be explained, and, if necessary, remodeled and re-interpreted.

It is on this "level" of reflective, critical thinking that the realistic meanings which characterized perceptionas an everyday affair fade into the background. Accordingly, it is possible now to regard what was completely overlooked before, i.e., the conditions of perception. The analysis of these conditions reveals the presence of psychological factors which no longer make it possible to regard perception as a pure intuition of an object. Although

> no motive has entered to cause us to doubt the existence of physical things co-real with the percipient, reflection has discovered that the objective content with which we at first clothe these acknowledged realities is intra-organic. In other words, we can no longer believe that we can literally inspect, or intuit, the very external existent itself. The content of which we are aware is clearly distinct from the physical existent with which it was erstwhile identified, though it is in causal relation with it. (31)

The critical realism of Sellars, then, is, as he himself explicitly affirms

> a criticism of naive realism and an attempt to free it from its prepossession that knowledge is, or can be, an intuition of the physical thing itself. (32)

It is, furthermore, a protest against the attempts of neo-realistic

---

(31) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 27.
(32) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 189.

thinkers to develop and defend naive realism on philosophic grounds. (33) By reason of the fundamental distinction he has drawn between the object and content of knowledge, Sellars, regards himself as an "epistemological dualist" (though he is not altogether fond of the term) for he holds that

> knowledge of objects is mediated by ideas which are in <u>some sense</u> distinct from the objects of knowledge. (34)

This position clearly stands in contrast with that of those who as "epistemological monists" somehow seek to identify the content or datum of knowledge with its object:

> For them the datum <u>is</u> the ultimate reality. The idea is the object. (35)

Before concluding this chapter, there is one more point I should like to clarify in regard to Sellars' critical realism as it bears upon the act of perception. From the fact that Sellars places a great deal of emphasis upon the mediatory processes involved in the act of perception, one might easily be led to conclude either that the act of perception is restricted to a knowledge of its contents, or that this act, as it regards the object, is the result of an inference.

Although it is true that in Sellars' theory we intuit only the contents of knowledge, and not the object, this does not, in his opinion, justify the inference that all we know are the contents.

---

(33) "The first wave of realism (in America) was guilty of an over-simplification of mind and of the act of knowing. It was consciousness-fleeing and afraid of the subjective... Its attention was directed at results rather than at means... This state of mind made the new realists prone to accept naive realism and to believe that knowing is a kind of giveness of the object and not a judging, or interpreting of it. In some sense the very surface of the external thing is open to inspection." <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, pp. 56-57

(34) <u>Knowledge and Its Categories</u>, p. 190.

(35) <u>Knowledge and Its Categories</u>, p. 190.

Such an inference to Sellars' mind would be based upon the narrowed down conception of knowledge exclusively in terms of intuition.

Secondly, Sellars explicitly denies the assumption that the

> physical world as the object of knowledge must be based upon an inference, if you are not a naive realist. (36)

The fact that we do not apprehend or intuit physical things does not force upon us the need for inferring them. It is true, as we have already seen, that there are inferential elements involved in the act of perception, but this does not mean that the very existence of the object itself is the result of an inference. For Sellars, we know the object, and we know it directly. This act of knowledge is the result, neither of an intuition nor of an inference, but of an affirmation which is effected through the instrumentality of the data of perception.

Concerning Sellars' distinction of object and content, there are points of detail which will be brought forth more clearly in the following chapter. Sufficient, however, has been said to fulfill the underlying purpose of this chapter, -- that of showing how Sellars regards his critical realism in relation to the unreflecting realism of common sense. Because critical realism purports to avoid what are regarded as the extremes of naive realism, on the one hand, and of idealism, on the other, we shall now examine Sellars criticism of what he frequently refers to as epistemological idealism.

---

(36) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 195.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL REALISM AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL IDEALISM

To any student of the history of modern philosophy, there is one fact which stands out above all the rest, viz., the dominant, and, at times, exclusive concern on the part of philosophers with the problem of knowledge. It is not to be thought, of course, that the problem of knowledge prior to Descartes' time, had not been dealt with and examined. As a matter of fact, a great part of the development of scholastic thought had centered around the various opinions expressed concerning the nature of universals. Yet it was not until the time of Descartes and thereafter that any attempt had been made to conduct an exhaustive, critical, and systematic examination of the problem of knowledge as a problem in its own right. It is therefore, correct to state, as does a contemporary author, that

> a systematic criticism of experience is a novel characteristic of philosophy since Descartes. (1)

It is the problem of the historian of philosophy to analyze the many factors that contributed to this new turn which philosophic speculation had taken. Here we are interested simply in noting the fact that beginning with the time of Descartes there began a new trend which consisted

> in a progress of reflection, in a turning back of thought upon itself, becoming more explicitly aware of itself and its own problems. (2)

---

(1) D.J.B. Hawkins, The Criticism of Experience (London; Sheed and Ward, 1947), p. v. I should like to make it clear that by "criticism of experience" Hawkins understands an examination of "the credentials of the kind of knowledge which common sense takes for granted." The Criticism of Experience, p. v.

(2) Jacques Maritain, The Dream of Descartes (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1944), p. 164.

This new trend accordingly brought about

> a progress in the status, and, as it were, in the morphology of philosophy. (3)

Another fact, relevant to the purpose of our inquiry, is that the dominant trend within this movement has, until comparatively recent times, very largely been in the direction of idealism. I say this is a fact relevant to our purposes, for, although the critical realism of Sellars, is, as we have just seen, a criticism of naive realism, it is equally well directed against the basic presuppositions that have characterized idealistic systems of thought from Descartes to modern times. As was indicated in the first chapter, the realism of Sellars is intended by its author to be a mid-way position between the extremes of naive realism and idealism, incorporating within itself the best elements of each, while avoiding the errors of both. Essential, therefore, to the understanding of Sellars' epistemology is how it stands in relation to the idealisms of the past.

The over-all estimate which Sellers gives of idealism in modern times is that its function was to serve as an interim period in the history of philosophy. Idealism, according to him, arose originally as a protest against the oversimplications of common sense realism; to the extent that it was such a protest it was valid. The strength of idealism, however, lies, not in enunciation of its own particular views of the nature of mind and ideas, but rather in the weaknesses of old-fashioned realism. As opposed to the older forms of realism, idealism stands for an appreciation of the subjective factors involved in the act of

---

(3) The Dream of Descartes, p. 164.

knowing, i.e., a more reflecting, critical view of the nature of the cognitive process. Together with modern critical realism, it is directly opposed to any and all theories which lay claim to any intuitional perception of extramental objects. This from Sellars' point of view is perhaps the only thing which his theory of knowledge has in common with past idealisms.

In stating that the realism of Sellars is opposed to idealism, I mean to imply that it is opposed to any and all of its forms, including the representative realism, both of Descartes and Locke, the idealism (in the stricter sense) of Berkeley, and the phenomenalism (of two different types) of Hume and Kant.

As regards Descartes and Locke, Sellars considers both of their philosophies as being

> typical of a combination of dualism in ontology and representative realism in theory of knowledge. (4)

As a matter of fact, the theory of representative realism is directly founded upon the assumption inaugurated by Descartes and taken up by Locke that matter and mind are, with respect to each other, in a state of complete or near-complete isolation. Consistently with this basic assumption, for Descartes and Locke alike the mind, as regards the direct object of its thinking, is restricted to a knowledge of its own states. What we know directly and immediately are, not things, but ideas, which in some way or another are the mental copies of the things they are supposed to represent. (5)

---

(4) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 50.
(5) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 62-63.

There are, of course, significant points of difference as regards the manner in which each of these philosophers develops his own particular brand of representationism. The rationalism of Descartes presents a considerable contrast with the empiricism of Locke. In this connection it will be recalled that the entire first part of Locke's Essay on Human Understanding is an attempt to refute the doctrine of innate ideas to which Descartes himself had subscribed. Furthermore, the sharp distinction which we find in Descartes between perception and conception becomes all but obscured in Locke's indiscriminate use of the word "idea." (6) But these points of difference are not sufficient to cancel out the fundamental doctrine which Descartes and Locke share in common, -- that of the representative function of the mind's ideas.

Accordingly, there is one basic objection which reveals the fundamental weakness of their theories, as well as that of any other kind of copy-theory of knowledge:

> If the idea is the direct object of knowledge, the contention that ideas are only "mental substitutes" for things is an act of faith. (7)

The point of Sellars' objection is well taken. If, indeed, all that we directly know are ideas, how can it be truly established that these ideas are the copies or reproductions of things which they are claimed to be? Such a claim presupposes by implication a sort of comparison between the copy-idea and the things which it imitates, -- a comparison which is rendered impossible, if

---

(6) "Locke defines an idea in very general terms. It is whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks. Sensations, images, concepts are all ideas." The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 65. Underlining is author's.

(7) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 193.

one consistently adheres to the assumption that only ideas are the direct objects of our knowledge.

Perhaps even more fundamental than this first objection is Sellars' protest against representationism, especially that of Locke, on the grounds that it falsifies and ignores the knowledge-claim itself:

> Ideas are made too substantial and cease to be thought of as contents in terms of which we interpret objects of knowledge. The directness of knowledge is lost sight of. While knowledge is mediate both in the sense that it is not an intuition and in the sense that there is much constructive activity at work in the mind, it is yet direct. We mean independent objects and we interpret these objects in terms of ideas. (8)

In the above passage, we have a statement, not only of what Sellars correctly regards as the fundamental weakness in Locke's approach to knowledge, but also of how by way of contrast critical realism stands in relation to representative perception. Critical realism, although it is critical, nevertheless lays claim to the directness of the cognitive act. (9) Representative realism, negating the claim that our knowledge of things is direct, bases knowledge upon an act of inference, which ultimately is reducible to an act of faith, an "assurance"that the copy represents the thing.

In the comparison thus far drawn between Locke's view of knowledge and that of Sellars, it would seem that Sellars,

---

(8) Knowledge and its Categories, p. 193

(9) Note also the following passage: "Knowing is regarded (i.e. by the critical realist) as more than an awareness of abstracta to be called logical ideas. It is an interpretation of objects. Thus objective reference is intrinsic to the very nature of knowing. This analysis rids us of the subjective bias of representative realism." Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 270.

favoring, as he does, the view that knowledge is direct, is more of a realist than Locke. To see whether this is actually the case, we might profitably examine the view which Sellars takes regarding the status of the so-called primary and secondary qualities of matter.

First, it will be recalled that for Locke the primary qualities of matter, such as extension, solidity, figure, motion, and rest are strictly objective. (10) These primary qualities are in material substances, and they are there according to the way that we know them, that is to say, there is an objective correspondence between our "ideas" of these primary qualities and the qualities themselves. The so-called secondary qualities of matter, however, are not real qualities of matter at all. Formally considered, i.e., as qualities, they are to be found only in the experience of the perceiving subject. There is nothing in the object to correspond to them, except the power which the object has by reason of its primary qualities to produce these sensations in us, i.e., color, taste, sound, etc. (11)

It will be recalled further that Berkeley employed a few rather convincing arguments against the position of Locke to show that, if the secondary qualities of matter are subjective, the same must hold true a fortiori of the primary qualities, since it is from the so-called secondary qualities that the primary qualities are derived and known. (12)

Now the position which Sellars takes in regard to primary

---

(10) Essay on Human Understanding, Book II, Chap. VIII, No. 9 in From Descartes to Kant, p. 406.
(11) Essay on Human Understanding, Book II, Chap. VIII, No. 10 in From Descartes to Kant, p. 407.
(12) George Berkeley, First Dialogue Between Hylas and Philonus, in From Descartes to Kant, pp. 545-550.

and secondary qualities, is, if one is unacquainted with his distinction between object and contents of knowledge, a rather startling one. In the first place he expresses his approval of Berkeley's rejection of both primary as well as secondary qualities as somehow residing or inhering in a substance. To hold that the qualities which are revealed to us in the contents of sensation are the qualities of matter itself would, as far as Sellars is concerned, be a simple reversion to naive realism. Accordingly, "all sense-data," together with the qualities which they express, "are subjective." (13) But that is not all: "Sense-data are," all of them, "equally means to knowledge." (14) We must also note that for Sellars

> the so-called primary qualities are judgments about the physical world having a foundation in the inferential use of sense-data. That things are extended means that they are superimposable and measurable, that the parts are in the order of side-by-sidedness; that things are solid means that they exclude other things in measurable ways; that they are at rest or in motion means that they change positions with respect to some standard coordinate or do not; that they are numerable means that they can be numbered...Now all these statements, while mediated by the pattern of sensible appearances and deepened by manipulation of things, are in no sense assignments of sensible qualities of any kind. They are intellectual graspings of the determinate nature of things through the use of the sense-data they arouse in us. (15)

In line with the above remarks, then, it would be wrong in Sellars' view to maintain that qualities and properties, as we

---

(13) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 181.
(14) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 181.
(15) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 184. Underlining is author's. Note also: "But what is a property? It is an answer to a question about the characters and powers of concrete substances. And this answer gives what I call knowledge about or facts about." R. W. Sellars, "Materialism and Human Knowing," in Philosophy For the Future, edited by Sellars, McGill and Farber (New York: MacMillan, 1949), p. 87. Underlining is author's.

know them, simply belong to things. There is always something in in things which justifies our thinking them as we do in terms of certain qualities. But we must not think that these qualities (i.e., as known) are themselves that something in the thing which causes us to think as we do. We must not, as did Locke, attribute these (primary) qualities to things.

Neither is knowledge on this account to be regarded as completely subjective. The perceiving organism is, in its awareness of sense-data, responding to the object which is stimulating it, and it is responding to that object in a manner determined by the nature of the object itself and its connections. There is, in other words, an objective relationship between things and our perceptions of things, but the relationship itself is not an object of intuition. It is simply one of the primary and irreducible factors involved in the act of knowledge, always present, but never intuited. (16)

What is true of the so-called primary qualities applies equally as well to secondary qualities, such as color and sounds: color is

> correlated with the vibration of electrons and sound with the vibrations of bodies in a wave-like fashion. This correlation is inferential but it is not arbitrary. (17)

By way of summary, then, all of the so-called qualities of matter, properly speaking and formally considered, comprise part

---

(16) "I have long argued that the directed cognitive claim is irreducible, though its conditions and mechanism can be studied." Materialism and Human Knowing, p. 77. Again: "The claim of the human mind to make verifiable knowledge-assertions is just epistemologically ultimate." Materialism and Human Knowing, p. 37.

(17) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 185.

of the contents of our perception. But because the contents of perception are merely the means whereby the object is made known to us, they are never to be literally ascribed to the object itself. (18) They are, it is true, "revelatory" of the object; they tell us something about the object; but the object itself together with its "ontological" properties is never literally presented in consciousness. More specifically, qualities, as we know them, are correlations within the organism which correspond to the correlations of things, but they are not to be regarded as identical with things.

What is important to note in Sellars' theory is that correspondence and correlation are not to be understood either as resemblance or identity:

> (Sense-data) are correlated with their external causes...in no case is there assumed to be a resemblance between a sense-datum and its external cause. What does hold is an ordered correlation so that to every difference in the one there is a difference in the manifold...It is the recognition of this fact that differentiates critical realism from the traditional type of representative realism. (19)

Since the idealism of Berkeley carries with it fundamentally the same view of sense perception as that which was entertained by Descartes and Locke, here again we find Sellers repeating substantially the same objections, but perhaps with renewed force, against the view that the direct object of knowledge is the sense-datum. Sellars frankly admits, of course, that

---

(18) "I would here point out the fact that much of the dispute about primary and secondary qualities stems from bad epistemology which takes knowing too much as an apprehension and not a revisable prediction." Materialism and Human Knowing, p. 77.

(19) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 135. Sentence underlining is my own.

Berkeley's "deadly criticism against any inferential passage from ideas to things" (20) proves beyond all doubt the plain impossibility of representative perception, but

> the unfortunate thing was that instead of trying to re-analyze perceptual knowing in order to re-formulate it, this destruction of the old formulation was taken to be a demonstration of idealism. (21)

The fundamental error underlying Berkeley's analysis lay in his failure to recognize the fact, so vital to the act of perceiving, that it has an interpretative reference to real objects:

> Thus, knowing as an operation of intent and interpretation is disregarded. The plain fact that perceptual knowing claims some sort of transcendent reference is neglected. (22)

Certainly, if the act of perceiving is to be identified with mere awareness of sense-data as such, then we could accept the Berkeleyean principle that <u>to be is to be perceived</u>. But this is to ignore the fact insisted upon in the last chapter, that knowledge <u>refers</u> us to something outside of ourselves, outside of the "organism" which perceives. (23) To reduce the act of perceiving to a mere awareness of sense-data makes it impossible to do justice to what human knowing really involves, as having a bearing upon a world of real, physical things.

Passing over now to the phenomenalism of Hume, I should like

---

(20) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p.33.
(21) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, P.33.
(22) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p.33.
(23) "A kind of thin intellectualism, associated with the traditional formulation of the causal theory of perception in Locke and Descartes, pervades the formula of Berkeley that <u>to be is to be perceived</u>, and that apples are nothing but a complex of ideas. There is a neglect of alerted attitude, pointing, demonstrative symbols, conceptualization, social activity, preparation for action with know-how." <u>Materialism and Human Knowing</u>, p. 83. Underlining is author's.

to remark, first of all, that Sellars' observations and criticism on this subject are for the most part common knowledge to the historian of philosophy and the philosopher. For this reason, I shall be content to summarize the results of his criticism, rather than endeavor to work it out in any point of detail. The phenomenalism of Hume, after all, from the standpoint of an analysis of the act of perception is essentially the same as Berkeley's idealism, and is, for that reason, susceptible to the same basic objections. In Hume, again, as in the whole line of the British empiricists of the classical period we find the a priori uncritical acceptance of the idealistic assumption that knowledge is restricted to an intuition of mere sensata. Sense images are for him, what they were for Locke and Berkeley, "atomic entities" found in the mind as if existing there in their own right and having no direct bearing or relationship to the order of physical objects.

While it is true, however, that Berkeley and Hume had much in common, such as their mutual rejection of the representative realism of Locke and of the doctrine of abstract ideas, Hume's significance lies to some extent in the devastating attack which he had made upon the spiritualism of Berkeley. (24) Hume had shown beyond all shadow of doubt that the retention of spiritual substances by Berkeley could not be tolerated on the principles which Berkeley himself had championed. If, from the standpoint of Hume's thinking, Berkeley had shown that bodies do not exist independently of mind, then he should have realized a fortiori that spirits do not exist either. Having rejected abstract ideas,

---

(24) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 91.

Berkeley's appeal to the "notion" of spiritual substance is not only vain, but casuistic.

The key principle of Hume's sensism is that no idea is valid unless traceable to its original sense impression. In line with this principle, it was an easy matter for him to show that we actually have no impression of soul or spirits. Why, then, hold that they exist? Yet, since the Humian rejection of spiritual substances is hardly a matter of regret for a naturalist such as Sellars, we need not dwell on it any further.

What Sellars does specifically object to in the phenomenalism of Hume is his subjectivistic interpretation of the "category" of causality. Rightfully, Hume recognized that all our judgments about existence, whether our own existence or that of the world, involve the principle of causality. But do we genuinely <u>observe</u> causal relations operative in the world of real, physical objects?

> As a true sensationalist, Hume answered this question in the negative. Observation is merely an awareness of sense impressions. Whence, then, comes the idea of causality? His answer struck the note of subjectivism. It is from a feeling established in us by custom, a feeling of expectation based on association. (25)

In Sellars' opinion, there is only one way of refuting Hume, and that is to reject his phenomenalism at the very outset:

> In perception we are interpreting things and their relations in the light of data given in the sensory field. In other words, the perceptual experience is dominated by categorical meanings. We sense ourselves as agents and patients and other things are perceived in the same fashion. And we think of ourselves and the things around us as continuants interacting. (26)

In thus directing his criticism against the phenomenalism of

---

(25) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 211.
(26) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 211.

Hume, Sellars makes it perfectly clear that causes constitute part of the experience of perceiving; in other words, we know them, we feel them. But do we literally see or observe causal relations as such? Considering all that has been previously said concerning Sellars' theory of knowledge, there is only one answer that we can expect to receive:

> I am not arguing that we mysteriously intuit an external something called force or necessary connection. I am not a naive realist. No; we think things as in dynamic relations, because they are so disclosed by our data... Our interpretative judgments are objective in reference. In other words, causality is a category going with self, thing, event, connections. In no case, however, do we ever literally intuit the object of perceiving; and we should not expect to intuit a productive agency. (27)

I have no desire to bring out in any further detail the points of criticism which Sellars brings to bear upon Hume's phenomenalism and scepticism. The work of Hume is, after all, but the climax of all that preceded it, the reductio ad absurdum of the representationism of Locke and the spiritualism of Berkeley, the bankruptcy of a mechanistic and atomistic theory of knowledge. Any further criticism at this point would, therefore, be little more than a repetition of what has already been said.

In his rather extensive, though scattered criticism of the whole British empirical movement, Sellars wishes to make it clear that he is not denying the existence of sense-data, images, and meanings. What he is rightfully objecting to is the persistent tendency within this movement to give these data an independent status which they do not actually enjoy. Sense-data and images,

---

(27) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 211.

after all, lose their meaningfulness as soon as they are divorced from the world of real objects. They are, it is true, in the perceiving subject, but they are not there as objects in their own right. Their raison d'etre is, according to Sellars' own particular view, to function within cognitive acts in which one thinks and describes objects. Accordingly,

> The weakness of traditional empiricism was its substitution of atomic entities for the actual movement of concrete experiencing. (28)

The British empiricists, thus considered for what they really are, i.e., idealists or mentalists, relinquished the object of knowledge, and (according to Sellars' criticism) satisfied themselves with the content. (29)

Because of the importance of this last point in Sellars' criticism of idealism, I should like to give it some measure of special consideration. The point in question is that which concerns the distinction between knowledge considered as a purely psychological event and knowledge considered from the standpoint of the objective reference given it in the consciousness of the knower.

In one of the clearest chapters I have found in Sellars' works, I find him citing approvingly a quotation from William James which emphasizes the objective reference which characterizes consciousness on the "level" of knowledge. (30) As further testimony to

---

(28) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 280.
(29) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 202.
(30) "Human thought appears to deal with objects independent of itself; that is, it is cognitive or possesses the function of knowing...The judgment that my thought has the same object as his thought is what makes the psychologists call my thoughts cognitive of an outer reality." William James, Psychology (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1892), pp. 271-272. Underlining is author's. Quoted by Sellars in Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 207.

this objective reference present in the act of knowledge, we find the following quotation from Stout:

> All subjective states are psychical; but not all psychical states are subjective sensations... Insofar as they enter into the relation of subject and object at all, these states fall to the side of the object, and not to that of the subject. (31)

Sellars finds the above passage, coming as it does from a psychologist, rather remarkable. Yet despite the epistemological truth which it embodies, Sellars points out that the psychologist as such need not concern himself with knowledge from the standpoint of its reference. Ordinarily

> the psychologist abstracts from the object of perception and all the realm which is the object of scientific knowledge, and concentrates upon the content of perception. He desires to break this content up into its structural elements and to find the conditions of their peculiar synthesis...In short, the psychologist studies the conditions of the psychical as such. (32)

The psychologist, then has every right to "feel at home" when he restricts himself to that which is properly his domain, an analysis of psychical states. But not so in the case of the epistemologist. Indeed, this has been the capital offense of epistemologists in modern times, viz., their handling of knowledge as if it were an exclusively psychological event. It is true, of course, that a knowledge of psychology should prove a considerable help in epistemological analysis. But the epistemologist is betraying his trust, if he attempts to reduce knowledge to a mere awareness of psychical states:

---

(31) George F. Stout, The Groundwork of Psychology (London: University Tutorial Press, 1903), p. 3. Noted by Sellars in Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 207.
(32) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 207.

> The critical realist desires to point to the fact that idealism has given this concentration by psychology upon the psychical and also interpretation. While the psychologist of today is a realist and believes in the physical realm... and uses the results of the physical sciences, the idealist is persuaded that the content of perception is the object of perception. The psychologist consciously makes the abstraction from cognitive reference, while the idealist asserts that there is no need of such an abstraction, because experience is an ultimate... But all modern realists are protesting against this neglect of the form of consciousness, of what we may call cognitive reference; and the critical realist adds that the content of knowledge is not simply identical with the object of knowledge. (33)

Sufficient has been said to manifest the significant differences in viewpoint between Sellars' approach to the problem of knowledge and that of some of the traditional idealists. I have deliberately restricted myself here mainly to a consideration of these differences as they affect knowledge on the so-called "level" of perception. Accordingly, I have deferred Sellars' criticism of Kantian idealism, which is largely of an intellectual cast, till the next chapter in which I shall examine Sellars' realism in some of its wider implications.

Synthesizing the results of this and the preceding chapter, it may be enlightening to note that in Sellars' estimation naive realism and idealism, though they are, so to speak, at opposite poles, have both made the same fundamental mistake -- that of identifying object and content of knowledge. Yet the mistake has been made in contrary directions. The center of attraction for the naive realist is the object of knowledge with which he identifies contents; for the idealist attention is concentrated upon

---

(33) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 203. Underlining is author's.

the contents which are mistakenly substituted for the object. Thus we find naive realism launched in the direction of pan-objectivism, and idealism hurled into a vacuum of purely subjective mental states. The big question, which seems to be Sellars' chief concern is: How is it possible to avoid this historical dilemma, and thus prepare the way for an adequate solution to the epistemological problem?

In Sellars' opinion, this is to be accomplished, negatively, by a rejection of epistemological monism in both of its forms. On the positive side, the epistemological dualism of object and content must be accepted and applied. Naive realism is right in claiming that the object of knowledge is something outside of the percipient subject; it is wrong in literally ascribing the contents of knowledge to that object. Idealism is right in maintaining that the contents of knowledge are something within the knower itself; it is wrong in reducing the object of knowledge to a mere intuition of the contents:

> To my way of thinking it (idealism) has made about as bad an identification of the content and the object of perception as has naive realism. Only in this swing of the pendulum, the object is identified with the content and declared to be mental because the content is. (34)

---

(34) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 27.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL REALISM IN ITS FULLER IMPLICATIONS

Perhaps I had best begin this chapter with an explanation of its title. Our attention has up to this point been focused upon the contrasting elements between the realism of Sellars and what he considers the traditional extremes of naive realism and idealism. The whole weight of emphasis within this contrast has been placed upon the problem of knowledge in its most elementary phase, i.e., the problem of sense perception. I should like now to extend this analysis to a consideration of Sellars' realism as it pertains to the problem of knowledge in what he regards as its broader and more scientific phases. I shall, accordingly, deal in this chapter with Sellars' theory as it stands in relation to the distinction between sense and intellectual knowledge, the distinction between common sense and scientific knowledge, the problem of universals, the nature and criteria of truth, the categories, and lastly, the problem of knowledge simply considered in itself. Since all of these questions are closely connected with each other, I have deemed it advisable to deal with them in a single chapter.

To one who is accustomed to the traditional distinction between sense and intellectual knowledge as exemplified in the writings of St. Thomas, there is the initial difficulty of determining whether and how this distinction is taken into account by a naturalistic thinker such as Sellars, for whom man is in the final analysis a minded organism. Certainly, we would be right in thinking <u>a priori</u> that if this distinction is to bear any recognition at all in a naturalistic theory of knowledge, it does not, nor can it have, the same meaning as it does for a philosopher to

whom man is a composite of body and soul. After all, what one's view of knowledge is, and the distinctions that prevail within its different orders, is a question which is very largely dependent upon one's outlook in psychology.

Now I suspect very strongly, either that Sellars does not realize this fact, or, if he does, that he does not take it seriously into account. This suspicion is grounded upon his frequent reference to the so-called dualism of sensation and conception in terms of something which is matter of "more or less". As I see it, either intellect and sense are two distinct faculties, involving two distinct kinds of processes, or they are not. It should be clear, at any rate, that in a truly rational psychology the distinction that exists is one which involves a difference of kind, and not of degree.

Be this as it may, Sellars is, as a matter of fact, critical of those philosophers in whom the "dualism" of intellect and sense prevails. Nor do I hesitate to say that his criticism is justified as it is applied to those philosophers, notably Kant, in whom this dualism implies, not a mere distinction, but an actual separation, a compartmentalizing, if you will, of the two respective orders of human knowledge.

Apart from the fact that Sellars' position as a naturalist precludes the very possibility of a "dualism" of sense and intellect in his theory of knowledge, I have little doubt that one of the positive reasons involving his sharp rejection of the distinction in its traditional meaning is his association of it with the logical apriorism of the Kantian critique. Whether this is

actually the case or not, it will be interesting to note by way of comparison and contrast the difference of perspective between Kant's brand of rationalism or intellectualism and the critical realism of Sellars.

Sellars strikes the keynote of this difference in perspective when he states unequivocally that

> Kant wanted to give validity to scientific propositions, to make them universal and necessary. I would remark that personally I want them to be true. (1)

For Kant who was greatly influenced by Wolf, "a logical fanatic", the chief function of the intellect is its "logical employment in a science of essences." (2) What Sellars is rightfully rebelling against in Kant is the strong tendency to autonomize the intellect in such a manner as to leave it completely undetermined by and in a large measure unrelated to the order of sensible experience as we actually find it. (3)

The reader will here recall that in Kant's view the contents of sensation, as derived from experience, furnish the mind with matter which is contingent and particularized. Now scientific laws are necessary and universal. The question which naturally presents itself is that of the origin of their necessity and universality. Kant's solution to the problem is found in his doctrine of subjective a priori forms. The mind, when brought to bear upon the contents of sensation imposes necessity and universality upon these contents by reason of the a priori forms.

Now the important thing to note in Kant's views of knowledge

---

(1) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 213. Underlining is author's.
(2) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 213.
(3) Critical Realism, p. 146.

is that for him the determining element of knowledge is not given in the contents of experience, but furnished by the mind. According to Sellars, it is this tendency in Kant to impose mental laws upon the contents of experience, together with an over-concern for the laws themselves rather than with the contents of experience, which constitutes the fundamental weakness, not only of the rationalism of Kant, but of all traditional rationalism. By way of contrast, then, critical realism is opposed to rationalism in all its forms mainly in two ways:

> It looks upon the total contents of experience as empirical, and is sceptical of the Kantian theory of the constitutive understanding; and it returns to the older tradition of knowledge as implying a reality independent of the ideas of it. (4)

Even more directly and explicitly we find Sellars attacking the Kantian view of reason

> as an innate power which, as it were, emits axioms and concepts. Kant never got beyond this conception of reason; for him, there is no real continuity between sense and understanding. (5)

In our attempt to determine what intellectual knowledge is for Sellars, I should like to remark that, although his criticisms of certain traditional views are sufficiently clear, the same cannot be said concerning the establishment of his own position. Sellars is not a sensationalist in the Humian sense of the term. In fact, he positively criticizes Hume for taking "too narrow" a view of knowledge and for limiting it to mere "atomistic sensations." But even more strongly we have found him opposed to the rationalism of Kant. In what way then does Sellars commit himself with respect

---

(4) Knowledge and Its Categories, p.211.
(5) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 94. Underlining is my own.

to the question of determining the respective roles of what are traditionally regarded as intellect and sense? We have first to note that

> In the place of the contrast between sense and reason, the modern thinker puts the recognition of levels of experience. (6)

There is no doubt about the fact that Sellars regards himself as a "modern thinker" for supposing

> that we take sense-perception as the first level of prime interest to the epistemologist, we soon discover that 1) there is structure or pattern in what is presented in sense-perception, and 2) that there is interpretation and judgment at work. Explicit reasoning is a term for methods, operations and processes which build upon and add to this level. It is a term for analysis, the discovery of relations, the seeking of more facts, the development of concepts, the application of experimental methods, etc. Thus reasoning is a term for operations, methods and capacities which carry our experience farther and deeper than sense-perception alone can. <u>But it is not a special faculty</u>. (7)

Sellars regards this view of knowledge with its different "levels" as being more in conformity with the methods of modern science, since it regards knowledge, <u>all</u> knowledge, as a development that takes place within the total complex of human experience. It is, accordingly, claimed to be an advancement over the view of knowledge that was dominated by the "old dualistic, faculty psychology."

Whatever the merits or demerits of Sellars' theory of different "levels" of knowledge, I should like to point out, before explaining it, that the problems with which it deals are of quite a different sort than those which originated the distinction between

---

(6) <u>The Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 103.
(7) <u>The Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 108. Underlining is the author's. Note also: "Reason stands for all those methods and operations which help in the solution of problems...reason is a term which covers the way the mind works in systematic investigation." <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 99.

sense and intellectual knowledge in traditional philosophy. Thus the chief concern of Sellars in advancing his theory of different levels of knowledge is that of the similarities and differences between ordinary "common sense" knowledge and knowledge in its scientific settings.

The first and most basic level of knowledge is sense perception which is

> a primitive sort of knowing in which sensory data are correlated and interpreted in relation to an object. (8)

As we have already noted, knowledge at the "level" of perception fails to distinguish object and content, since perceptual knowledge as such, being mainly of a practical bent, is uncritical. Yet knowledge, even on this elementary "level", implies for Sellars some sort of judgment and interpretation. In perceptual knowing, according to Sellars, we actually do assign certain predicates to the objects which we claim to intuit; yet this assignment of characters, which is founded on sensory data is made without a critical study of the data themselves.

The point, however, we are mainly interested in noting here is that

> Critical realism stands for the reality and fundamental significance of another kind of knowledge, a knowledge which presupposes this interpretative awareness of the data of observation as a foundation, and yet goes beyond it to the reference of propositions built upon these data, to affirmed existents, as known and about them...The object of knowledge is identified with the object of perception; but whereas in perceptionwe tend to clothe the object in the apprehended content, we now think of the content as <u>material</u> for obtaining knowledge about the object. We use the content in the critical knowledge claim. (9)

---

(8) <u>The Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 125.
(9) <u>Evolutionary Naturalism</u>, p. 34. Underlining is author's.

It is clear from the above passage that what chiefly distinguishes knowledge, once we get beyond the "level" of perception, is the fact that it is critical. Whereas in perceptual knowledge we automatically assign the sense-data to the object, on the "level" of conception (using the word "conception" as Sellars does, in a broad sense) we consciously and critically examine these same sense-data with a view to obtaining further and more objectively exact knowledge about the object. In short, the kind of knowledge which is had over and above the "level" of perception is such that it can measure up to the demands of scientific thinking.

To avoid a possible misunderstanding Sellars endeavors to make it clear that

> there is nothing in science which, when properly understood condemns perception. We should see the sun round, and things should look small to us at a distance, and a stick should look bent in water. Why? Because perception involves a personal, biocentric perspective. (10)

Now it is this "personal, biocentric perspective" which the scientist as such is trying to get away from. As a critical thinker, he is interested in determining by means of experimental tests and measurements, not how things stand in relation to an individual percipient, but how they stand in relation to each other. At this "level", then, when "conception replaces perception," the object which is thus being critically examined is

---

(10) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 126-129. In this connection note also: "It is because perceiving is knowing strongly affected by the locus of the percipient that it is at once practical and theoretically inadequate. It is but a beginning of knowing, a point of departure for reason. It gives us a sense of objects and the idea of interpreting them. Reflection must work within this primitive knowing to correct it and expand it...In all this there is the attempt to reach greater objectivity by making things speak in terms of each other as units." The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 96.

> interpreted in terms of certain predicates which are now consciously assigned to it. In this way I think the object. We may say that knowing an object at this level is thinking it in terms of predicates. These predicates are supposed to give the actual characteristics and relations of the object... Just as we perceive an object in terms of its appearances, so we conceive it in terms of its corrected appearances, which may be called the predicates of judgment. (11)

Briefly stated, knowledge on its higher "level" is for Sellars knowledge which involves the use of logical ideas and predicates in propositions. This kind of knowledge, because it is more explicit, more critical than that had through mere perception is more adequate and scientific. Yet whatever advantages it has, it must never be understood to involve an intuition of the essence of things. The scientists themselves make no such claim. (12) Knowledge, on any "level" you conceive it, is always approximative, subject to correction and improvement. On this point Sellars takes exception to what he calls the "old rigid conception of absolutistic knowing," which he contrasts with his own view:

> Absolutistic knowing fits in with what we may call intuitional, apprehensional views of knowing which are dominated by the thought that the object is literally grasped by a mental act and that there are no degrees of it. You either have knowledge or you do not. No mechanism underlies it; it is not dependent upon methods. Approximative knowing turns its back upon such absolutism. Knowing is an achievement having degrees; it can be improved as methods improve. What we aim to do is to get insight into the characteristics of physical systems. And insight is a matter of degree. (13)

We have seen the chief points of distinction which, in Sellars' view differentiate knowing on its two main "levels." But, as is evident from the above quotation, these distinctions are to be

---

(11) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 128-129.
(12) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 203.
(13) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 94. Underlining is the author's.

understood as involving differences of degree rather than of kind. This point is brought out even more explicitly in the following quotation:

> There is no sharp break between perception and propositional knowledge, for propositional knowledge is based upon perception, to which it must remain responsible. Scientific knowledge is clearly only a more explicit, more critical, and more developed form of knowledge than perception... Scientific knowledge requires additional methods and a finer technique. Yet there is at its basis nothing different in nature from that which we have noted in perception. (14)

In line with his insistence upon the essential continuity that exists in knowledge on both of its "levels", Sellars makes a special point of noting that scientific knowledge, however critical it may be, is always realistic in its point of reference. Whether one views the external world from the relative, and mainly biological, point of view of perception, or whether he is viewing it as a scientist does, i.e., in a manner that is strictly detached from personal interest, it is still the same external world which is the object of knowledge. The difference lies in the fact that the scientist makes a closer approximation to external fact than that which is made in perception:

> Atoms, electrons, and protons are as real as chairs and tables. They are not constructions. It is our <u>thought</u> of them that is a construction. (15)

The external world, therefore, whether viewed macroscopically as in sense perception or microscopically through the aid of scientific technique, has as object of knowledge a unitary status which is not in any way unbalanced by the difference in contents:

---

(14) <u>Knowledge and Its Categories</u>, p. 203.
(15) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 97. Underlining is the author's.

> I cannot see by what logic I can be a physical realist in regard to molar things and cease to be one in regard to microscopic things. (16)

Although science, therefore, "adds instrumental and mathematical technique to organic technique," (17) its outlook is just as realistic as is that of common sense:

> Critical realism keeps the directness of natural realism, but explicates its mechanism. (18)

As a means of gaining further insight into the critical realism of Sellars in its more advanced stages, I should like now to examine it in the light of Sellars' remarks relating to the traditional problem of universals. Although the reader may object to Sellars' method of handling this traditional problem, I nevertheless think it worthy of note that he as a "modern thinker" does, at least, take it into account. This surely is more than can be said of many of his fellow contemporaries.

What Sellars has to say concerning the historical aspects of the problem is very brief, and, I might add, superficial. He makes mention only of "the contrast between nominalism and realism in the Middle Ages," as being in the main

> an expression of a struggle between Platonism and materialism, between the acceptance of generic universals as real and the denial that anything but individual things exist. (19)

Indeed, the problem of universals as it had been stated by Porphyry, and as it had been discussed by most philosophers with few exceptions up to the time of Aquinas seemed to suggest only these two alternatives, i.e., nominalism and (extreme) realism. Yet the

---

(16) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 100.
(17) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 104.
(18) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 104.
(19) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 155.

fact of the matter is that St. Thomas and others had established a position, called moderate realism, which carefully avoided these two extremes. It is this fact which Sellars seems almost completely to ignore.

However value Sellars' sense of history may be in regard to medieval thought, the same cannot be said of his analysis of philosophy in modern times. Thus we find him, for instance, criticizing very aptly the tendency among the British empiricists to regard the universal merely as a collection of sense images:

> I do not deny that images are valuable in defining my meaning; but they never seem equivalent to it. Certainly, my meanings are not mere collections of images. (20)

For our present purposes, however, we are interested, not in historical criticism as such, but what Sellars' position is as to the "status" of universals. As a preliminary clue to his position, we have first to note the following:

> I believe in concepts but I do not believe in universals as a peculiar kind of entity in external things which may be in many things at once and gives them an identity of nature. (21)

Thus Sellars makes it adequately clear in his own way that he is not a moderate realist. For him the mind has, or better employs, concepts, which may be called universals; but it is not to be thought that there is an identity of nature in things to which these concepts correspond.

What then are universals in Sellars' view, and how do they relate to the order of external things? Concepts for Sellars are

---

(20) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 157.
(21) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 155.

operational meanings in consciousness which we apply denotatively to external things. They are instruments or means

> for thinking truly about things and their connections; they are not parts of things, nor peculiar adjectives of things. (22)

Now it is clear that if Sellars intends universals to apply to the order of things, there must be, if not an identity of nature, at least something in things to which they correspond and which makes their application valid. What then according to his view is the "ultimate ontological fact" upon which the validity of universal concepts rests? It is

> the existence of a multitude of similar substances able to combine in similar patterns and have in such combination, similar properties. (23)

There is, in other words, a basis in things, a fundamentum in re, by reason of which the universals of the mind are applicable to things. But this basis implies for Sellars, not identity of nature, but merely similarity of structural patterns and certain definite connections. There are no classes in the traditional sense of the word, but merely "a determinative plurality of similar things which are identified as a class merely in our own thinking." (24) Sellars ascribes the "entity-theory" of universals to the natural tendency on the part of the mind to project into reality an identity which, in point of fact, is only logical in character:

> The very mode of working of our minds through concepts as instruments leads us to project the recurrence of the same meaning in our

---

(22) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 34.
(23) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 175. Again: "In the strict sense, classes do not exist in nature. They are only similar things. Classes express a way of thinking things together by means of a logical connotation which corresponds to and applies to actual things." The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 173.
(24) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 15 .

> minds into the things we are thinking of. Logical identity is transformed into universals in things. (25)

In order to confirm his own conception of universals, i.e., as operational meanings in consciousness which are used to signify denotatively the objects to which they are referred, Sellars analyzes the nature of predication. When I predicate I am using concepts as instruments to signify or denote something which I hold to be true concerning the subject of my predication. When, for instance, in an act of predication I apply the concept "red" to two sense-data

> I am not denying their particularity, but I am saying that with respect to a feature of the one I can rightly apply the concept red and that with respect to a feature of the other I can likewise apply the concept red. Each feature is an instance of red. (26)

Now what is to be understood here by "instance of red?" Simply, in Sellars' view that the concept applies. Reflective analysis of the act of predication does not reveal or imply the need for an identity of character in the things themselves. Yet it is easy without the use of reflection to make the mistake of thinking that what we conceive to be a logical identity is actually identified in the things themselves. Actually, we think two particulars in terms of the same concept, but this "epistemic identity" does not warrant "the assumption of a factor literally common to the two particulars." (27)

As a further type of argument to discredit the theory that there is a literal conformity between the meanings which we apply to things and the qualities of things themselves, Sellars calls

---

(25) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 158. Underlining is author
(26) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 161.
(27) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 161.

attention to the fundamental unity that exists in the thing between its "that" and its "what", i.e., between its existence on the one hand, and its nature and properties, on the other. The unity of the "that" and the "what" in the object means that

> a thing has no existence apart from its properties and its properties no existence apart from the thing. In other words, a thing and its nature are inseparable. (28)

Taking up with the argument, Sellars points out that

> the epistemic approach easily leads us to take a thing's nature to be identical with the concept which applies to it and reveals it. That is, the very mechanism of knowing favors an abstraction of the what from the that; the more readily that several things can be known in terms of the same concept. (29)

Now I take it that the understood minor of this argument is the assumption that, since abstraction is a mental separation of what is inseparably united in the thing, the abstraction itself can never literally represent what is contained in the thing. Although I shall defer my criticism of this assumption until the next chapter, I should nevertheless like to point out here the remarkably close analogy which Sellars' argument bears to one that is employed by Hume. Hume argues, in order to show that there are no abstract ideas, that if things and their properties are individual in fact and reality, it is absurd that they can be known in idea as universal. (30) This argument, of course, is not the same as Sellars', yet behind it there is the common assumption that abstraction is somehow supposed to involve a kind of actual separation by the mind of what is inseparable in the thing itself.

---

(28) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, pp. 161-162.
(29) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, pp. 161-162. Underlining is the author's.
(30) David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, Section VII (third argument) in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant, p. 638.

The result of this separation is a different view of the thing than the thing is in itself.

Much could be said at this point concerning the fact that one's theory of knowledge, whether it be a form of conceptualism, realism, or nominalism, is directly and immediately dependent upon the particular view which is entertained concerning the nature of abstraction. But we shall content ourselves simply with noting the fact that universals are not for Sellars, literal representations of things themselves, because in abstraction we separate the properties of a thing or its nature from the thing itself.

Without wishing at this point to pursue any further an analysis of Sellars' concept of abstraction, which, after all, is only implicit in his doctrine of universals, I should like to bring out a little more clearly the contrast which he draws between his own particular brand of conceptualism and the more realistic doctrines of the past. Of capital importance in the doctrine of Sellars is the view that the "essences," "natures," and "properties," of things are in no way subject to the inspection of human knowledge. A failure, however, to understand the mechanism of knowledge might lead us, as it has (in Sellars' view) led thinkers in the past, not only to the illusion that we really know "essences", but also to the assumption that individuals <u>share</u> universal natures. This view Sellars characterizes as "pure mythology." (31) The tendency to hypostatize universals by giving them an objective status which

---

(31) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 166. Note also: "Instead of thinking predicates as disclosing objects he (the naive logician) thinks of them <u>as being one with</u> the characteristics of objects. There is a kind of natural logical realism here until the mechanism of knowing is brought out by epistemology... My operative theory is that application only demands that the meaning be able to disclose the characteristics of similar things. It is the antithesis of identity." <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 166. Underlining is the author's.

they do not actually enjoy, is, I am sure, to Sellars' way of thinking, just another case of our natural proneness to regard as identical the content and the object of knowledge -- a tendency which can be corrected only by a critical analysis of the nature of knowledge.

Now what is it that critical analysis reveals? Simply that a predicate when applied to two similar things has for us a sameness of meaning:

> The one predicate can be used to interpret and disclose the qualities of two particulars. That is what is meant by a meaning, or a predicate applying. (32)

It is to be understood that this operative function of the predicate to disclose objects does not in any way suggest that the predicates are identical with the objects which they disclose. The meanings which appear in consciousness are not, therefore, to be thought of as revealing an identical quality in things; they themselves, i.e., the meanings, are identical, but this is an identity which is exclusively logical in character. All that is meant by the critical realist then when he asserts that predicates apply to things is that

> They reveal, through a controlled correspondence the structure, behavior and composition of things...(33) The critical realist must hold that universals are post rem. But they are used as revelations of what is in re and inter res. I presume that it is this position which differentiates modern science from Greek science and modern epistemology from medieval realism. (34)

From the standpoint of the subject who knows, concepts, meanings, and predicates (which Sellars regards as being "essentially

---

(32) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 166.
(33) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 162.
(34) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 38. Underlining is the author's.

synonomous terms") are to be understood in terms of "interpretative response." They are

> meanings in experience connected with the operation of interpretation and associated symbols. Their ontological foundation is a cerebral pattern which integrates with cognitive responses. In this sense meanings are always potential predicates. Every occurrence of a meaning in an individual's experience is a new event based on the functioning or activation of this cerebral pattern. It is because the enduring pattern is activated and is expressed in consciousness that the meaning occurs. (35)

Having seen in rather full detail Sellars' doctrine concerning the origin, foundation, and nature of universal concepts, it is a relatively simple matter of determining now what his theory is as to the nature of truth. By way of a preliminary approach to the problem of truth, Sellars correctly notes that the adjectives "true" and "false" are applied properly, not to sense-data or images, but to ideas (taking the word in its broader meaning) and beliefs which are expressed in the form of propositions. He notes that today there is a general recognition of the fact that knowledge consists essentially in acts of judgments, and that this emphasis which insists upon knowledge as being understood in terms of judgments represents a break from the sensationalism of the past.

Now in the act of judgment

> The mind employs meanings and the knower thinks objects in terms of these. It is in this setting that ideas are thought of as deserving the adjectives true or false. (36)

What then is necessary in order that an idea be regarded as true?

---

(35) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 194. Underlining is the author's.

(36) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 195.

Simply that its content agree with and be capable of disclosing the object selected in the act of cognition. The theory here suggested is what Sellars ventures to regard as the "correspondence" theory of truth. It is to be understood, however, that "correspondence" does not imply, as it has in the past, a copy-like reproduction theory of truth.

It should hardly be necessary at this point to note that for Sellars there is no literal correspondence between the mind and the world of things. It is sufficient that the object be revealed in the idea-content. Thus, for the mind to be in possession of the truth it is sufficient in Sellars' theory that the content of knowledge be causally connected or correlated with the object, so that the content can in some sense reveal something which applies to the object. It is true (in Sellars' view) that when the mind is in possession of truth there is

> a peculiar kind of identity which, for want of better names, we can call logical or cognitional identity. (37)

And it is by reason of this "cognitional" identity that there is a cognitional revelation of the object. But under no circumstances is this identity to be thought of as being of an existential or "semi-existential" sort. To maintain this latter view would involve a return to naive realism or to the "entity-theory" of universals, which maintains that the essence which the mind knows is the essence of the thing.

In setting forth his theory of the nature of truth, Sellars plainly rejects the opinion of the pragmatists that ideas are true,

---

(37) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 165.

because they are adaptable to a plan of action. His point of criticism is well taken:

> I do not doubt that true ideas are workable and valuable in action, but I believe that they are so because they correspond with the object which is thought of in terms of them. (38)

In criticizing William James' definition of truth (39), Sellars correctly notes the confusion in it between truth and verification. (40) Verification is commonly known as a criterion of truth, but it should not be confused, as it is by the pragmatists, with truth itself.

But what are the criteria of truth? Apparently for Sellars there can be no question here of establishing what is referred to as an ultimate criterion, for

> the proper approach (i.e., in determining the tests of truth) is to ask what casts doubt on the truth-claim of a judgment. The doubt must be motivated and specific, otherwise we are merely doubting the ability of the human mind to know. (41)

If, however, this primary postulate is called into question, the doubt can be resolved only by a critical approach to the problem of knowledge. In other words, should doubt be cast on the ability of the mind to know, the reason for the doubt will likely be found to be rooted in a false idea of the nature of knowing. What is necessary then is to redefine knowledge itself along the lines of critical thinking:

> Thought cures its own difficulties by showing how new distinctions satisfy old conflicts. (42)

---

(38) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 117.
(39) "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that therefore is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known as...The true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is the expedient in the way of our behaving." William James, The Meaning of Truth, (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1919), pp. vi and viii of the Preface. Underlining is the author's.
(40) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 161.
(41) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 272.
(42) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 273.

In the process of determining whether a specific proposition is true or false, it is, in Sellars' view, "absurd to look for some touchstone which can be applied in a mechanical fashion to propositions claiming truth." (43) The testing of the truth of scientific propositions is, in other words, itself a complex process which involves the use of internal, not external criteria.

> In any particular case, the mind works back and forth between data and theory adding new data and modifying the theory. (44)

The process of verification, which is the testing of the truth of propositions, specifically involves

> responsibility to fact, from self-contradiction, and a flexible harmony with other accepted theories which have passed through the same test. (45)

By way of summary, the truth of a proposition is tested by 1) the consilience of established facts, 2) the logical coherence of ideas, 3) agreement of investigators, and 4) its utility in exercising control over nature. (46)

In our continued development of this chapter, whose purpose is to work out as explicitly as possible the implications of Sellars' critical realism, it will be necessary to say something of Sellars' doctrine on the nature of <u>categories</u>. Although the specific analysis of the categories themselves constitutes "what is <u>traditionally</u> called metaphysics," (47) categories in their general meaning

---

(43) R. W. Sellars, <u>Essentials of Logic</u> (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917), p. 301.
(44) <u>Essentials of Logic</u>, p. 301. Note also: "The directed cognitive claim is irreducible, though its conditions and mechanism can be studied. The tests of statements which constitute the content of cognition are empirical." <u>Materialism and Human Knowing</u>, p.7
(45) <u>Essentials of Logic</u>, p. 301.
(46) <u>Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism</u>, p. 273.
(47) <u>Critical Realism</u>, p. 94. Underlining is the author's.

> represent the framework of our knowledge about the universe in which we live. (48)

Regarding the question of their origin, here again we find the critical realism of Sellars in sharp contrast with the aprioristic rationalism of the Kantian tradition. As we have already noted, categories are for Kant forms of the mind which are imposed upon the data of experience. For Sellars, the categories are, all of them, products of experience:

> I would make much of categories, but I think of them as arising in experience naturally under the stress of the give-and-take of the conscious organism and the suggestions and pressure of conscious living...The elementary categories, are, if you will natural ways of interpreting the world to which the organism is responding. (49)

In contrast with the Kantian technique which constructs categories and imposes them as form upon the matter of experience, it is the task of the epistemologist, as well as that of the psychologist and the logician, to exhibit the categories as "features of our cognitive experience from the level of perceiving upwards." (50) The categories are fundamentally

> reflections of the felt attitudes of the organism to its environment...(which) have an existential foundation and significance. (51)

While I do not intend to introduce here an analysis of Sellars' specific categories, such as self, cause, relation, activity, etc., a few words I think will be in order concerning his category of "thinghood." By this category Sellars understands that element in the structure of our thought and experience which lays claim to a knowledge, not of mere sense-data or phenomena as such,

---

(48) Critical Realism, p. 94. Underlining is the author's.
(49) Critical Realism, p. 145.
(50) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, pp. 144-145.
(51) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, pp. 144-145.

but of real, extramental, physical objects. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the fundamental point of Sellars' criticism of the idealistic movement in epistemology has been its assumption that ideas are themselves the direct objects of our knowledge. This assumption, which is ultimately based upon Cartesian dualism, is due purely and simply to a failure to take into serious account the category of thinghood, together with the realistic meanings which it implies. This category is for the physical realist the only adequate basis of a sound epistemology.

Directing himself, then, against this past tradition which is being perpetuated in the thought of such neo-pragmatists as C. I. Lewis, Sellars emphatically asserts that

> it is independent and enduring things which we suppose to perceive, and not presentations. In fact, our whole mode of thought is robbed of its significance and meaning if we are led by the epistemological puzzles of the past to formulate our knowing otherwise. We should begin our reflection with natural realism and hold to realism...This means that nature is an executive realm inhabited by bodies and changes that occur apart from our presentations...The wood burns to ashes equally well whether we are present or absent. (52)

In this and the last two chapters our attention has been engaged in a descriptive analysis of Sellars' critical realism. The specific points of this analysis have concerned themselves largely with the contrast-positions which have served as the springboard for the development of Sellars' own position including the distinctions which it emphasizes in the field of epistemology. Before passing over to the next chapter, which will be a critical analysis of the matter thus far developed,

---

(52) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, pp. 145-147.

I should like to conclude with a few summary statements of what, in Sellars' view, the nature and grasp of knowledge is simply considered in itself, i.e., irrespective of any of the "levels" on which it is found to appear. It is hoped that these remarks will also serve to synthesize the fundamental elements of Sellars' epistemological doctrine.

In attempting to discern what the nature of knowledge is in Sellars' estimation, we can take our cue from the definition which he gives of <u>thought</u> as

> the movement or readjustment and of creative construction in the continuous field of the individual's experience. (53)

However vague this definition may in other respects appear to be, it is clear that for Sellars thought is essentially a process, an operation that goes on within the individual whose primary purpose is adjustment to an outside world, -- an adjustment which involves a creative response. Now the <u>kind</u> of adjustment and the <u>kind</u> of creative response which results from this process is an event of a unique sort which goes by the name of "knowledge."

Knowledge thus viewed in its proper setting is an act which is <u>sui generis</u>, an act that goes on, however, within an organism. As such it is an essential part of the individual's experience, though not strictly convertible with experience. These two facts, namely a) the uniqueness of knowledge, and b) its natural, empirical setting within the organism should determine at the outset the lines along which all epistemological analysis should be conducted. The uniqueness of knowledge, on the one hand, forbids

---

(53) <u>Critical Realism</u>, p. 146.

the sort of reductionist analysis that has been given it in the past by such thinkers as Thomas Hobbes, who regarded it merely as a mechanical event which is explicable in terms of the laws of motion. On the other hand, the natural empirical setting within which knowledge takes place should also be taken into account for all of the implications which this setting involves. Any attempt, either to distort the meaning of the word "experience" as it relates to knowledge, or to neglect experience altogether will make impossible any real solution to the problem at hand.

Taking his lead, then, from the initial fact of experience, that we really do know things, a fact which must not be questioned or examined, Sellars proceeds to an analysis of the factors involved in the act of knowledge. It is this type of analysis which constitutes the very essence of Sellars' critical approach. It is, moreover, the only means in Sellars' view of getting a true conception of what the nature of knowledge really is.

The results of Sellars' analysis of the factors involved in every act of knowledge are:

> 1) affirmation of an object;
> 2) the idea or content given to the knowing self;
> 3) the interpretation of the first in terms of the second.
>
> To these three on the subjective side there must correspond the affirmed existent with its determinate nature. (54)

Synthesizing these three elements or factors, we may say then, that knowledge for Sellars is essentially an interpretative affirmation of an object which is effected by and through the subjective medium of contents or ideas.

---

(54) Knowledge and Its Categories, pp. 197-198.

It is to be noted carefully that the term "interpretative" is not to be understood as implying an act of inference with reference to the existence of the object. As we already know, for Sellars, we know the object and we know it directly. The element of interpretation and "selective response" is present with reference to various characters which we assign to objects by means of the contents.

Another point I should like to stress is the meaning of the term "subjective" as it appears in the above context. While contents and ideas are not in any way to be objectively identified with the nature and qualities of things, neither are they to be understood as being purely subjective, or arbitrary. Sellars certainly is not a relativist, for we have seen in a number of contexts that in his view the contents of knowledge are causally correlated with the characteristics of things themselves.

Having stated positively what in Sellars' view the nature of knowledge is, it is important to note by way of further explicitation that for him knowledge is not being, but only a kind of substitute for it. Although I shall endeavor to show why Sellars' position as a naturalist compels him to take this view, in the next chapter, I am simply interested here in calling attention to it. It should be clear, at any rate, that Sellars' refusal to allow any sort of identification between knowledge and being, is a corrollary which is consistent with the underlying distinction of his epistemology between object and content of knowledge.

For Sellars, then, to know the thing is not, in any way, to have a "semi-magical" intuition of its essence. We interpret the object by means of contents, and in so doing we affirm it, we think it, we have information about it. But in no wise are the contents to be literally understood as reproducing in an existential manner the characteristics of the thing itself:

> The physical object known is never literally present in the field of consciousness; the mind makes no existential contact with it except through the sense organs. Knowing is a claim and reference to an object mediated by meanings in consciousness. It is a sort of mental pointing and not a literal transcendence...Knowing handles objects through internal substitutes which are supposed to reveal the nature of the external object. (55)

This statement has, of course, very serious implications for philosophy, for it raises the important question: what is the extent or grasp of human knowledge? Sellars' answer is brief and to the point. Knowledge embraces

> essentially what science has worked out, -- structure, relative dimension, relative mass, energy-content, behavior. Theory of knowledge does not so much dictate to science as interpret it. (56)

Characterizing his solution to the problem as to the extent or grasp of knowledge, Sellars remarks that this position "is as near natural realism as the conditions of knowledge permit." (57) Physical things exist and we know them, but the content of our knowledge as revelatory of the object is a "character-complex and not a mental existent"; (58)

---

(55) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 271.
(56) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 273.
(57) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 217.
(58) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 217.

> In other words, the content which we apprehend must have the property of reproducing something about the object, of conveying in its own medium the form of the object. (59)

This last statement may seem to suggest at least a parallelism between Sellars and the traditional aristotelian-scholastic position which holds that knowledge is the mental possession of a form. So as not to leave room for any such interpretation, Sellars makes it clear that by the use of the word "form" he means to indicate only position, size, structure, causal capacities, etc., but in no sense does he mean to imply any sort of identity between the form of the thing in the mind and the form of the thing outside the mind.

> What about the object can be conveyed to mind? Obviously <u>not the being</u> but the "form". To convey the being is impossible, for the thing must remain outside the mind. To know the thing is therefore not to <u>be</u> the thing... What, then, is knowledge? It is the mediated grasp of those features of the thing which are reproducible. To know these is to know the thing. (60)

If there is any further doubt as to the basic differences in point of view between Sellars' position and that of traditional scholasticism, we need but note the following passage:

> The critical realist, while he holds that knowledge is a comprehension of reality, points out that it is not identical with reality. In this way, he is able to avoid that reification of laws and essences to which the scholastic realist fell a victim. Laws are not in nature, nor do they control nature. The status of propositions is subjective. (61)

By way of conclusion, then, I should like to point out that although knowledge is transcendent for Sellars, in the sense that

---

(59) <u>Knowledge and Its Categories</u>, p. 217.
(60) <u>Knowledge and Its Categories</u>, p. 217. Underlining is the author's.
(61) <u>Evolutionary Naturalism</u>, p. 282.

its reach or grasp extends by way of denotation to outside physical objects and their interrelationships, this is the only sense in which it claims to be transcendent. The limitations of knowledge are, in short, evidenced by the limitations of scientific knowledge, which makes no claim to any intuition of the stuff of the physical world, or, for that matter, of any other kind of world beyond experience. Knowledge is in its ultimate analysis for Sellars

> a characterizing of existence in terms of supposedly disclosing predicates. (62)

---

(62) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 403.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CRITICISM OF SELLARS' EPISTEMOLOGY

I should like at this point to recall what I have already stated in the first chapter concerning my intentions in the handling of Sellars' philosophy. It was then, and still is, my intention to present Sellars' thought, not only in the measure of accuracy which philosophic method demands, but also in as favorable a light as the principles of my own thinking permit. While the purpose of the present chapter is to enter into a criticism of Sellars' naturalism to the extent that it has thus far been developed, i.e., in epistemology, I should nevertheless like to make it clear that it is my intention to resist any temptation that would lead me into a sort of polemic.

The reason for this is simple enough. Polemical controversy is very likely to adapt itself to personal slants, objectives, and interests and is likely on this account to fall heir to the temptation of regarding dialectic as more important than truth. Since, moreover, it is the business of the philosopher to seek out the truth wherever he finds it, his method of criticism is well suited to the purpose of philosophy, if it is meant to include something more than a mere catalogue of errors. Criticism should embody as well an attempt to evaluate the elements of truth that are found in a system, however false the system itself may be. (1)

Before entering into the work of criticism itself, there are a few other observations I should like to make regarding method. Since criticism necessarily presupposes a point of comparison and

---

(1) "For it behooves those who wish to judge sufficiently concerning the truth to show themselves, not as enemies of those concerning whose opinions they are judging, but as arbiters and examiners for both sides of the question." St. Thomas, De Coelo et Mundo, lec. 22 from Vives edition. Translation is my own.

a standard of reference, I had best indicate here that my point of comparison and standard of reference are not simply "the principles of my own thinking," but of my thinking as informed by the principles of thomistic philosophy. And if it be objected here by a "broad-minded" individualist that such method of comparison is not fair, I would grant him that it is not, if it simply involves a case of "mine vs. thine." I would even go further and admit that this method of handling criticism is sometimes apparent in undergraduate textbooks and manuals where accuracy is sometimes sacrificed in the cause of simplification. But I would be entirely unwilling to admit on principle that criticism by way of comparison *eo ipso* involves either an *argumentum ad auctoritatem* or an *ignoratio elenchi*. It may not be altogether irrelevant to note here that a goodly part of the development of Sellars' own thinking is effected precisely by this type of criticism in which he compares his own thought with that of past and contemporary thinkers.

It is important, of course, that in the making of comparisons of this sort that the position of one's "opponent" be not only accurately represented, but that it be represented in a manner that is relevant to the point of criticism at hand. This is the same as saying that there must be a common ground of comparison.

Now while there is comparatively little common ground of comparison between Sellars' epistemology and St. Thomas' theory of knowledge *in point of detail*, the same cannot be said of the problem of knowledge as regards its fundamental issues. By "common ground of comparison", I do not mean, of course, a unified solution to a given problem, or, for that matter, a common

method of approach. All that I do have reference to is the presence of the problem itself, however different the terminology, approach, or solution may be.

Now the problem of knowledge as it appears to Sellars is perhaps the most important problem in the field of philosophy, in a basic sort of way. Apart from the personal fact of his love for "epistemological analysis," (of which Sellars makes no secret), it is his justified conviction that if naturalism is to claim any measure of systematic coherence and organization, its foundations in epistemology must be deeply driven. To say nothing of naturalism generally, it certainly is true, and I am sure Sellars would be entirely willing to admit this, that his own naturalistic system depends very largely upon the validity of his solutions to the problems of epistemology. Although this is a point I have already touched upon in my first chapter, I mention it again to call attention to the importance of what now follows in the way of criticism.

The first problem that presents itself for examination is one which has already been suggested in our second chapter. Having examined in some detail Sellars' analysis and criticism of the outlook of natural realism, the question was raised as to whether or not the realism of Sellars is ultimately in conformity with the dictates of common sense, i.e., whether it does justice to the facts pertaining mainly to the act of sense perception.

We have already noted in a number of contexts two basic points of general agreement that exist between what Sellars calls the "outlook of naive realism" and his own critical realism, viz., the

postulate that the object of knowledge is co-real with the knowing subject, and the direct character of sense perception. Although, as I shall point out later, neither of these postulates can be adequately guaranteed by a purely naturalistic conception of knowledge, the emphasis of Sellars' epistemological theory in the line of a direct realism is well placed. It is well to note that on this score there is a hearty agreement between Sellars' epistemology and that of the thomists.

To the extent, moreover, that Sellars' critical realism involves a critical analysis of the subjective factors and elements present in the act of perception with a view toward explaining the so-called "errors and illusions" of sense, I should be willing to agree that here too is another point in which Sellars' philosophy and that of the thomist are, at least in principle, in full accord. It is simply untrue to maintain that an appreciation of the subjective elements which characterize the act of sense perception is <u>ipso facto</u> destructive of a realist position in epistemology. It would be wrong, therefore, to maintain that Sellars' stress upon the subjective aspects of sense perception implies any inherent incompatibility between his position and that of the common sense realist. To be a realist, in other words, it is not necessary to be a <u>dogmatic realist</u>.

Now the first stumbling block which the realist encounters in his analysis of Sellars' view of sense perception and its cognitive value is the open rejection which it makes of any and all forms of sense intuitionism. On this point there can be no mistake, for it is a fundamental principle with Sellars that the

object is affirmed, but never intuited, not even on the "level" of sense perception. It is this point mainly which sorely stands in need of critical examination, but before examining it, it should be worth our while to find out why Sellars is so insistent upon it.

It should be abundantly clear from our previous summaries of Sellars' position that the chief compelling motive which underlies his rejection of an intuitionist theory of sense perception is the plain impossibility of the object being "literally" present in consciousness. (2) On this point Sellars is unquestionably reacting against, not only the weird hypotheses of some of the "naive" realists of the past, but also against the exaggerations of his neo-realist contemporaries in America. But this as it may, it certainly should be clear to anyone (except perhaps a naive realist), that the physical object has its own mode of existence which cannot be reproduced by the mind in the same way as it exists outside of the mind. In order for an object to be known, it is not necessary for it to undergo some sort of mysterious, physical bilocation.

Sellars is right, therefore, in maintaining that the mind cannot be the object, if by this he means to affirm that it is impossible for the object to be physically present to the mind in the same way as it is to itself. On this point we might profitably note the observation of St. Thomas concerning the naive realism of the early Greek naturalists:

---

(2) This would, as Sellars remarks, "involve the leaping of spatial and temporal barriers in an unnatural fashion." Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 200.

> They thought that the form of the thing known is in the knower in the same way as in the thing known...Observing that the things known are corporeal and material, (they) held that they must exist materially in the soul that knows them. (3)

By way of criticism he adds:

> If it were necessary for the thing known to exist materially in the knower, there would be no reason why things which have a material existence outside the soul should be devoid of knowledge. (4)

Clearly, if one understands knowledge in terms of some sort of "literal", physical identity of the mind with the object, he makes knowledge so realistic that he virtually destroys it. One might just as well say, then, that a physical object, because it possesses its own form, knows itself. Obviously, then, St. Thomas is not a naive realist any more than Sellars is. But admitting with Sellars that the object cannot be present to the mind in the same way as it is to itself, is he justified on this account in rejecting an intuitionist theory of sense perception?

Before answering this question I want to make it clear in more positive terms what the thomist has in mind when he speaks of the senses as intuiting their respective objects. Applying the principle that whatever is received in something is received according to the mode of that in which it is received, the thomist, in setting forth his theory of sense perception, maintains that the object of perception as received through the medium of the organ of sense is the same object as that which exists outside the knowing faculties, even though as known, as sensed it has received a new mode of existence, an esse intentionale. X

---

(3) Summa Theologica, I, Q.84, a.2,c.
(4) Summa Theologica, I, Q.84, a.2,c.

It is fully recognized, of course, that certain conditions must be fulfilled if a true act of perception is to take place. For an object to be intuited by the senses it must first of all be physically present to them. If moreover, the object itself is not directly in contact with the external sense organs, there is further required an objective medium which enables them to grasp it. For want of an objective medium, as for example light, I cannot see the objects which are physically present to me in a room which is completely darkened, nor can I, in the case of sound, hear the vibrations of an object which has been blocked off by a sound-proofed wall. For a genuine act of perception to take place it is necessary, moreover, that the subjective medium, i.e., the sense organ itself, be in a healthy, normal state. If my senses are impaired, either I completely fail to perceive an object or I get a distorted impression of it. Yet despite the need for the fulfillment of these conditions, -- conditions which are, after all, merely the pre-requisites of perception, the thomist is entirely confident that when they are fulfilled, what he perceives through his senses, he intuits. Not that he perceives things insofar as they are theoretically perceptible, but in the measure that his limited powers of perception allow.

Now I have little doubt but that Sellars might be inclined to agree with much of what has just been said, though insisting that <u>as regards the object itself</u> we merely <u>affirm</u> it, assigning to it the contents of sensation which are subjective. Sense knowledge, like all knowledge, is for Sellars merely <u>denotative</u>, <u>non-apprehensional</u>, and, therefore, not intuitive.

In criticism of Sellars' position I should like to note, first of all, that the external senses, since they are incapable of judging, do not properly speaking either affirm or deny, but merely report what is given to them in consciousness. They are, in other words, determined by what is objectively given to them. In experiencing an object, I see it, I feel it, I hear it; my senses, in other words, reveal it, but there is no question here either of affirmation or denial. When, moreover, I experience in the concrete a colored object as red, there is no question here of assigning a property or quality to a thing by the senses. "Red," for instance, is a sense-datum, and a sense-datum is just what the word itself indicates, something given in consciousness, not something which is either consciously or unconsciously ascribed or attributed by the sense to the object.

From what has just been said, it should be clear that the important thing to note in connection with the problem of sense knowledge, is, not the reflex consideration of the mind as to the measure of conformity that exists between the senses and the extra-organic object, but what the object of sense really is.

Because this point is fundamental in my criticism of Sellars' epistemology, I want to make it unmistakably clear. For failure on his part to develop an adequate distinction between sense knowledge proper and the intellectual act of judgment which involves predication, Sellars does not, properly speaking, set forth a theory of sense perception in its own terms; his theory of sense perception is expressed rather in terms of the judgments which we subsequently pronounce concerning our sense impressions.

Let us see then where and how it is that Sellars makes his mistake. I sense an object in the concrete as red, sweet, loud, or hard. Recognizing as a realist that the senses know objects and that in this knowledge there is some measure of conformity between the object of sense as internally given in sensation and the object which exists outside the senses, I then proceed judgmentally by means of reflection and critical analysis to determine what the exact nature of this conformity is. I may possibly come to the conclusion, as Sellars does, that sense-data are only "causally correlated" with their external causes, or, as scholastics would say, that they are not "formally transubjective." I may, in other words, form the judgment that "this object which I, by means of my senses, experience as red is only causally red." But am I justified on this account, i.e., by reason of the judgment which I am now forming, in thinking that the red object of sensation is not intuited? Only if by object of sensation I mean object apart from sensation, which is, of course, a contradiction.

The point is simply this, that in an analysis of the object of sensation, the object must be understood as it is actually revealed in sensation, i.e., concretely. It is illegitimate to substitute here for "object of sensation" the object as it exists apart from sensation. It is possible only for the intellect to draw this distinction. Only the intellect too can judge the measure of correspondence that exists between the object of sensation proper and the object conceived of abstractively apart from sensation. Lastly, it is possible only for the intellect to distinguish the properties of the object as concretely experienced in

sensation and as abstractively though apart from it.

We can conclude, then, in the light of the above distinctions that Sellars' refusal to admit the intuitional character of sense perception is based upon his failure to recognize precisely what the object of sensation really is. Granting that the object of perception has as such an esse intentionale distinct from the esse physicum of the thing itself, this is no reason for maintaining that the object of sensation proper, in the sense in which we explained it, is not intuited, or for saying that it is affirmed by the senses. Sellars' failure to realize this fact is, as has been shown in the above paragraphs, ascribable to the literal con-fusion that exists in his mind between the data of sensation proper and the reflective pronouncements made through the mental act of judgment.

By way of corrollary from the conclusions just established, I should like to point out first of all that the failure to draw an adequate distinction between sensation and intellection is a two-edged sword, involving not only an unhappy reductionist view of the intellect in its higher capacities, but also, as we have just seen, a falsified conception of what the senses themselves actually reveal.

I would note secondly that the "epistemological status" of our sensory perceptions is not, as Sellars unquestionably thinks it is, a matter which is intrinsically dependent for its solution upon the findings of the experimental sciences. What science has to say about the physical object as it exists "out there" and independently of the way in which we perceive it, is a question

which relates only in an indirect manner to what strictly speaking is the object of sensation as such. To know objects sensibly as red, sweet, loud, and hard is obviously not to know things as science knows them, for the very simple reason that science seeks a different kind of knowledge than that given in sensation. We may not conclude, therefore, that because the senses are, so to speak, infra-scientific, they do not know their objects, or, for that matter, that they do not intuit them.

Lastly, I should like to note (in answer to a query that has been raised a number of times in the last few chapters) that ultimately and precisely because he rejects intuition, the critical realism of Sellars is incompatible with the demands of common sense. If the claims of the common sense realist are at times, either false or exaggerated, these mistakes can be very readily explained in terms of the hasty and uncritical judgments that are sometimes made in terms of that which is only accidentally the object of sense. (5) Yet the truth remains that the senses as regards their proper objects are infallible, -- a truth to which the common sense realist testifies when he says that he sees red and truly sees it. On this point St. Thomas is unequivocally clear:

> Sense, then, has no false knowledge about its proper objects, except accidentally and rarely, and then because of an indisposition in the organ, it does not receive the sensible form rightly. (6)

---

(5) "An accidental sensible is a thing which of itself is not the object of sense...the accidental sensible is such as regards all the senses, if the intellect alone has immediate knowledge of it, v.g., substance, truth, being, etc.; or it is such as regards a particular sense, if it is perceived by one of the other senses; v.g., I see a lemon pie, I can immediately perceive its taste by one of the internal faculties. In this case, the taste of the pie is an accidental sensible for the sense of sight, i.e., it (the taste) is accidentally visible." Henri Grenier, Thomastic Philosophy (Charlottetown, Canada: publ. by St. Dunstan's University, 1948), Vol. II, p. 151.

(6) Summa Theologica, I. 9. 17. a.2.c.

Again:

> The sense is not deceived in its proper object (as sight in regard to color), save accidentally, through some hindrance to the sensible organ...The reason of this is evident. Every power, as such, is essentially directed to its proper object; and things of this kind are always uniform. (7)

Since it is admittedly impossible to give in a single chapter an extended criticism of the detailed elements of Sellars' realism, (many of which might from a philosophical standpoint be justly regarded as superfluous) I shall confine myself to fundamental issues. Perhaps the most fundamental issue that could be raised in this connection is whether the epistemology of Sellars is in an intelligible way what it claims to be, realistic.

It is, after all, one thing to profess realism, to affirm it, but quite another to give a rational account of the faith that lies within. It is simple enough, as common sense itself affirms, to maintain the fact that what we know are things. But since, as we have already noted in the beginning of our third chapter, common sense gives no explanation, it is necessary to look elsewhere, i.e., to the realm of philosophic theory. Now the basic test of any theory is that it be able to account adequately for the fact or facts at hand. The question with which we are now faced is this: Does the epistemological theory of Sellars account for the fact that we know things? Does it, in short, make realism an intelligible position?

Although the entire remainder of this chapter will, in a sense, be devoted to the answering of this question, I should like

---

(7) Summa Theologica, I., q.17, a.2,c.

to restrict my considerations here mainly to a criticism of Sellars' realism in the light of the fundamental distinction that underlies it, -- that between the object and the contents of knowledge.

There should be no question in the mind of the reader at this point that it is precisely this distinction (and its application) that Sellars has in mind in attaching the term "critical" to his realism. Indeed, the precise significance of the critical approach in epistemology is for Sellars to be aware of the distinction and the existing inter-relationships between what he regards as the object of knowledge and its contents. It is this distinction which naive realism with its uncritical identification of the contents with the object of knowledge ignores. Now the precise question being raised is this: Is it possible to be critical in the sense just defined, and still be realistic?

The first consideration I should like to present to my reader is a very basic one: Is it possible in the first place (in the light of ordinary human experience) to think the distinction between object and content? Obviously, the import of this distinction is that the content of knowledge is not, and is not in any way to be construed as, the object. But are we not accustomed, and justifiably so, to thinking of the content of knowledge as in some sense being the object, for, if it is not, what is it then that we know? Is not our failure to conceive this distinction in the light of the "knowledge-situation" directly ascribable, not to the supposition that we are naive or uncritical, but to the inherent unity of content and object?

I can, of course, and sometimes, do, distinguish between the subjective elements which are present in my act of knowledge and the object which I know. But never do I draw this distinction with a view toward establishing a dualism between my knowledge of a thing and the thing itself which I know. Yet it is precisely this sort of dualism which characterizes the object-content distinction of Sellars. From the standpoint of knowledge, then, as I really experience it, I find, not only the need for rejecting a dualism of object and contents, but for positively insisting upon a kind of identity between the object which I know and the contents of my knowledge.

For fear of any misunderstanding, I want to make it clear that I am not directing the above considerations against Sellars' distinction after the manner of a strictly philosophical argument. These are considerations which are drawn simply from a reflection upon what human experience seems to demand. Sellars, indeed, places a great deal of insistence upon the primary dictates of experience that we know objects as co-real and that we know them directly. Yet is it not equally a demand of experience that the content of our knowledge is the object which we know? To deny this, is, in my opinion, to be guilty of a fault of which, as we have seen in our third chapter, Sellars acouses Berkeley, that of initially placing a contradiction in experience. Thus, although, I would agree with Sellars that it is natural to identify the contents of knowledge with the object of knowledge, I could not agree (nor could anyone whose claims are rooted in the fundamental demands of experience) that it is a natural mistake. On

the contrary, it is positively unnatural and arbitrary to disjoin, as Sellars does, by the employment of his distinction, the object of knowledge from its content. If the object of knowledge is not the content, what then is it that we really know, or, even more fundamentally, what sort of arbitrary meaning is one assigning to the word "knowledge?" To know an object is not, as we have already seen, to be physically possessed of it, for that is admittedly a plain impossibility. Yet this is no sufficient reason to swing to the other side of the pendulum to maintain, as does Sellars, that we intuit only the contents, and not the object. Nor is it any reason to assert furthermore that we only affirm the object, and that knowledge essentially consists in this affirmation and the assignment of predicates.

Sellars would, of course, object at this point to maintain that it is by means of the contents that the object is revealed to us, not in the sense of becoming intuitively known, but in the sense of getting information about the object. Thus in Sellars' opinion, although the contents are not in any sense the object (his rejection of all forms of intuitionism forbids this view), they are nevertheless in "causal conjunction" with it. It is because of this causal conjunction of the contents with the outside world that we actually do have knowledge about it.

By-passing other points of criticism that might be directed against the above trend of thought (8), let us assume, for the

---

(8) Note for instance, the following excellent point of criticism: "If, at least in our basic contact with reality through sense experience, the object is not immediately intuited, the knowledge claim rests solely on a faith that subjective effects resemble objective causes. And for Sellars even this foundation is shaky, inasmuch as he has stated that "as a matter of fact, the effect should not be like the cause."...The correlation between subjective datum and external stimulus, therefore, might be extremely poor or absent entirely." Richard R. Baker, "The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars", in The New Scholasticism, Vol. 24, (1950), p. 160

sake of argument that if Sellars can give an intelligible account of how it is known that the contents of knowledge are truly "revelatory" of the object, then his realism need not be called into question. Yet, as far as I can see, there is nothing, even within the framework of Sellars' own principles, which can adequately justify this claim.

Sellars maintains, for instance, that

> experience indicates an actual, causally-based agreement between the physical existent perceived and the content of perception. (9)

Granting, of course, that experience does assure us of an objective relationship between our impressions of things and the qualities existing in the things themselves, I would insist first of all that by "experience" here is to be understood "reflective experience in the order of human intelligence." Next I would like to raise the question as to how on the basis of Sellars' principles could this causally-based agreement of contents with object be known?

To say simply in broad terms that "experience indicates it," or, for that matter demands it, is to ignore the basic issue at hand. If the very nature of knowledge is such that it allows only for an affirmation of the object together with the assignment to it of the contents of consciousness, what assurance is there, as far as knowledge is concerned, that the contents really are in causal agreement with the object? In other words, how do we actually know this causal agreement, or must we simply assume it? Surely, if we merely assume it, we are assuming also our realism.

To know that the contents of knowledge are in some sort of

---

(9) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 202.

agreement with the object would, I am sure, require over and above a mere affirmation of the object some sort of glimpse into its very nature. Certainly if the contents are not the object, but merely in causal conjunction with it, something about the object must be known (in the sense of intuited) if we are to know that the contents really apply. What I am arguing for against the vagueness of Sellars' position is the need for an adequate guarantee in the order of knowledge itself for the supposedly "controlled correspondence" that exists between the categories of nature and the categories of our own thinking. Indeed, it is aside the point to say merely that the contents are actively related to the things by which they are causally controlled, for the question to be answered is how are they known to be actively related and causally controlled? Neither is it of any help to say, as Sellars does, by way of a final appeal that

> the whole psycho-physical setting of perception seems to guarantee that agreement between datum and object which makes it possible in the knowledge-claim to impute the datum to the object and to think the object in terms of the content of thought. (10)

Such an appeal leaves the so-called knowledge-claim merely a claim, and not an intelligible fact.

In the absence, then, of any intelligible explanation on this point, we must conclude that the critical realism of Sellars is at odds with itself. By this I mean that the realism of Sellars qua realism is a petitio principii in the most literal sense of the term. There is, in other words, nothing within the framework of Sellars' principles, either as regards our knowledge of

---

(10) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 202.

the object (which we affirm), or of the contents (which we assign to the object by means of predicates), -- there is nothing which enables us to know that there is an objective correspondence between our ideas and things.

It should be clear from the above that essentially the same arguments which Sellars so effectively employs against representative realism, especially that of Locke, can be directed against his own position. (11) I must confess that I personally find it difficult to see how a thinker such as Sellars, whose criticism of the idealistic school in epistemology has been so keen and penetrating, should be so fatefully unaware of the subjective elements which characterize his own principles.

Ultimately, as far as I can see it, the epistemology of Sellars (with its fundamental distinction of object and content) is as far as its realism is concerned, based upon the practical

---

(11) Despite his repeated affirmation of the directness of the knowledge-situation, Sellars does nevertheless, and contrary to his own explicit intentions, incorporate within his epistemology the principles of subjective idealism. It is true, the critical realism of Sellars avoids a copy-theory of knowledge (such as that of Locke), or possibly, knowing the consequences of such a theory seeks to avoid it. It is also true that ideas or contents are not regarded by Sellars, as they were by the British thinkers, as the only direct objects of human cognition. Nevertheless, as far as his own critical realism is concerned, "the knower," as Sellars himself explicitly states, "is confined to the datum," (Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 203.), i.e., the content. In the final analysis, therefore, and from a strictly philosophical point of view, there is little essential difference between the realism of Locke which Sellars disavows, and that of Sellars own theory. Locke based his belief in the outside world upon a sort of assurance which he openly hesitates to call by the name of "knowledge." Sellars affirms the object. Obviously, Sellars is more clever and bold than Locke in defining knowledge itself in terms of this very affirmation. But is not this a rather arbitrary device? Surely, an adequate comparison between the realism of Locke and that of Sellars flatly contradicts the statement that "properly speaking, there is no trace of subjective idealism in critical realism." Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 199.

necessity of affirming outside objects, and not upon any genuine contact with them. In view of this fact, it is correct to say that Sellars' realism is as closely allied in principle to pragmatism as it is to subjective idealism.

In our last chapter we saw in some detail Sellars' handling of the traditional problem of universals. In this connection we noted his criticism of the reductionist type of nominalism, such as that of Hume, which lowers the status of universals to a general name which is assigned to a group of similar sense impressions. While it is undeniably true that here, as elsewhere, Sellars' criticism of the traditional empirical school of thought is valid, that is not the matter with which we are now specifically concerned. Our problem now is to determine whether or not the realism of Sellars, specifically restricted to the question of universals, can be validated.

It is to be noted, first of all, that regarding the problem of universals, Sellars regards himself as a "conceptualist in epistemology" and a "nominalist in ontology." It will be recalled that universals for him are simply "operational meanings in consciousness," which, by means of predication, are applied to things which are <u>similar</u>, but in no sense <u>identical</u>, in character. Thus it is that for Sellars these meanings <u>are</u> not in any way the essences or natures of things, but merely <u>apply</u> to things and in so doing give us information <u>about</u> them. Here again it is readily noticeable that the epistemology of Sellars is radically inimical to any theory which savors of intuitionism.

Before entering into a direct criticism of Sellars' doctrine,

there are a few points that must first be cleared up in the cause of historical accuracy. Certainly, not all traditional realism is what Sellars makes it out to be, -- exaggerated in its claims for our knowledge of the essences of things. In the thomistic view, essences are not literally intuited or exhaustively known by a mere consideration of the mind. Although it is not my task here to give a full-fledged exposition of the moderate realism of Aquinas, I do want to make it known that thomistic realism repeatedly stresses the difficult, laborious process required in the acquisition of our knowledge of essences. Never in the case of human knowledge (with its dependency upon the sense) is the pure and simple essence of a thing "open for inspection." Indeed, our universal knowledge of essences is (in the thomistic view) neither independent of the senses, nor complete in itself. To make this clear, I have selected the following passages from St. Thomas' Summa:

> To know a thing in general, and not in particular, is to have an imperfect knowledge of it. Hence our intellect, when it is reduced from potentiality to act, acquires first a universal and confused knowledge of things before it knows them in particular, as proceeding from the imperfect to the perfect...(12) Since the intellect passes from potentiality to act, it has a likeness to generable things, which do not attain to perfection all at once but by degrees. In the same way, the human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge of a thing by the first apprehension; but it first apprehends something of a thing, such as its quiddity...and then it understands the properties, accidents, and various dispositions affecting the essence. Thus it necessarily relates one thing to another by composition and division, and from one composition and division it necessarily proceeds to another, and this is reasoning...(13)

---

(12) Summa Theologica, I, Q.14, a.3,c.
(13) Summa Theologica, I, Q.85, a.6,c.

> Our intellect, which knows the essence of a thing as its proper object, derives knowledge from sense, of which the proper objects are external accidents. Hence it is that from external appearances we come to the knowledge of the essence of things. (14)

Clearly then, in the view of St. Thomas, we simply do not have an intuitive penetration of the essence of things of the sort which renders superfluous, either the activity of the senses, or of the higher acts of the mind. And as regards these latter, it is clear that, although in St. Thomas' view, it is by means of concepts that we have some knowledge of essences, nevertheless these concepts are, all of them, perfected only by further acts, viz., those of judgment and reasoning, -- acts which imply comparison, analysis, abstraction, definition, division, or whatever other complex process that human knowledge in all its limitations involves.

It is partly, then, because of a misunderstanding of what moderate realism actually holds concerning our knowledge of essences that Sellars is led to criticize and reject this traditional solution to the problem of universals. But it is partly also because Sellars, like Hume, (as has already been noted) entertains a false notion of the nature of the process whereby universals are attained by the mind, namely, abstraction. Sellars unfortunately seems to take the view that, since abstraction is a kind of mental separation of what is inseparably united in the thing, the abstract concept does not truly represent the thing as it really is. This means that for Sellars the essence as seen by the mind is not really the essence of the thing, but merely some sort of substitute for it.

---

(14) Summa Theologica, I, Q.13, a.2,c. Underlining in this and the two above passages is my own.

That Sellars is mistaken in the view that he takes of abstraction is a point I want to make clear by consulting at some length a basic distinction which St. Thomas makes with regard to the nature of abstraction:

> Abstraction may occur in two ways. First, by way of composition and division, and thus we may understand that one thing does not exist in some other, or that it is separate from it. Secondly, by way of a simple and absolute consideration: thus we understand one thing without considering another. Thus, for the intellect to abstract things one from another which are not really abstract from one another, does not involve falsehood, as clearly appears in the case of the senses. For if we said that color is not in a colored body, or that it is separate from it, there would be error in what we thought or said. But if we consider color and its properties, without reference to the apple which is colored,...there is no error in such an opinion or assertion; for an apple is not essential to color, and therefore color can be understood independently of the apple. In the same way the things which belong to the species of a material thing, such as a stone, or a man, or a horse, can be thought of without the individual principles which do not belong to the nature of the species. <u>This is what we mean by abstracting the universal from the particular</u>, or the intelligible species from the phantasm... <u>For it is quite true that the mode of understanding, in one who understands, is not the same as the mode of a thing in being</u>; since the thing understood is immaterially in the one who understands, according to the mode of the intellect, and not materially, according to the mode of a material thing. (15)

The above passage is so abundantly clear as to render quite unnecessary any commentary or explanation. Yet we must still attempt to answer the basic question as to whether the specific doctrine of Sellars pertaining to the problem of universals is such that it can be validated in a realistic epistemology.

---

(15) <u>Summa Theologica</u>, I, Q.85, a.1, ad 3<u>um</u>. Underlining is my own.

Considering Sellars' doctrine of knowledge in general, and in particular his view of the "status" and "function" of concepts, it is clear that universals, which, formally speaking, are logical in character, are true, because they apply denotatively to individual things. Yet granting all this, must it not be said that application, denotation, or extension is strictly an affair of logic, -- a science which does not and cannot give a solution to the real problem of universals? In other words, although universals, formally considered, are admittedly logical in character, must they not have, in order that their application be true, a metaphysical foundation, i.e., a foundation in the order of existing things? There are, as I see it, mainly two questions which present themselves for analysis in connection with the problem of universals:

(1) Why, from the standpoint of the object, does the universal apply?

(2) How do we know that it applies?

What Sellars' answer is to the first question we already know: universals used in predicates apply because some things are similar, though not identical, in nature. But is similarity of objects a sufficient warranty for a valid application of universal predicates?

Here it is to be noted, first of all, that Sellars is correct in maintaining, as Occam did, that only individual things exist. It is to be noted also, as Gilson does, that no doctrine could be more Aristotelian (16), and, I might add, thomistic. Yet granting that only individuals exist, or, what amountsto the same thing, that nothing exists unless it is individual, there still remains the fact they have something, if not their

---

(16) Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 63.

own existence, in common, -- something which is more than a mere similarity of natures.

If Sellars' view is correct, it must be consistently maintained that things are individual, not only with respect to their existence, but also with respect to their nature, which, though resembling other natures, is never identified with them. To put the matter more emphatically, it would have to be maintained in Sellars' view that every individual is (in an exclusive sense) its own nature in very much the same way in which God is His own nature. If this were the case, it would follow that every individual thing is unique from the standpoint of everything that it is, -- i.e., both nature and existence. And if individual things are unique, how then could we account for their supposed similarities? Certainly not by a vague reference to "patterns" or "structures."

Whatever the metaphysical difficulties involved in Sellars' doctrine, it should be clear at any rate (and this is presently our main concern) that in applying a universal concept to things, we could never apply it, i.e., truthfully apply it, in exactly the same sense (univocally), but only analogously. This means that in applying the same concept to different things, however similar they might be, the meaning of the concept would have to vary with each predication. But does it as far as my own knowledge is concerned? Here Sellars not only admits, but makes a special point of observing that actually we do mean our predicates to apply to things as if they were identical, i.e., we mean to apply them univocally. This manner of application or predication he

ascribes to the tendency on our part to project what is merely logical (i.e., the content of the universal) into things themselves, to the tendency, in short, to identify the content with the object.

Apparently, then, we are prone to make a mistake which can be corrected only by our critical thinking. But what is it that critical thinking here reveals? As far as I can detect the critical thinking of Sellars does not get beyond the basic point of the plain impossibility of the universal existing of and by itself. This, of course, is praeter rem, leaving unexplained the question of why we make the "mistake" of univocal predication. To me, the obvious conclusion is simply that there is no mistake. It should be likewise obvious that Sellars' failure to provide an answer to this problem (which he himself creates) is the reason for his leaving unexplained also the basic question as to why (from the standpoint of the object) the universal actually does apply, so that here again we find Sellars begging a realistic position.

In the light of what has just been said concerning Sellars' failure to supply an objective counterpart which is adequate to guarantee the application of the universal to the order of things, it seems quite superfluous to answer the second question originally proposed as to how we know that the universal applies. If, as we have shown, the object is such as not to admit of a completely valid application of a universal predicate, then a fortiori we encounter a cul de sac in trying to discover how, i.e., from the standpoint of knowledge, the universal predicate supposedly applies. The answer is simply that there is no guarantee that it does.

From what has been said above it should be clear that Sellars' position of "conceptualism in epistemology" and "nominalism in ontology" is, when sufficiently examined, little short of a contradiction in terms. His mistake, as I see it, is directly ascribable to his dualism of object and content, and as a consequence, to his refusal to allow for any sort of real identity between the nature of the thing as conceived and the nature of the thing as individualized.

Clearly, then, the thomist, while completely avoiding the difficulties attendant upon the exaggerated forms of realism which stem from the Platonic tradition (17), is in a better position to defend his realism, with his distinction of object as known and object as enjoying a physical mode of existence. Far from there being a need for postulating the type of distinction which Sellars draws between object and content, it must be said that such a distinction renders a realistic view of knowledge wholly unintelligible.

Regarding the thomist solution to the problem there is little need for saying that, because the universal as universal is only in the mind, that it does not really and truly apply to things. Indeed, if it were not truly universal, it could not apply to many things. And if it were not genuinely applicable to things, i.e., as regards its content, though not as regards its mode, it would always be something other than what the thing itself really is. Surely, knowledge would be a very poor "substitute"

---

(17) One might call attention here, for instance, to the exaggerated realism of William of Champeaux (d.1120) who maintained, even after he had modified his views in deference to the contentious Abelard, that universals, though multiplied in individuals, still remain in each individual, universal, i.e., formally considered.

for being, if no real knowledge of the thing, i.e., its nature, could be had.

With regard to Sellars' doctrine concerning the nature of truth and the means of verifying the truth of propositions, there are a few basic points of criticism which must here be brought to the reader's attention. Although there is nothing in Sellars' doctrine to indicate any clear-cut lines of distinction between an act of judgment proper and an act of sense, Sellars is nevertheless right in principle when he declares that the adjectives "true" and "false" apply strictly to judgments. Here we must recall further that a judgment is true for Sellars when the content agrees with or is capable of disclosing the object selected in an act of cognition.

Now it is basically the same objection as that which we have already directed against Sellars' object-content distinction that again presents itself in a consideration of his doctrine of truth. If the knower is restricted to a knowledge (using the term "knowledge" here in its traditional sense) of the content or datum, what guarantee is to be had of the supposed agreement between so-called object and content? In view of the close allignment of his principles to subjective idealism, what has he to offer in the place, let us say, of a copy-theory of truth? To say that there is a correspondence, though not a literal correspondence, between our judgments of things and the things themselves is to beg the question. Here again we are left without any adequate guarantee of a "causally controlled response."

At this point it is of little or no avail to appeal to a "logical or cognitional" identity between the content and the

characteristics of the object which the content is supposed to reveal. For the point is how, in the absence of any real identity, can it be known whether a proposition is true or false? Indeed, to know the truth or falsity of a proposition, we must also know the measure of correspondence or proportion that exists between it and the object. And this, in turn, involves a mental transcendence of merely "logical contents."

As regards the criteria of truth, I am hardly in a position to deny the various scientific criteria to which Sellars calls attention in connection with the need for testing the truth of scientific propositions. Yet for want of a known conformity between our judgments and their respective objects, do not the limitations of merely scientific criteria become manifest, particularly when it comes to establishing the truth of first principles, upon which all scientific conclusions rest? Surely, since not all propositions are of the empirical sort with which the natural sciences deal, they cannot be tested by the methods of experimental science. There are, indeed, many propositions, such as those with which epistemology deals, which, though they cannot be scientifically or philosophically demonstrated, can nevertheless be verified by a reflection upon the nature of our intellectual experience. What St. Thomas has to say on this matter is very much to the point:

> For (truth) is in the intellect as following upon the act of the intellect, and as known by the intellect. For it follows upon the operation of the intellect according as the judgment of the intellect is about a thing inasmuch as it is: but it is known by the intellect insofar as the intellect reflects upon its own act, not only according as it knows its act, but according as it knows also

> relation of the act to the thing. But it cannot know this unless it knows the nature of the act itself; which again cannot be known unless the nature of the active principle is known. But this (principle) is the intellect itself, in whose nature it is to conform to things. Wherefore, the intellect knows the truth by reflecting upon itself. (18)

Here I should like to quote at some length what a contemporary thinker, expressing very accurately the thought of St. Thomas, has to say on this very same point:

> Throughout the whole process (i.e., of determining whether our knowledge is true) the stress must be laid on the active role of the intelligence, not active in the sense of creating its object, but active in the sense of critically reflecting on the nature of both its own activity and that of the senses. This critical understanding of the nature of thought and sensation is the final basis of all certainty, and is presupposed by all judgments. This being so, the ability of the mind to understand both itself and the nature of sensation, its power to discriminate between the objective and subjective factors in knowledge, its right to make judgments, must all be justified as inherent properties of the intelligence and not as mere products of experience...(Some philosophers) consider that the only way of establishing the value of our thoughts is by tracing them to experience... They forget that the faculty of experience itself must be subjected to critical examination before its data can be accepted as objective. In this way they involve themselves in a vicious circle. Thought is objective to the extent to which it is derived from experience -- experience is objective to the extent to which it is judged to be so by thought; the inevitable conclusion would seem to be a denial of the value of both thought and experience altogether. If this disaster is to be avoided philosophers must concentrate far more on the conscious understanding the mind has of itself. (19)

Before concluding our examination of Sellars' critical realism, there are a few fundamental points of criticism which must yet be

---

(18) De Veritate, q.1., a.9,c. Underlining is my own.
(19) George Ekbery, "First Principles of Understanding," Aquinas Paper No. 10 of The Aquinas Society of London. Published by Blackfriars Oxford, 1949. Underlining is my own.

brought to light, namely, those pertaining to his doctrine of the nature of knowledge in general. Here it should be noted, first of all, that to anyone who has more than a casual acquaintance with his epistemology, it should be evident that behind the entire framework of Sellars' critical realism, what with all of its manifold refinements, there lies the notion that knowledge is, by and large, a peculiar kind of reaction of the organism to its environment. I might also add that Sellars himself, in spite of his professed opposition to reductionism, especially when it comes to the question of knowledge, makes little attempt to hide this view which he takes of knowledge. Or perhaps I had better say that in attempting to establish his realism, he repeatedly calls attention to it. Note, for instance, the following passages:

> Penetrative intuition of the physical world is impossible just because we humans are what we are, organisms stimulated by external things...(19) The primary setting of epistemology is given in the gross contrast between the individual knower and his environment...The interest of the individual knower is in affirmed objects taken as co-real and his behavior is toward them...This concrete idea of the knower enables us to maintain the fact that knowing usually subserves vital interests. (20)

Sellars seems willing to admit, however, that some provision must be made for knowledge which is purely speculative, as when he says

> It (i.e., the concrete idea of the knower) is quite able to become the specialized object of an interest like mental curiosity which develops autonomously. (21)

Yet this is a fact which he quickly dismisses by the broad remark that "the mental life has different levels and differentiations." (22)

---

(19) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 203.
(20) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 205.
(21) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 205.
(22) Knowledge and Its Categories, p. 205.

In spite of the above qualification, therefore, for which little or no provision is made by way of explanation or analysis, it is true to say that knowledge is for Sellars essentially an organic act which is thought of almost exclusively in terms of biological function.

It is mainly on the basis of this predominating view, that the weaknesses of Sellars' epistemology, in my opinion, become evident. Now I can fully appreciate the fact which Sellars so frequently emphasizes, that the reference of our so-called knowledge-claim is realistic. Yet granting this, what precisely is there in the order of human cognition which justifies and makes this reference possible? Here, indeed, is the critical point of Sellars' realism beyond which he <u>as a naturalist</u> cannot get. To say that it is the very function of knowledge to make its reference realistic, -- a function which is based chiefly upon the biological act of organic response, is to avoid a distinctive explanation of what knowledge itself really is. It is the function of the stomach to digest its food, -- a function which is readily explicable in terms of the laws of biology. It is the function of chemical substances to combine with and react to each other in various ways, -- a function which is, in its turn, intelligible in terms of the laws of chemistry. But the "function" of knowledge is, if you will, of a unique sort; it is a "function" of a higher order and of a different kind than that which is explicable either in terms of the laws of biology, chemistry, or, for that matter, of any of the other natural sciences.

While Sellars would, of course, not only admit, but insist that knowledge is unique, he nevertheless attempts to explain this

uniqueness by relegating knowledge merely to a higher "level" on the plane of organic, biological existence. Yet the simple truth is that between the supposed "level" or "levels" of knowledge and the lower levels of biological function, the differences that exist would be differences of degree, and not of kind, since every biological function, however complex it might be, would always be explicable in terms of biological laws.

To me it is clear that the nature of knowledge is such that it demands an explanation which is commensurate only with the laws of being itself, and not of any of its specialized modes. Or must it possibly be accepted as a dogma that all reality is co-extensive with the various so-called levels of physical existence? On this point, I might remark that a naturalistic view of knowledge, or, for that matter, of reality is tenable only on the assumption that no other view is necessary.

The above remarks should help the reader to understand why Sellars is so hasty to regard our knowledge of real objects as being "epistemologically ultimate." The reason for this conclusion is not so much that Sellars is in an intelligible sense a realist, but that he is a naturalist. I entirely agree, of course, that our knowledge of objective reality is an objective fact, and I further agree that epistemology must not begin as it did for Descartes, with a universal doubt. Yet the point of the matter is that Sellars accepts knowledge of real objects as a blind, unintelligible fact concerning which no assurance other than that of common sense is to be had.

To revert at this point to an explanation of knowledge in terms of physical or biological laws with an insistence upon its

genetic foundation, to relegate our knowledge of the world to "our instinctive assertion of it," is to leave hopelessly unexplained that which essentially distinguishes knowledge from every other event. Granting that knowledge does have its practical aims, granting that it does in some respects bear an analogous resemblance to certain kinds of biological response, the basic question still remains: What is it that gives knowledge its distinctive character?

By way of conclusion, it must be noted then that realism must, indeed, be critical in the sense of being able to give an intelligible account of how we actually do know things. Yet it is precisely in respect to this and a few other basic facts, such as the knowledge that we have of ourselves as existing substances, wherein the realism of Sellars is found most wanting. Although it is true that the critical realism of Sellars is an attempt to get beyond an exclusively "common sense" view of reality, the fact remains, paradoxically enough, that the final argument of Sellars' realism, insofar as it is realistic, is by way of a behaviorist appeal to the dictates of <u>common sense</u>. His critical realism is critical, indeed, but only in regard to that concerning which it can least afford to be critical, namely, the distinction of object and content; for it is by the use of this distinction that Sellars consistently avoids the very thing necessary to place his realism on a firm foundation, namely, a real intuition of the object. <u>Its criticism is, in short, launched in the direction of subjective idealism, while its realism is blindly rooted in a pragmatic affirmation of real objects.</u>

Thus it becomes clear that the critical realism of Sellars

which, though professedly condemning the errors of common sense realism and subjective idealism alike, strangely inherits the weaknesses of both. In the last analysis, it must be said that the proposed synthesis results only in an uneasy compromise, which virtually amounts to a contradiction. At one and the same time and in respect to the same object, I know it (for I affirm it) and I do not know it (for the knower is confined to the datum). From this it should be clear that once the contents of knowledge are separated from the object, no successful attempt can ever be made to re-unite them.

As a final word of comment, I might observe that Sellars' failure to establish a realistic position which is intelligible is due partly, of course, to his naturalistic principles, but partly also to the narrow historical framework of the modern and contemporary tradition in epistemology within which he develops his own position. Had Sellars acquainted himself more thoroughly with medieval realism, especially that of St. Thomas, he would, I am sure, have discovered that the "forms" of the scholastics are not the "barren virgins" which he seems to think they are, but the only means of giving an account of knowledge which is both realistic and intelligible. He may have discovered furthermore the fundamental principle, in the absence of which any theory of knowledge, whatever its refinements and distinctions, is hopelessly "reductionist", -- the principle, namely, that immateriality is the root of all cognition.

SECTION B

THE NATURALISM OF SELLARS: HIS PHYSICAL REALISM

CHAPTER SIX

THE PHYSICAL REALISM OF SELLARS: METHOD OF APPROACH

It is a generally recognized fact that Sellars' distinctive contribution to the development of American philosophy lies chiefly in the field of epistemology. In accordance with this fact, I have given concentration to the development of his critical realism in a measure which, I trust, is proportionate to its significance. Yet it would, I am sure, be a mistake not to present also, at least in some of its most significant phases, Sellars' doctrine as it relates to the problems of metaphysics and values, since it is in these fields that we become aware of his thought, not as an isolated analysis in a restricted field of philosophy, but as an organized system with a unified method of approach.

We have, as a matter of fact, already taken a step in that direction when, in the first chapter, we saw, at least in an elementary sort of way, the meaning which the term "naturalism" carries for Sellars, and the general contrasting relationships which his theory bears to certain traditions of the past, namely, mechanical materialism, spiritualism, and dualism. Now we must take a further step in the same direction to view at closer range what it is in Sellars' naturalism that constitutes a) its distinctive method of approach, and b) its characteristic doctrinal implications.

Such will be the burden of this and the following chapter. Lest, however, there be any room for misunderstanding, I must point out first that <u>as a naturalist</u> Sellars has much in common with the naturalists of the past. The reason for this is simple enough, since all naturalism, whatever its methods of approach, whatever its subsidiary implications in the line of individual doctrine, is at least agreed in principle that Nature is a self-

contained unit beyond which no further explanation outside its own order is required. It is for this reason that all naturalists, however remotely connected they may be from a chronological point of view, somehow feel a common bond of allegiance which is not always as loose as it sometimes appears to be. Witness, for instance, Sellars' remark concerning the philosophy of Epicurus (despite the regret he expresses for its "technical inaccuracies"):

> The central and admirable feature remains, a clear-eyed, courageous choice of a rational view of things...felt to underlie the vast procession of nature...(1) The Epicurean maintained that the intrinsic character of experience gave the clue to reason as to what is desirable and what undesirable. (2)

So much in regard to Sellars considered simply as a naturalist. But just a word concerning him as a <u>contemporary</u> naturalist. Here it must be noted in the cause of accuracy that the basic doctrine of his system, i.e., emergent evolution, is not peculiar to himself alone, but is shared by him with a number of thinkers in his own generation, notably Lloyd Morgan and S. Alexander. Each, of course, has his own particular type of explanation within the framework of this doctrine, yet the point is that the doctrine itself in its basic features is held by them in common.

Knowing this, the reader must realize that it would be impossible (and I might add <u>undesirable</u>) to ignore those aspects of Sellars' naturalism which bear witness to its relationships with the naturalisms both of the past and of the present era. Yet the main weight of emphasis will be given to those two elements of his system which, in my opinion, constitute his claim to orig-

---

(1) "Emergence of Naturalism," <u>International Journal of Ethics</u>, Vol. 34, (1924), p. 322.
(2) <u>Emergence of Naturalism</u>, p. 320.

inality in the panorama of naturalistic thought:

a) his approach to a naturalistic "Weltanschauung" via the channels of his critical realism, and

b) his handling of the theory of emergence mainly as it relates to a solution of the "mind-body" problem.

Concerning the question just mentioned under (a) (to which the remainder of this chapter is dedicated), we have first to note by way of explanation that Sellars' distinctiveness lies, not only in his epistemology taken as such, but taken as a preparatory step toward the development of his naturalism, also, -- a step which gives that position one of its mainly distinguishing characteristics. Having seen by way of analysis and in its various points of detail, what the critical realism of Sellars is, we must now attempt to relate it to his ontology. In accordance with this objective, what we say here will be, not so much in the line of an extended analysis, as an attempt to synthesize and interrelate the matter that has already been developed with a view toward gaining a deeper penetration of the unity and distinctiveness of Sellars' naturalistic system.

The path we shall follow is already determined for us in the three leading conclusions of Sellars' epistemology which we need but here recall:

a) the rejection of naive realism,
b) the rejection of any and all of the forms of idealism and deductive rationalism, and
c) the assertion that we never intuit reality, but only interpret it through the instrumentality of contents.

Regarding the first conclusion, it must be recognized, of course, that there are a variety of implications contained in it. Yet the one thing that should be clear (without the need for

reading between the lines) is that to Sellars' mind the rejection of naive realism implies the simultaneous rejection with it of all the reductive materialisms and mechanical atomisms of the past few centuries, which were reductive and mechanical largely because they were naive. That is to say, underlying the "dead-level" mechanical systems of the past (which constitute materialism in its traditional sense) is the assumption that man has an intuitive grasp of the very stuff of the world in which he lives. It is precisely this assumption with its oversimplified outlook of reality which accounts for the reductiveness of past naturalism, and ultimately too, for its final rejection. As Sellars notes:

> Naive materialism was dominated by two things, against which the evolutionary naturalist is on his guard: (1) atomic mechanism, and (2) a confident vision of the very stuff of the world as somehow inert, internally homogeneous, solid, and alien to those qualitative events which we call feelings, sensations, and thoughts. (3)

To appreciate this fact it is necessary for us to recall here a few of the leading assumptions which characterized the advent of modern science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It will be recalled that the dominating world-view of the times was one which literally attempted to picture the universe as a vast cosmic machine which smoothly operated according to a few mathematical laws, and that to explain nature was to reduce it to these laws. Moreover, Galileo (as well as Boyle and Newton after him) maintained that

> mathematics is not only to be used as an instrument in physics but the physical world really is the mechanical-mathematical system which physics describes. (4)

---

(3) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 278. Underlining is my own.
(4) From Descartes to Kant, p. 45. Underlining is the author's.

Now in view of the intrinsic relatedness of naturalistic philosophy to science, whatever that science might be in any particular year (5), it is clear that the naturalist philosopher of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fell heir to the same assumptions as did the physical scientist of that day. Yet, while it is true that the scientists themselves made rapid strides in their own restricted spheres, that is, in spite of their falsified picture of the universe, the philosophers encountered a stumbling-block precisely because of this.

The reason is simple enough. The task of explaining the "phenomena" of mind, consciousness, life, etc., is one which ultimately falls upon the shoulders of the philosopher. Since, then, the early naturalists were committed, like the scientists, to a mechanical conception of the world, including man himself, everything, whether in the order of quantity or quality had to be accommodated to this scientific scheme. The result of all this was reductionism pure and simple. (6) Mind, for instance, in such a simple scheme as this is merely another form of matter in motion, and is, for that reason explicable in terms of the laws of motion, i.e., mechanical laws. As a matter of fact, the whole of philosophy becomes simply a sort of generalized physics, which knows no other criterion than the measuring-stick of the physical scientist.

This, then, is the type of naturalism which Sellars rejects, and not only rejects but censures for the naive realism to which

---

(5) "Materialism endeavors to set forth a synoptic view of man and the universe implicit in the sciences at their present stage of development." Philosophy for the Future, Preface pp. ix and x. Note also Sellars' remark that "historically and logically naturalism is associated with science." Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 7.

(6) The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 475.

it fell a victim. To the extent, then, that modern epistemology (in the form of critical realism) rejects the naive realism of the past, it prepares the way for a new type of naturalism, -- a type of naturalism which will be much better accommodated to the demands of the science of our day. Such is the significance of Sellars' critical realism for ontology from the standpoint of its rejection of naive realism.

In our third chapter we saw at considerable length Sellars' criticism of the idealistic school of thought and in the fourth his rejection of Kantian rationalism. No doubt the reader has been given cause to wonder at times why a naturalist like Sellars should so busily occupy himself in unravelling what he himself has called the "epistemological puzzles" of the last few centuries. If, however, we keep in mind that realism for Sellars is the pathway to naturalism (7), and that there is no greater hindrance to a naturalistic world-view than a realm of ideas and a priori forms, it should be clear that a refutation of idealism means for Sellars a negative defense of his own position which is that of a "frank," physical realism. Indeed, there is nothing so alien to his philosophical temperament than a world of Ideas (in the Platonic sense) or a world of phenomena (in the Kantian sense) upon which the mind imposes its own subjective, rationalistic forms. On this point we have the emphatic word of Sellars himself:

> The two great enemies of an evolutionary naturalism are Platonism and Kantianism. Both deny the self-explanatory character of nature. In a sense, they are both supernaturalistic. They desire to transcend space. (8)

---

(7) "In all its forms, materialism involves what philosophers call realism, that is, physical realism, and not medieval, Platonic realism." Materialism and Human Knowing, p. 77. Note in this passage another instance of the tendency in Sellars' thinking to identify medieval and Platonic thinking.

(8) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 6.

For the forthright naturalist the world of physical existence is not only real in a primary sense, but it is real in its own right. Matter and reality are, in other words, co-extensive terms. For the idealist, on the other hand, either the physical world is (as for Berkeley) unreal or its measure of reality is that of a purely phenomenal mode of existence, i.e., an existence only of an inferior sort. Neither of these postulates are acceptable to naturalism, for the reason that both of them contradict the primary demands of human experience. Here again we must rely upon our now-famous plain man who accepts the world as he finds it, i.e., common, independent, and permanent. A true philosophy is one whose growth is from within, not from within an isolated realm of ideas, but from within the order of human experience and scientific data.

Enough, however, has already been said along these lines for the reader to appreciate the significance for naturalism of Sellars' attack upon idealism. Idealism, in its final analysis, comprises for Sellars only an interim period in the history of philosophy which has long since exceeded the measure of its usefulness. The arguments of Berkeley, for instance, against what might be called the fideistic realism of Locke have now (in Sellars' opinion) been "outflanked" by the principles of a critical realism which fairly and squarely points the way to an outright physical realism.

In the preceding paragraphs we have just seen how, from a negative point of view, Sellars attempts to prepare the way for a new type of naturalism. This he accomplishes by his common rejection

of any and all of the forms both of the naturalism of the past and of the idealism whether of the past or the present era. Here I might add that for anyone not conversant with the basic distinctions of a philosophic perennis (some of which were illustrated in our last chapter) the arguments of Sellars might very easily be taken as a convincing proof in favor of a new type of naturalism. I should be the last to deny, of course, that Sellars' arguments do have a measure of objective significance, but to what extent we shall see in a forthcoming chapter. What I want to take up now, however, is that which, from a more positive point of view, constitutes Sellars' contribution to what I can only inadequately describe as a naturalistic method of approach, viz., his non-apprehensional realism.

To appreciate the significance of Sellars' non-apprehensionalism for a naturalist ontology, we must keep in mind a previous remark of Sellars that it is the task of naturalism to interpret the sciences and the various data which they reveal, but not (as some have supposed) to rule them. This being the case, we must then ask the question: What is it that modern scientists tell us concerning the type of knowledge they have of the data they investigate? Do scientists, in other words, any longer claim, as once they did, to have a penetrative intuition into the very stuff of the physical world? Do they claim to know what matter in itself really is? On this point I cite the following very excellent summary of the views of one of the leading scientists of this era -- views which may be taken as typical of contemporary science:

> There need not be an exact correspondence between a scientific law, or law of nature, and extra-mental facts; still less need there be such correspondence between a scientific theory and fact...There is an essential element of fact which is a primary datum, and to this the law or theory must conform. The truth of it is to be judged by its applicability to a range of phenomena, by its self-consistency and by its simplicity; not by its supposed correspondence with a set of relations actually existing in nature, still less by its correspondence with a set of relations between real entities...We are not to suppose then that scientific entities, such as electrons; or theories, such as the wave-theory of light; or even laws, such as Newton's laws of motion, either represent, or are intended to represent entities in nature; except in a very abstract and partial way, and for the particular purpose which science has in view. (9)

If such, indeed, is the view which the modern scientist has of his scientific knowledge of the world, must it not then be said that the critical realism of Sellars, subserving as it does the interests of scientific naturalism, is eminently suited, not only to the methods of science, but also to the very attitude that science takes toward its own ideas, theories, and laws? Here, as I see it, is what every good naturalist should regard as a distinctive contribution to contemporary naturalism. Here too, in a more general sort of way, is Sellars' piece de resistance against, let us say, the attitude of Dewey, for whom an involvement in the problems of epistemology is little more than a

---

(9) R. P. Phillips, Modern Thomistic Philosophy (Westmenster, Md.: Newman Bookshop, 1935), Vol. II, p. 152. The views outlined here are those of Professor Hobson. Underlining is my own. For an excellent analysis of the view that the contemporary physicist takes of his own knowledge of the world see also Robert Millikan's very interesting little book Evolution In Science and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).

gentleman-philosopher's pasttime. (10)

Consonant, then, with Sellars' doctrine of critical realism, it is the task of the naturalist to work as the scientist does, i.e., with a view toward interpreting reality, but never in the hope of intuiting its inner operations and laws. (11) Moreover, the type of explanation which the naturalist gives (in the light of the "categories" he knows) is the very same in kind as the type of explanation to which the specialized scientist resorts, -- one, namely, which does not exceed the boundaries of empirical analysis, but restricts itself to observation and scientific experimentation. For Sellars the famous expression "natural piety" far from connoting a sort of naturalistic mysticism, i.e., a type of naturalism which "rubs elbows" with pantheism, means simply "empiricism as against deductive rationalism." (12)

Explaining more at length the kind of empiricism which critical realism involves, Sellars notes that it does not preclude explanation or subordinate it to description:

> To connect a property with the particular organization of a thing is to explain it. To show how one organization passes into another is to explain it. All that scientific explanation, so far as I can see, demands is the gaining of insight into the structure, relations, and operations of

---

(10) There are a number of passages in which I have found Sellars explicitly expressing his resentment against Dewey's distaste for epistemology as well as the effect that it has had upon American philosophy. The following passage may be taken as typical: "It is with Dewey's dismissal of theory of knowledge that I am (here) concerned. That it has been a bad influence in American philosophy I am convinced...His very skepticism with respect to theory of knowledge...has been destructive of the morale of the younger generation. It has tended to turn the edge of persistent reflection and to encourage those who preferred the easier way." The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 54. Underlining is the author's.

(11) The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 277.

(12) "If we know only the structure, behavior, or relative masses and energies of things, by means of scientific investigation, it follows that we cannot intuit physical systems in some more direct way." Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 274.

> nature so that particular events can be interpreted. Explanation is knowledge and cannot demand more than knowledge can. (13)

Such, then, is Sellars' method of approach toward the development of his evolutionary naturalism, a method of approach which, as has already been stated, stamps his naturalism with one of its distinguishing and distinguishingly modern characteristics. Critical realism, in short, dictates what sort of philosophy a physical realism must be. What that philosophy is, from the standpoint of its most significant doctrinal implications, we are now about to see.

---

(13) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 274.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEORY OF EMERGENCE AND ITS LEADING APPLICATIONS

To place the theory of emergent evolution in what Sellars would regard as its proper perspective, we must realize that for him emergent evolution is a contemporary, scientific view of the universe which, when extended to the entire domain of physical existence, is a means of resolving the traditional contrasts between a purely mechanical view of the world (2), on the one hand, and one which, on the other hand, is in the main teleological and "supernaturalistic." As against traditional materialism, evolutionary naturalism, as Sellars understands it, is to find a means of avoiding a reductive interpretation through the laws of mechanics of those aspects of reality which are marked by qualitative differences. As against what is broadly conceived of as "supernaturalism," the theory of emergent evolution allegedly makes it possible to place the higher "levels" of existence, such as life and mind, within their proper context, i.e., within the realm of nature. It is the hope of the naturalist that by placing these higher "levels" within the context of Nature (as an all-inclusive category), he will render superfluous an appeal to an order of "supernatural" causes and events. Such very briefly stated is Sellars' perspective, -- a perspective which is ultimately guided by the hope that the theory of emergence will result in a new set of categories which will have rendered the old ones useless and irrelevant.

Before we proceed any further, however, I should first like to introduce a few leading considerations concerning the general background of the theory of evolution itself. As proposed in its original form by Charles Darwin, the theory of evolution made no

---

(2) Recalling what we have already said concerning Sellars' rejection of mechanism, it may be interesting to note that for Alexander too, one of Sellars' fellow-emergentists, "mechanism, if that convenient term may be used to describe a habit of mind, is only a particular, imperfect, and mistaken form which naturalism may assume." Samuel Alexander, "Naturalism and Value" in Basic Problems of Philosophy (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1949) p. 658.

attempt to give an explanation of the origin of life and mind. The work of Darwin, as Hocking points out,

> was limited to changes within the different forms of life, -- the origin of species, the descent of man. He took life for granted, assuming that life always came from life; but he broke down the lines between species and thus between lower forms of life and higher forms. (3)

Thus, although the publication in 1859 of Darwin's Origin of Species has been hailed as "the most important single event in the history of modern naturalism," (4) the biological evolution of Darwin fell far short of a generalized theory of evolution which alone could (in the cause of a thorough-going naturalism) break down the barriers between the non-living and the living, the mental and the non-mental. (5)

The first attempt at such a theory is to be found in the writings of Herbert Spencer. It was he who

> assembled the scattered scientific work of his day into a picture so vast and so impressive...that it became much easier to believe that the remaining difficulties (i.e., of giving an account of life and mind), if not surmounted by Spencer himself would eventually be resolved. (6)

Significant as Spencer's attempt may have been, however, from an historical point of view, it was (to use a phrase which Sellars employs in another context) "more of a prophesy than a fulfillment." Especially as regards its handling of the problems of mind and consciousness, the evolutionism of Spencer had hardly transcended the crude mechanical interpretations which hitherto had been

---

(3) Types of Philosophy, p. 54.
(4) Harold A. Larrabee, "Naturalism in America" in Naturalism and the Human Spirit, p. 347.
(5) Types of Philosophy, p. 54.
(6) Types of Philosophy, p. 55.

attached to these "phenomena." (7)

What characterized, moreover, the doctrine of evolution as it had been taught at the time of Spencer was the thought that all development was a gradual unfolding of the higher out of the lower. Conceived of in this manner evolution is

> a perpetual unrolling of the eternally given, such that each new stage was predictable from the preceding one, so that no really new thing is possible. (8)

In the light of contemporary thought, this more primitive type of evolution, in placing too heavy an emphasis upon the principle of continuity, made little or no provision for the fact of novelty. (9) Accordingly,

> Since Darwin and Spencer wrote, many changes have been made in our views of the manner in which evolution takes place. The word "gradually" has happily been submerged: many steps of development...may have occurred abruptly, by "mutation"...There are two kinds of effects in nature...distinguished as "resultants" and "emergents". The resultants are the effects which we are able to deduce from causes; as when we say that the weight of salt is the sum of the weights of the sodium and the chlorine that combine to produce it. The emergents are

---

(7) See James Ward's Naturalism and Agnosticism (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), Vol. I. In Lectures VII, VIII, and IX of this volume Ward enters into a lengthy criticism of the evolutionism of Spencer, which "proposes to deduce the phenomena of evolution (celestial, organic, social, etc.) from the conservation of energy." p. 212. Note the following basic point of criticism which Ward directs against the synthesis of Spencer: "Evolution, so far from being a self-sufficient explanation of what are called its results, has itself to be explained; like other processes, it must have its adequate cause." p. 261. As a point in passing, I should like to note that Ward's extensive criticism of the earlier forms of naturalism, whether purely mechanical or evolutionary, served in no small way towards the development of Sellars' own thinking, a point to which Sellars himself occasionally testifies.

(8) James B. Pratt, Matter and Spirit (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1922), pp. 186-187.

(9) "If evolution is to be taken seriously by science, the principle of continuity must not be taken to exclude newness." Critical Realism, p. 234.

> the unpredictable effects which, so to speak, supervene together with the resultants: as the taste of the salt, its crystalline form and color, which lacking all resemblance to the properties of either sodium or chlorine seem to be something quite new and additional to the situation. Such emergent qualities seem to depend upon the way of arrangement or composition of the ingredients. (10)

It was this distinction, then, between "resultants" and "emergents" which eventually paved the way for a new type of theory set forth by Lloyd Morgan (11).

> May it not be that life and mind "emerge" in this abrupt way whenever in the re-arrangements of physical elements the right kind of order or form happens to be struck out? This is the suggestion of Mr. Lloyd Morgan. (12)

It was this new trend in evolutionary thought, i.e., to regard life and mind as emergents rather than as mere resultants to which the thinking of Sellars was attuned, and which (in its sum and substance) comprises the central doctrine of his philosophy of physical realism.

Proceeding now to a distinct consideration of Sellars' handling of the doctrine, it must be noted first of all that, in the philosophic thinking of Sellars, evolution is employed in the cause of an all-out physical realism. Such is not the case with regard to the thinking of either Lloyd Morgan or Samuel Alexander. This is a point which Sellars himself occasionally calls to his reader's attention:

> Both Lloyd Morgan and Alexander have more of a monistic tinge to their thinking than I have. For them, there is an underlying nisus to the whole cosmos and this nisus gives a unity which is alien to my more

---

(10) Types of Philosophy, pp. 5, 7, 8. Underlining is the author's.
(11) This theory is presented by Lloyd Morgan in his article "The Case for Emergent Evolution," Journal of Philosophical Studies, Vol. 23, (1929).
(12) Types of Philosophy, p. 58.

> pluralistic outlook. I would refuse to say that I take evolution less seriously than they, but would admit that I take it more empirically and distributively. (13)

What Sellars has reference to in the above passage is the fact that in the thinking of Morgan and Alexander alike there lies behind the physical universe some mental cause which accounts for the emergence of such qualitative events as mind and consciousness. It is this assumption which Sellars as a physical realist refuses to tolerate. Even more clearly does he bring this point out in the following passage:

> As a frank naturalist, physical systems are for me ultimate, and I have no reason to postulate an extra-physical nisus of the sort that Morgan and Alexander acknowledge...Such a postulated nisus seems to me a shadow of dualism resembling the elan vital of Bergson. (14)

Realizing, then, that the doctrine of emergence signifies in Sellars' thinking an all-out physical realism which is incompatible with any of the varieties of pan-psychism (15), we must now proceed to examine those leading points of emphasis in the theory which occupy the foreground of his own thinking. Very briefly stated, the theory of emergent or creative evolution is for Sellars "the assumption that there is novelty or origination in the world." (16) Yet underlying and presupposing this assumption, viz., that new forms under favorable conditions periodically arise, there are the two basic facts of organization and chance, -- facts which had not been taken seriously enough by the materialists of

---

(13) R. W. Sellars, "Realism and Evolutionary Naturalism," Monist, Vol. 37 (1927), p. 151. Underlining is the author's.
(14) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, pp. 277-278. Underling is the author's.
(15) "The new naturalism finds it unnecessary to adopt pan-psychism in order to do justice to the emergence of mind and consciousness." R. W. Sellars, "Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?" in Ethics, Vol. 55 (1944), p. 28.
(16) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 362.

the past.

Regarding the need for seriously accepting the fact of organization, Sellars has this to say:

> We must accept the rise in nature of natural kinds with specific properties expressive of the system. From this it would follow that we must expect novelty and origination in nature and what may be called levels of causality. Uniformity of process would no longer be the scientific ideal. To reduce everything to one type would now be looked upon as a false and impossible objective. (17)

It is in his "frank" acceptance, then, of the significance of organization or relatedness that Sellars is led to maintain a theory of evolutionary naturalism, and to reject the reductive materialism of the past. Organization, in other words, signifies for Sellars the fact that reality is arranged, not as the mechanists conceived it (in a uniform pattern of existence), but rather according to different "levels" of existence and causality.

Extending this last remark, I should like to make clear that reality is for Sellars what he calls a plurality of physical systems. Since this is a very important point to grasp for the understanding of the type of naturalism which he professes, we must carefully note the meaning which the term "pluralism" carries in the thinking of Sellars. The question here (as he himself is given to understand it) is that concerning the attitude which is to be adopted to the traditional opposition between monism and pluralism. Since, however, the term "monism" is usually taken in opposition to Cartesian dualism, it would be better in Sellars' opinion to substitute for it the term "singularism." What, then, is it that

---

(17) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 275.

constitutes the difference between these two points of view? The difference between a singularistic and a pluralistic conception of the world is for Sellars

> one of the degree of the interdependence of nature. Singularism seems to me to stand for homogeneity and tightness of union, while pluralism means heterogeneity and degrees of freedom. If pluralism is interpreted in this way, I am a pluralist. (18)

As a pluralist, then, in the sense just defined, Sellars maintains that reality is composed of different levels; yet each of these levels, although belonging to the general context of Nature (and hence subservient to its laws), is nevertheless differentiated according to the properties which its own particular level of organization reveals:

> Take an organism. Clearly, it is subject to the same gravitational relations as a stone. There is one kind of physical nexus binding the physical world into one system. And if the physical world were homogeneous, not much more would need to be said. But if we take organization seriously, we must admit the development of systems within this basic continuity, systems responding in accordance with their internal nature. While more complex and more highly integrated levels are reared within the system of nature and cannot violate its demands, they can yet add capacities for which these demands give permission and latitude. Thus human behavior does not violate any of the demands of the inorganic world, but merely explores and expresses possibilities left open. It is this openness to novelty which evolution signifies. Thus singularism stands for a general relatedness of the sort that physics investigates, or for a mystical unity, while pluralism stands for differentiation. (19)

From the above passage, then, it is clear that Nature for Sellars is not the "tightly knit," homogeneous system that it

---

(18) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 230. Underlining is the author's.

(19) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 281.

was once conceived to be. Sellars, indeed, allows that there is a "basic continuity" within the order of nature which justifies our thinking it as a physical system which has a certain unitary status. He is not a cosmological anarchist. This continuity, however, is such that it must not be taken to exclude the fact of organization, and what that fact implies, viz., an ordered hierarchy of different levels of existence. It is this very concept of different levels of existence, each of which contains capacities for further development, which leaves open the possibility for the emergence of yet new systems which "...on certain intimate chemical relations and arrangements are achieved...can under certain conditions maintain themselves." (20)

Such in its essentials, the, is the world-view which lies at the very heart of Sellars' naturalistic thinking. It remains for us now, however, to examine it briefly from the standpoint of some of its leading denials and assumptions. When, for instance, Sellars asserts that for him "physical systems are ultimate," (21) and that the "emergence of higher levels of existence is an ultimate brutal factuality in nature," (22) he is clearly denying the traditional doctrine of the contingency of the physical world, -- a denial which he himself makes explicit.

> The materialist holds that the cosmos is material in nature and <u>exists in its own right</u>. To deny this is to deny the contingency of the world. (23)

What motive (one might ask) is it that impels Sellars to regard the universe in this way? The answer to this question

---

(20) <u>Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism</u>, p. 276.
(21) <u>Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism</u>, p. 277.
(22) <u>The Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 296.
(23) R. W. Sellars, "Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance," <u>Philosophical Review</u>, Vol. 53 (1944) p. 361. Underlining is the author's.

mainly lies in his conception of matter as

> active, dynamic, relational, and self-organizing. As against (neo-thomism) it (materialism) emphasizes a materialistic form of hylomorphism in which matter absorbs both patterns and activity. (24)

The hylomorphic dualism, in other words, of matter and form, which characterizes the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas, -- this together with their doctrine of final causes must be replaced by a conception of matter which regards it as including the properties of matter and form alike, and as containing within itself the capacity for self-organization. As Sellars sums it (rather vaguely):

> Materialism substitutes functional directionalism for formal finalism. (25)

A little more clearly perhaps we find the very same thought expressed in the following passage which is mainly directed against the arguments of Gilson's God and Philosophy:

> What the Neo-thomist calls esse and assigns to God is by the materialist assigned to pattern-forming matter. While the former asserts the contingency of the material world and postulates two modes of being, the materialist denies the contingency of the material world and finds no evidence for two modes of being. And with the denial of the contingency of the material world goes the affirmation of its intrinsic endurance. (26)

Sellars' assignment of esse to matter apparently is no great cause for concern when he comes to deal with the problem of change, for "contingent denotables," i.e., contingent, changing things

---

(24) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 364.
(25) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 364.
(26) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 377. Underlining is the author's.

> are but organizations within being...being is something ultimate which contingent denotables are themselves expressions of... Contingency and variability are then assigned to relations, organizations, to the process side of being. (27)

Again, keeping in mind that being for Sellars is matter, we note that

> being is the context of existence. As I see it, being is beyond fact, for it is the source and foundation of fact. We discover being in its processes and manifestations. (28)

The conclusion of all this seems to be that, since matter is being, despite its varying modifications and changes, it cannot not be. Non-being for Sellars is only a verbalism. (29)

From the above passages it is clear that Sellars explicitly accepts the facts both of being and becoming. It is far less clear, however, to discover how precisely (in his thinking) being and becoming stand in relation to each other. If becoming (which is the "process side of being") is being taken relationally, how is it possible then (since matter is at one and the same time both being and the subject of change) to conceive of being for what it is in itself, i.e., absolutely? If, in other words, matter is both being and the subject of change, how are we to escape an identification of that which is explicitly maintained to be distinct? There are no texts of Sellars which I can offer in answer to this difficulty, the reason being, of course, that the difficulty is intrinsic to his evolutionary system.

Having completed our review of those leading principles which characterize the emergentism of Sellars, we have now come

---

(27) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 374.
(28) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 379.
(29) Materialism and Human Knowing, p. 102.

to the point in our examination of his ontology where we are prepared to view a few of its leading applications. What I mainly have reference to here is the extension of the theory of emergence to what is traditionally known in philosophy as the "problem of man." Sellars himself leaves no room for doubt that this is the central problem of philosophy, and that it is the ultimate objective of the naturalistic thinker to include man in the scheme of purely natural systems. To give an adequate account of those admittedly distinguishing characteristics of man in terms of the purely natural, -- such is the aim of Sellars' entire system.

In previous paragraphs we have seen what the basic postulates of evolutionary naturalism are; viz., that a) new physical systems arise in nature under favorable conditions, and b) these new physical systems have properties which are functions of their own particular "level" of organization. (30) It is in the light of these postulates that Sellars attempts to account for the origin and nature of vital systems, and "a still higher stage of the same, mental or intelligent systems." (31) It is his purpose, accordingly, to show that consciousness and mind are intrinsic to the human organism. This he hopes to accomplish, not only with a view toward refuting the dualism of past philosophic systems, but for the purpose of rounding out the development of his own philosophic thinking:

> Achieve the idea of mind as intrinsic to the brain, and naturalism is full-fledged. (32)

There are various historical contrast positions which Sellars, in developing his own position, utilizes, yet none more

---

(30) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 276.
(31) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 276.
(32) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 274.

frequently than the dualism of Descartes. For Descartes organic bodies, including the human body itself, are merely complicated machines:

> Animals, he held, are purely machines, while man is a machine with a soul which guides it...The behavior of animals can be regarded as the resultant of reflexes. A reflex is a mechanical response to a stimulus, and is exemplified in a knee-jerk...Why assume, then, that animals are conscious? Consciousness is a function of the soul and not of the body. (33)

Man, then, although he has a body, is, in the thinking of Descartes, essentially what his soul is, i.e. consciousness or thought. (34)

Little reflection need here be given to realize that such a position as that of Descartes and his followers is (to use an expression of Dewey's) "anti-naturalism in extremis." It is, indeed, the very antithesis of Sellars' position which is an attempt to show that a non-mechanical interpretation of the human organism makes it possible to realize that consciousness, far from being a substance in its own right, is a function of what he calls the brain-mind. This, then, is the task to which Sellars devotes himself, i.e., to

> render <u>intellectually conceivable</u> the presence of consciousness in the organism. (35)

Defining his use of the term "consciousness", Sellars maintains that he is employing it in the traditional sense

> as a denotative term for the total field of a person's experiencing as it shifts and changes. (36)

---

(33) <u>Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 298.
(34) Here it must be recalled that the very essence of a spiritual substance is for Descartes consciousness or thought.
(35) <u>Evolutionary Naturalism</u>, p. 288. Underlining is the author's.
(36) <u>Philosophy of Physical Realism</u>, p. 407.

To think consciousness in this way, however, i.e., as the concrete flow of the field of experience is not enough, though such a conception is true as far as it goes. The question that needs to be determined here is that of the "ontological status" of consciousness. What is it? Cautioning his reader against the tradition of dualism and the tendency to regard consciousness as an "immaterial kind of stuff," (37) Sellars maintains that it should be conceived rather as

> a qualitative web of events intrinsic to the brain-mind (38)...Consciousness is the qualitative dimension of a brain-event. It is the patterned brain-event as sentient. It is because of its status that we, as conscious beings, are on the inside of reality. (39)

Essential to the understanding of Sellars' doctrine concerning the nature of consciousness as being a "variant" within the brain is his double-knowledge theory of the brain. Why is it that Cartesian dualism, and the long line of thinkers that have followed in its wake (40), conceive of consciousness as something distinct from and apart from the brain? Because in Sellars' estimation they regarded the two kinds of knowledge had of the brain as pertaining to two different kinds of substance. Granting, according to Sellars, that our knowledge of the brain is different (i.e., depending upon whether we look at it from without or from within the domain of consciousness itself), does not our knowledge in each case refer to one and the very same entity?

In one way the brain is known as any other outside physical object is known, i.e., in an external manner. Viewed in this

---

(37) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 279.
(38) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 279.
(39) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 414.
(40) Including, according to Sellars, many of the scientific thinkers of our day who make a mystery of consciousness.

external way, we have no more knowledge of the brain than that which the experimental sciences reveal, i.e., we simply know its structure, its quantitative dimensions, relative mass, etc. This kind of knowledge is, of course, accurate as far as it goes, but it always falls short of an intimate glimpse into the very nature of the brain. (41) But is this the only way in which the brain is known? In the answer to this question we have the central point of Sellars' double-aspect theory, for it is his leading contention that by means of consciousness we are literally on the inside of that physical system called the brain. What is more, since the brain is the only physical system that we know in this internal way, our knowledge of it is unique.

Now it is because of the uniqueness of this situation that there is always the danger of regarding consciousness, as the dualist does, as an entity distinct from the brain. Because, moreover, of a failure on our part to appreciate the unique organization which the brain has achieved

> we find it difficult to think consciousness correctly and put it in its proper context and relations. (42)

In order then to see where consciousness belongs, and, in so doing, to avoid a dualistic misconception of it, it is necessary in Sellars' opinion to

> enlarge our concept of the physical (43)... Physical science has so accustomed us to think of physical systems in terms merely

---

(41) "In such knowledge, genuine as it is, we are never literally on the inside of external objects intuiting, or experiencing their particular 'go,' their life and substantial being." R. W. Sellars, "An Analytic Approach to the Mind-Body Problem," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 47, (1938) p. 472.
(42) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 341.
(43) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 313. Underlining is my own.

> of quantities and relations that we are almost shocked at the suggestion that a physical system may contain a qualitative content. Let us remember that physical science can never offer us a glimpse of the stuff of the physical world, but can only work out structures, quantities, and relations. In our consciousness we are a pulse of reality at this high level of organization and activity. (44)

Once we have made the adjustment in our thinking of regarding consciousness, not as an alien substance apart from the brain, but as a variant from within, it is easy to see how consciousness

> can act as the focus and instrument of functional adjustment. Thus out of an apparent dualism we have achieved the conception of a more adequate monism which accepts the internal differentiation of the organized and functioning reality we call the brain. Consciousness is, as it were, the eye of the brain. (45)

Having seen, then, what consciousness means for Sellars, and how it relates to the functional adjustment of the organism, we have now to examine his doctrine of the nature of mind. The first thing to note in this connection is that for Sellars the term "mind" stands for

> memory, habit, association, reasoning, attention. It is a term for functions...for motor-sets, patterns, for cumulation and organization, for instinct, and learning by experience. (46)

---

(44) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 325. Underlining is my own.

(45) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 313.

(46) Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 322. With reference to the question of the origin of mind, it is interesting to note what Sellars as a typical evolutionist has to say: "Mind has had an evolution from humble beginnings step by step with the development of the central nervous system...The scale from positive and negative response with reflexes and tropisms to well differentiated instincts and thence to generalized intelligence is discernible. Mind is clearly organic to nature and to the conditions and demands of the environment...So relative to the total situation is mind that to assign it a separate being and status, intrinsic to it apart from physical nature, seems unjustified." Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 207.

It is clear from this passage that mind for Sellars is not, as has so often been supposed, a faculty, but merely a generic term which signifies denotatively a wide variety of inner activities and functions. But here again, as in the case of consciousness, the question remains, what is mind from an ontological point of view? Clearly, the mind for Sellars is a physical category which is identical with the brain "in its organic setting of muscle and gland." (47)

To see more clearly what Sellars means by this, it may be helpful here to examine the differences which he conceives to exist between mind and consciousness. The chief point of distinction, as far as I can make it out, is that mind with its sets and habits is relatively permanent and enduring, whereas consciousness, is, on the other hand, essentially of a transitory nature. Whereas, moreover, it is entirely possible for a person to lose his consciousness, he does not literally lose his mind, for the mind is actually the brain. Mind, according to Sellars,

> somehow flowers into consciousness, and consciousness seems to function as the means to the growth of the mind. (48)

As distinguished from consciousness, the mind is

> the tremendously complex system of sub-systems gradually built up during the lifetime of the individual upon the foundation, and with the assistance of, congenital capacities. (49)

Such in its essentials, then, is Sellars' solution to what he so often refers as the "mind-body" problem. It is interesting to note that for him this problem was (in its historical formulations) a pseudo-problem. Now that our concept of the physical

---

(47) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 273.
(48) Critical Realism, p. 251.
(49) Critical Realism, p. 252.

has (in the light of evolutionary science) been "enlarged," the problem itself, i.e., of inter-relating consciousness, mind, and body, is virtually non-existent. The mind *is* the brain, and consciousness itself is a functional variant within the brain.

Little wonder (in Sellars' opinion) that in the past a mechanical interpretation of physical systems gave rise to a dualistic conception of mind and body. Little wonder, too, that a purely mechanical interpretation of mind and consciousness, set forth by the earlier naturalists, was susceptible to the attacks of the idealists. Yet evolutionary naturalism with its stress upon the principle of internal organization has (in Sellars' opinion) mediated and transcended these traditional conflicts. The "Nature" of the contemporary naturalist is no longer one of a dead-level system of mechanical laws; rather it is intrinsically dynamic, originating within itself "grades of causality as it evolves." (50) This being the case

> there is no adequate reason to deny that the physical world rises to the level of purposive activity and that consciousness is an immanently produced variant in such a physical system. (51)

---

(50) *Critical Realism*, p. 235.
(51) *Critical Realism*, p. 236.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NATURALISM OF SELLARS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

Consistently with the principles of method laid down in the opening pages of Chapter V, I shall attempt to examine here from a critical point of view those features of Sellars' ontology that have been set forth in the last two chapters, relating a) to his method of approach, b) to his doctrine of emergence, and c) to the application of that doctrine to what Sellars entitles the mind-body problem, or to what we have referred to as the "problem of man."

The purpose of our analysis in Chapter VI was, in the main, to show how the critical realism of Sellars comprises what for him is the foundation of his doctrine in ontology. We have seen how (from a negative point of view) the leading conclusions of his epistemology provide him with a basis both for rejecting the reductive materialism of the past (as well as any and all of the forms of idealism) and for establishing a negative defense of his own position. From a positive point of view, we have seen how the application of these same conclusions to the age-old problems of ontology supply him with the theoretical groundwork for the development of a new type of naturalism which is adjusted to the exigencies of contemporary science. All of this constitutes what I have generically entitled Sellars' distinctive method of approach to a naturalist ontology.

With reference to the validity of his approach, we must first note the fact that the ontology of Sellars is in very large measure causally dependent upon the conclusions of his critical realism. In view of this fact, it might be argued here that the philosophic rejection in Chapter V of those conclusions (as well as the principles upon which they rest) is in itself sufficient grounds for invalidating their application to the problems of

ontology. Yet apart from all of this, I think it advisable to bring to the fore a few points of criticism which should serve to indicate in an even more explicit manner the fundamental fallacy latent in Sellars' attempt to extend the methods of science to the perennial problems of philosophy. The fallacy to which I am here referring is the belief that the problems of philosophy are convertible with the problems of science, and are, for that reason, no different in kind from the problems of science.

Here, as I see it, is where the main point of issue lies between traditional scholastic thought and contemporary naturalism which is (in Sellars' own language) "isomorphic with science." (1) What, in short, is philosophy, and how (having determined the answer to this question) do its methods differ from those of science, or are they essentially the same?

Obviously enough, for the naturalist, the methods of philosophy essentially are (or should be) what the methods of the sciences are, i.e., methods of an exclusively empirical sort. Philosophy itself is, accordingly, essentially what science is (though on a broader plane), - an inquiry into the causes of natural events. Now what I would insist upon here as a basic point of criticism is the logical priority of the question of the nature of philosophic inquiry over that concerning the use of method. What I chiefly have reference to here is the fact that naturalism has traditionally strongly declared itself in favor of the use of scientific method irrespective of the subject matter with which it deals.

In the cause of scientific accuracy, we must first of all allow that for Sellars, at least, the naturalistic principle of

---

(1) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 363.

the continuity of analysis (i.e., the universal validity of empirical verification)(2), is something more than a mere dogma, for it has its foundations in his critical realism. Secondly, we must take into account the fundamental truth of his statement that "at the root of all differences in philosophy, you will find epistemology." (3) But granting all this, is it not true from a strictly objective point of view that the a priori assignment of the methods of the sciences to the problems of philosophy constitutes in itself a blanket rejection of metaphysics in its traditional sense, and is, in the final analysis, a wholesale denial of a truly rational philosophy of being?

In support of my claim for the logical priority of matter over method must it not be conceded that it is axiomatic in science that the method of one's inquiry is to be determined by the subject matter it handles, and not as the naturalist would have it for philosophy, conversely? Certainly, it would be a mistake, let us say, for an experimental psychologist to decide in advance that his method of approach will be along the lines of chemical analysis. The net result of any such attempt would be a failure to understand the very problems of the science which one proposes to investigate. Yet if such is the case with relation to the experimental sciences considered among themselves, is it not true

---

(2) For a clear-cut analysis of the meaning of this principle see Thelma Z. Lavine's "Naturalism and the Sociological Analysis of Knowledge," in Naturalism and the Human Spirit, pp. 183-209. "Continuity of analysis can thus mean only that all analysis must be scientific analysis. Continuity between the 'lower' and the 'higher', between the 'physical' and the 'human,' between the 'biological' and the 'logical' signifies that the mode of inquiry into each of these territories must be experiential." p. 185.

(3) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 235.

a fortiori that a very exact determination be made of a philosophical problem before any specific method is attached to its solution?

It is precisely on this point that Sellars as a typical naturalist goes astray. Having determined in advance (through the instrumentality of his critical realism) that the type of method used in philosophy should be the same in kind as that of the natural sciences, he then proceeds to examine the nature of reality. And what does he find? That there are no ultimate, "hidden" causes behind and beneath the structure of the natural events he examines; even more precisely, that the relations of these events to each other (within the all-inclusive category of Nature) are themselves the ultimate causes which the philosopher seeks.

For the naturalist, then, there is no need to appeal to extranatural causes which lie outside the ambit of our experience. Change, organization, matter, life, consciousness, and mind, - all of these are events intrinsic to the order of Nature itself. Since these events can be explained within their natural context, we need not search any further:

> What, then, are the controlling principles of naturalism? Essentially, those of science: the belief that nature is an all-inclusive spatio-temporal system and that everything which exists and acts in it is a part of this system. In short, naturalism is the expression of the desire for explanation in terms of objects which can be handled and studied in accordance with scientific method and is opposed to what we may roughly call mythology and superhuman agencies of a generally invisible and unlocalizable sort. (4)

---

(4) *Religion Coming of Age*, p. 141.

To render as explicit as possible the basic point of criticism that I have thus far advanced, I should like to point out that the preference which the naturalist expresses for the use of scientific method as against that which implies the use of deduction and philosophical analysis is in itself justifiable, if in the use of that method no attempt is made to offer definitive pronouncements of a metaphysical nature. Naturalism, in other words, if it is considered merely as a tendency, i.e., as an expression of the desire to give an empirical account for the facts of experience by interrelating these facts to each other in the order of their immediate and proximate causes is per se valid. I might even suggest that naturalism considered in this way has much in common with Aristotelian-thomistic thought which heavily stresses the role of secondary causes as genuinely operative in rerum natura. But the consideration of naturalism as it appears, e.g., in the thought of Sellars, i.e., as a claim to ultimate truth is quite another thing.

Now how is it possible, in view of the limitations of scientific method, to maintain, as Sellars does, that his evolutionary account of the world is a completely adequate account? From the standpoint of the limitations which he himself imposes upon human reason, it would seem at the very least, that nothing could be said one way or another whether Nature is an ultimate category. How, in the light of Sellars' critical realism, could it be known to be such? (5) It

---

(5) "The scientist, of course, is perfectly within his right in excluding metaphysical problems from his inquiry...His concern is solely with the description of the phenomenal regularities... The ultimate 'what' and 'why' of things is obviously not discoverable by such a method, and no one who recognizes the distinction between science and philosophy expects the scientist to provide such ultimate explanations." Richard R. Baker, "The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars," New Scholasticism, Vol. 24, (1950) p. 163.

is, moreover, strictly beside the point to argue that Nature is "self-explanatory" on the basis of the fact that it is susceptible to being explained in terms of what actually are its immediate causes. Immediate causes, after all, are not ultimate causes by the very same token that a scientific knowledge of the universe is not a philosophic knowledge. (6) Ultimate causes, in other words, cannot be discovered by the use of scientific method, nor can they be empirically verified, for the simple reason that they lie outside the range of our direct experience. Even abstracting from the question as to whether ultimate causes do or do not exist, it is clear that the naturalist by the use of the method to which he has committed himself is not qualified to offer pronouncements concerning them. The logical outcome of the naturalist attitude should then be agnosticism pure and simple.

Since Sellars, however, is not an agnostic, it is necessary now to embark upon a criticism of some of the actual content of his proposed ontology. Having noted that in principle a purely empirical approach is inadequate to the problem of being as such, we must now see why this is so in praxi. This type of criticism, i.e., of the very content itself, will, I am sure, render more meaningful the criticism suggested above.

Now the test of a sound philosophy is its ability to give an account of the facts of experience, - an account which makes those facts intelligible. This is to say, a truly philosophical account of the facts of experience is such that it does full justice to

---

(6) On this point we have the word of Robert Millikan, one of the noted scientists of our day: "Science has little to say about ultimate causes. Its concern is the observation of phenomena, and the fitting of them together into as comprehensive a theory, or theories, as it can find, primarily for the sake of predicting new facts." Evolution in Science and Religion, p. 53. Underlining is the author's.

and in no way contradicts the universal laws of reason, such as the principle of contradiction, the principle of sufficient reason, and the principle of causality. Can the evolutionary naturalism of Sellars measure up to these tests? Such is the question we now propose to examine.

Since, as we have pointed out in the last chapter, the evolutionary naturalism of Sellars is that of an all-out physical realism, it explicitly proposes to explain the facts of experience, including such significant facts as mind and consciousness, in terms of matter and the properties of matter. Since this is the case, the generic question proposed in the preceding paragraph specifically resolves itself to this: Can our concept of matter be sufficiently "enlarged" so as to include and explain those aspects of reality which have hitherto been explained in terms of a principle or principles distinct from and superior to matter?

Now of all the facts we observe in nature there is one which the philosopher cannot ignore, viz., the fact of change. Since, moreover, Sellars repeatedly insists that the fact of change must be taken seriously into account, and that it is one of the characteristics of an evolutionary naturalism to do just that, it is no more than fair that we should examine this claim.

When Sellars maintains that

> Aristotelian hylomorphism must be stood on its head, as the Marxists say of Hegel, by so changing the conception of matter that it includes form and activity (7)

he is suggesting that the ultimate cause of change is matter itself. "Matter," in other words, "must by its very nature be active." (8)

---

(7) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 371.
(8) Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance, p. 364.

Now if what Sellars maintains is true, viz., that matter is intrinsically dynamic, it follows that we need not look beyond it for our explanation of change.

Prima facie it would appear that Sellars is right, for what is the reality of change, i.e., as regards the physical world, if it is not the reality of matter in motion. Restricting ourselves, i.e., to a purely empirical approach to the problem of change, it would seem offhand that change is an elementary fact in nature which somehow must be assigned to matter as one of its internal features or properties. Yet it is here that the real problem of change in its philosophic setting comes to the fore. For how is it possible to maintain that matter which is also the subject of change is at one and the same time the originative source of the changes it undergoes?

It is clear that matter as we experience it, i.e., secondary matter, has a dual or composite nature which somehow implies the distinction of a determining principle and a determinable stuff. Yet to maintain, as Sellars does, that matter is intrinsically dynamic and active, is to ignore the fact that it is capable of being determined (either substantially or accidentally) precisely as the subject of change. At the very least, then, it would seem necessary to hold that a material substance, or what Sellars would call a "physical existent," is in itself a composition of two intrinsic principles, respectively known in scholastic thought as primary matter and form.

In order, moreover, for a change to take place, it is necessary for the subject which undergoes the change to receive a new determination from a being that is capable of conferring it, i.e.,

an efficient cause. It is an open contradiction to avow that a substance can determine itself. Yet the belief so essential to the ontology of Sellars, that new physical systems under favorable conditions periodically arise, and that by reason of the inner capacities of matter, is in itself in open violation of the rational demand for an originative cause of the change. "Inner capacities," "favorable conditions," and such like are not in themselves sufficient to account for the rise in nature of new physical systems. The fact of novelty, in other words, cannot be accepted, as Sellars maintains it must, as a "brutal factuality in nature." Indeed, it is in the very absence of any intelligible account of this fact upon which the entire theory of emergence rests that evolutionary naturalism as a philosophic view of the world must be regarded as little more than a wishful assumption.

To resort, moreover, as Sellars does, to the plea that "novelty in the modern sense is always a relative beginning" (9) is to argue in a manner that is strictly beside the point. For admitting the need of a real subjective capacity as being a conditio sine qua non of a change, there is nevertheless required the causality of an agent which actualizes the subject of a change. A thing cannot, as the scholastic axiom has it, reduce

---

(9) Realism and Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 151.

itself from potency to act. (10)

With respect to the question of the origin of the universe, Sellars consistently upholds the view that there is no need to "assume a beginning for reality." He interprets the denial of this assumption, moreover, as being in itself a sufficient refutation of the "so-called cosmological argument to a First Cause" of St. Thomas:

> Science and philosophy no longer tend to assume a First Cause...If change is an event <u>in</u> nature, may not both change and nature always have been? And, in our human minds, we can go backwards in thought from effect to cause indefinitely. An indefinite series is quite thinkable, and any stoppage would be a matter of arbitrary fiat. Neither science nor philosophy, then, assume

---

(10) There is nothing in the scholastic doctrine of change to suggest that the change itself in some mysterious sense lies outside the being which undergoes the change. Change, in other words, is an event <u>in</u> nature. What the doctrine does imply, however, is the need for a determining agency, an efficient cause or causes (whether personal or impersonal) which effects the change. The need for the presence of an efficient cause (which as St. Thomas, following Aristotle, maintains must be immediately conjoined to its proper effect, <u>Summa Theologica</u> I, Q.8, a.1,c.), is evidenced by the fact that nothing can reduce itself from potency to act, whether in the sense of achieving a new kind of being (substantial change) or in the sense of acquiring further determinations in the same order of being (accidental change.) Indeed, it is on this very point that traditional scholasticism raises one of its chief objections to any and all of the forms of pan-evolutionism, whose primary postulate is the unquestioning acceptance of change as an empirical fact, which does not (from a philosophical point of view) require any further explanation. In the absence of any such explanation evolutionism is content merely to describe the different types of change which it empirically encounters and note the various conditions which attach thereto. Now it is precisely in the absence of a <u>philosophical</u> explanation of change that any further conclusions which evolutionism draws, because they fail to reach the very heart of the matter, are of necessity <u>praeter rem</u>.

> any absolute beginning for reality. Stars are born as well as die within a universe of simultaneous construction and destruction. Evolution and devolution are like two currents which flow side by side. This new outlook cuts the ground from underneath the arguments of St. Thomas. (11)

Now granting that change is an event in nature, it is an event the philosopher must take into account -- an effect, that is, which requires an intelligible explanation. Granting, moreover, the conceivability of an indefinite series of movers and moved extending into the past, the point of the argument, as St. Thomas proposed it, is to explain the very source of the motion itself. Consequently, the "new outlook" which Sellars proposes is as old as the argument itself, and is, as we have just noted, irrelevant.

The argument from motion, then, is not, as Sellars would have it, based upon the supposed inconceivability of an eternal series of movers and moved; it is based rather upon the proposition that it is impossible to proceed ad infinitum in a series of movers and moved which are actually and essentially subordinate:

> It is impossible for motion to find its completely sufficient reason or its first cause in a series of past movers, even if the series were ab aeterno, since each of these movers was itself set in motion by another. If this series is eternal, or had no beginning, it is eternally insufficient, for it has not within itself a sufficient reason for existing... Therefore we are dealing with movers which actually exert an influence upon one another and which are essentially subordinated one to the other. Thus the moon attracts the bodies which surround it, and is itself attracted by the earth; the earth, in turn, is attracted by the sun, and the sun has some other center of attraction. We cannot go on indefinitely

---

(11) Religion Coming of Age, p. 212. Underlining is the author's.

> in this ascending series. If, indeed, each of these movers essentially subordinated to one another, receives an impetus which it transmits to another, in such a manner that there is no prime mover which is the source of motion... then there never will be any motion. (12)

From the argument given above it is clear that the scholastic demand for the existence of a First Mover (or as Sellars would have it, for a First Cause) is not, as the naturalist conceives it to be, an appeal which is extraneous to the data of experience, for

> the realities with which metaphysics deals lie, all of them, beyond our experience, but are implied in our experience. So, too, the self-existent first cause lies outside the reach of natural experience, but yet... it is implied in our experience and is required to give a meaning to the things that do lie within our experience. (13)

If, moreover, the argument for the existence of God from motion is valid, the doctrine of absolute evolution (whatever its form) is refuted, for the one fact upon which it relies above all the rest, i.e., the fact of change, is in the evolutionary scheme of things unexplained. Although, therefore, there is little reason to doubt that the evolutionism of Sellars does take seriously the fact that there are changes, many changes, in the world about us, it never comes to grip with the basic problem of change itself so as to render that fact intelligible.

As we have indicated, moreover, in the preceding chapter, the theory of emergence, as Sellars proposes it, is ultimately forced somehow to identify being with becoming, since matter for Sellars is both <u>esse</u> and the subject of change -- change

---

(12) R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., <u>God His Existence and Nature</u> (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), Vol. I, pp. 382-3. Underlining is the author's.

(13) John F. McCormack S.J., <u>Natural Theology</u> (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1943), p. 58.

being in his own language "the process side of being." (14) Now is not such a contention a very contradiction in terms? If matter is *esse*, its nature is then to be, to exist. (15) But becoming or change, if it has any meaning at all, always implies a relative non-existence or potency. The terminus of a thing which is becoming is that it *be*. How, then, can matter which (in Sellars' opinion) by its very nature *is* be intelligibly spoken of also as becoming? Clearly, if matter is *esse*, the reality of change (which is the reality of matter in motion) must then be denied. That which essentially *is* cannot *become*. Matter, on such an assumption, simply could not have a "process side." If, on the other hand, change must be taken seriously, as Sellars claims it must, then the only remaining alternative is to accept the contingency of matter, and in accepting the contingency of matter, we prepare the way for the proofs of the existence of God. (16)

---

(14) *Reformed Materialism and Instrinsic Endurance*. p. 374.

(15) "In our human experience, there is no thing whose essence it is 'to be'...The definition of no empirically given thing is existence; hence its essence is not existence, but existence must be conceived as distinct from it...If the nature of no known thing is 'to be', the nature of no known thing contains in itself the sufficient reason for its own existence. But it points to the sole conceivable cause...whose very essence it is 'to be.' To posit such a being whose essence is a pure act of existing, that is, whose essence is not to be that or that, but 'to be', is also to posit the Christian God as the supreme cause of the universe." Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), pp. 70-2.

(16) It may be interesting to note, by the way, that the identification by Sellars of matter with *esse* is virtually an attempt to identify matter with God Himself. The argument, therefore, which St. Thomas uses to show that God cannot be a body is not unrelated to the purpose of our critical inquiry: "The first being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality. For although in any single thing which passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to the actuality, nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality is reduced to actuality only by some being in actuality. Now it has already been proved that God is the First Being...But every body is in potentiality, because the continuous as such is divisible to infinity. It is, therefore, impossible that God should be a body." *Summa Theologica*, Q.3, a.2,c.

Proceeding now to an examination of the so-called "mind-body" problem, it is clear first of all that the affirmation of the radical immanence of the human animal in nature is one of the leading applications of Sellars' doctrine of emergent evolution. Man is so part and parcel of the framework of nature that even the supposedly "spiritual" aspects of his being are simply different modes and manifestations of the marvelous fecundity of the nature from which he sprang. Knowledge itself is nature on the "level" of conscious existence. Not that nature itself qua nature is conscious, but consciousness is one of the forms into which it has significantly evolved, and that by reason of the inestimable variety of events capable (under favorable conditions) of springing forth from this universal well-spring. The naturalism of Sellars, then, in relation to the problem of man, is an attempt to

> penetrate more deeply into the life of nature and follow it, as it were, from level to level until it rises into mind and consciousness. (17)

Thus it is, too, that the physical realism of Sellars involves a conception of man as a minded organism. The mind for him is the brain, and consciousness one of its "qualitative dimensions."

Now it is clear from what we have said in the preceding chapter that this doctrine is in large measure an attempt to dispense with for once and for all the artificial conception of man (inspired by Descartes) which regards him mainly as a thinking substance endowed with a body. Considered as such, the "physicalism" of Sellars is (and this is to regard it in its most favorable light) an attempt to restore what must be regarded as a fact of experience, viz., the unity of man's nature. If man is, as

---

(17) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 191.

Cartesian dualism presents him, a thinking substance that is artificially linked to a mechanical system called the body, how is it possible to explain the fact that man is a self who thinks, acts, feels, and responds to the problems and needs of his physical and social environment?

Since, however, the rejection of one philosopher's opinion is not in itself a proof of one's own, the burden of proof rests with Sellars to establish his belief that the mind is the brain, and that consciousness is its qualitative event. Now the attempted proof of this position lies, as we have already seen, in Sellars' double-knowledge theory of the brain.

Recalling the basic tenet of his critical realism, that knowledge essentially is an affirmation of a physical existent, rather than an intuitive glimpse into its very nature, it is clear that for Sellars the only way in which we know physical systems is in this external manner, i.e., from the outside. The brain likewise is known in this way. But our knowledge of the brain, unlike that of other physical systems, is not restricted to this type of knowledge alone, for it is by means of consciousness that we literally are "on the inside" of the brain. Therefore, the brain is the mind, and consciousness its qualitative event.

Now this theory, taken as an argument, is, as far as I can see, a petitio principii from start to finish. For granting in the first place that consciousness is not a substance, and secondly, that we are intuitively aware of our own conscious states, what warranty is there on this account for Sellars' belief either that the mind is the brain or that consciousness is its function? Allowing that the functioning of the brain is a necessary condition for the event of consciousness, it is not

by means of consciousness that we become aware, not of the brain as such, or of the mind as such, but rather of ourselves as existing? The question, moreover, as to what the self is remains (from the standpoint of consciousness alone) very much an open question which can be decided only by an analysis of those vital acts which distinctively human behavior reveals.

From what we have said thus far, it is clear that the brain-mind theory of Sellars is based partly on the supposition that a monistic interpretation of man is the only plausible alternative that remains, once we have rejected Cartesian dualism in one or another of its many varieties. It is based partly also on the assumption, so common to all materialists, that, because the mind is dependent upon the brain, the mind is the brain. (18)

Now granting with Sellars that the mind-body problem is a pseudo-problem, if we are given to understand by mind, as Descartes did, a substance which exists in its own right, do not the very facts of the situation itself in regard to man's nature require the admission of some kind of dualism other than one of its Cartesian varieties?

In view of certain kinds of activities which man, unlike other "physical existents," can and does perform, the scholastic philosopher is forced by the evidence to attribute to him a principle of being, a form, whose nature is commensurate with

---

(18) "A complex piece of matter, called the brain is the organ or instrument of mind or consciousness;...if it be stimulated, mental activity results;...if it be injured or destroyed no mental activity is possible...Suppose we grant all this, what then? We have granted that brain is the means whereby mind is made manifest...it is the instrument through which we know it,...but not that mind is limited to its material manifestation." Sir Oliver Lodge, Life and Matter (New York: D. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906) p. 93-4.

these activities, notably those which pertain to thinking and volition. (19)

Man, in other words, is, like everything else in nature, a composite both of matter and form. But because the activities which he can elicit are different in kind than any of those observable in the operations of physical nature, the form which the scholastic attributes to him is one of a higher order. On

---

(19) For an excellent analysis of human thought and volition as being activities of the sort which are commensurate only with a spiritual principle (the human soul), see Michael Maher S.J., Psychology (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1915), especially Cahpters xii, xix, and xxi. "The human soul is the subject or source of various spiritual activities; but the subject or source of spiritual activities must itself be a spiritual being...An effect cannot transcend its cause: no action can contain more perfection or a higher order of reality than is possessed by the being which is the entire source of that action... 1) The spirituality of thought. We are capable of apprehending and representing to ourselves abstract and universal ideas, such as justice, unity, man, triangle; we can form notions of spiritual being, e.g., of God; we can understand necessary truths; we can comprehend possibilities as such; and we can perceive the rational relations between ideas, and the logical sequence of conclusion from premises... Such operations as these are spiritual phenomena, which must accordingly proceed from a spiritual faculty. They could not be states of a faculty exerted through, or intrinsically dependent on, a bodily organ. A power of this kind can only react in response to physical impressions, can only form representations of a concrete character, depicting contingent individual facts...2) The Will...A merely sentient agent... can only desire sensible goods. It can only seek what is proportioned to its nature, and this is always reducible to organic pleasure or avoidance of pain. On the other hand, to a spiritual creature which is endowed also with inferior faculties, both sensuous and supersensuous good is adapted. Therefore, the aspirations of the latter are unlimited, while those of the former are confined within the sphere of material well-being. But our own consciousness, history, biography, and the existence of poetry and romance, all overwhelm us with evidence of the fact that man is moved by suprasensible good. Consequently, there must be a principle in man not completely subject to material conditions." -- pp. 469-73. See also Contra Gentiles, B. II, Chap. 49.

the principle that the activities of a thing are a sign of what its nature is, the scholastic concludes that, because certain activities in man are strictly of an immaterial kind, so too the principle from which they proceed. The determining principle, therefore, of the nature of man is one which is immaterial, and this is traditionally called the soul. I have selected the following quotation from St. Thomas as being at one and the same time an irrefutable proof of the immateriality of the human soul as well as devastating criticism of Sellars' brain-mind theory:

> It must necessarily be allowed that the principle of intellectual operation, which we call the soul of man, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent. For it is clear that by means of the intellect man can know all corporeal things. Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature, because that which is in it naturally would impede the knowledge of anything else. Thus we observe that a sick man's tongue, being unbalanced by a feverish and bitter humor, is insensible to anything sweet, and everything seems bitter to it. Therefore, if the intellectual principle contained within itself the nature of any body, it would be unable to know all bodies. Now every body has its own determinate nature. Therefore, it is impossible for the intellectual principle to be a body. It is also impossible for it to understand by means of a bodily organ, since the determinate nature of that organ would likewise impede knowledge of all bodies...Therefore the intellectual principle, which we call the mind or the intellect has essentially an operation in which the body does not share. Now only that which subsists in itself can have an operation in itself... We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called intellect or mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent. (20)

Here it is extremely important to note that in the thomistic conception of man, the soul is not, as it is sometimes thought to be, a superimposed entity from without which is only acciden-

---

(20) Summa Theologica I, Q.75, a.2, c.

tally conjoined to the body. To anyone who has only an elementary acquaintance with the doctrine of St. Thomas, it is clear that for St. Thomas and his followers man is a substantial union of body and soul. The individual self or Ego is neither body nor soul, but the unity of the composite. (21) In view of this fact it must be maintained that it is never the mind which thinks, or the body which acts, for man is what his total nature is and acts in accordance with that nature:

> The soul is the ultimate principle whereby man lives and understands, but it is man himself that is the ultimate subject of operation. Man is not his soul nor is he an accidental unity of an intellective soul and a body, but is one being substantially; for, while the soul is the mover of the body, it is primarily the formal cause of the body, giving it its proper existence. (22)

Enough has been said at least to indicate what the thomistic approach to the problem of man is -- an approach which is clearly consistent, not only with the basic requirements of metaphysical analysis, but with the demands of human experience itself. That the naturalism of Sellars, on the other hand, as applied to the problem of man is inadequate to account (among other things) for the fact of human intelligence as an operation distinct from and superior to the activities of sense is a point which we need hardly further examine. Man, indeed, is a part of nature, but the immanence of man in nature can never obscure the fact of this transcendent superiority to any of the

---

(21) "Man...is neither his body, since the body subsists only by the soul, nor his soul, since this would remain destitute without the body: he is the unity of a soul which substantializes the body and of the body in which this soul subsists." Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 188.

(22) John P. Rowan, The Soul, A Translation of St. Thomas Aquinas' De Anima (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1949), from the Translator's Preface, p. v.

properties to be found in matter. Any attempt, therefore, to "enlarge" our notion of the physical so as to include within it those distinctive activities which characterize the workings of human intelligence and human free will is ultimately destined to lead, not only to a violation of the laws of reason, but to a distortion of the facts themselves.

Granting, then, that the naturalist's opposition to dualism is, at least from the standpoint of its motive, an initially sound reaction (entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessitate), it is a reaction that is based upon a misunderstanding of what a true dualistic system involves. The naturalist in his opposition to dualism should recall that there is a dualism of distinction which through a process of subordination preserves the integrity of the natural order of things. Dualism, however, as it has appeared in modern times, establishing as it does an antagonism between mind and matter, is a dualism which disjoins and separates these as two contrary and opposing principles of reality. Any attempt, therefore, to establish a relationship between them will at best, like the occasionalism of Malebranche, the psycho-physical parallelism of Spinoza, or the pre-established harmony of Leibnitz be both arbitrary and artificial. Nor will such an attempt be borne out by the testimony of human experience.

One of the greatest mistakes, in my opinion, on the part of contemporary naturalists, such as Sellars, is their failure to examine scholastic dualism on its own grounds and merits. This failure has led inevitably to the fateful misunderstanding that the doctrine of Aquinas is only one or another of the varieties of idealism, or, what is perhaps worse, a prototype of the dualism of Descartes. To any impartial observer it is

clear that the dualism of St. Thomas is a dualism of matter and form which unites and integrates these two principles of being in a manner which does full justice to the relationships existing between them, whether the composite is organic or inorganic, whether it is human or non-human. We have seen that the soul, for instance, which is the form of the human body, is not opposed to it, but stands in relation to it as the higher to the lower principle. Matter and form, then, are not two principles of strife and opposition, but rather of harmony and (to use a modern phrase) "inter-operational agreement."

By way of conclusion, then, to the points we have examined in this chapter, may I remark that, although the naturalists' reaction to the type of dualism that has (under the influence of Descartes) prevailed in modern times is in itself understandable enough, it is a reaction, nevertheless, which swings too far in the other direction.

If the points of this critical analysis are philosophically sound, it must be held in the first place that there must be at least a dualism of distinction between the method of approach which the philosopher employs as against that of the purely empirical approach of the specialized scientist. Granting that an empirical approach is sound as far as it goes, and that such an approach is necessary as a starting point in philosophy, it is not in itself adequate to the solution of the real problems of philosophy.

Secondly, if we seriously accept the fact of change, it is clear that there must be a dualism of matter and form in physical things to render the fact of change intelligible. It is necessary, moreover, in accounting for the fact of change to make adequate

provision for the efficient cause of the change, and (for that matter) the final cause as well.

The fact, moreover, that the assignment to matter of both *esse* and *fieri* is in itself a contradiction in terms implies the need for the acceptance of a dualism between a being which exists by Its very nature (viz., God) and physical reality which is constantly subject to the laws of change.

Lastly, in applying the doctrine of matter and form to man, we have seen the need for admitting that the form of man, his soul, is (contrary to the "brain-mind" theory of Sellars) immaterial and spiritual.

From all of this it is clear that, despite the insistence which Sellars places upon the non-reductionist type of analysis which evolutionary naturalism employs, naturalism, whatever its form, whether it be mechanical or evolutionary, is but a caricature of what a true philosophy must be -- a rational interpretation of the facts of experience. Naturalism is, whether regarded either from the standpoint of its methods or of its contents, by its very nature, reductionist.

SECTION C

THE NATURALISM OF SELLARS: HIS HUMANISM

CHAPTER NINE

HUMAN LIFE AND HUMAN VALUES

Although the problems with which we have dealt in the preceding chapters are those which (more than any others) have occupied the thinking of Sellars in the evolution of his naturalism, it would be a serious omission on our part were we not to devote at least one chapter to a consideration of his position as it relates to the problem of human values. The reader will here recall some of the remarks that have already been made in the first chapter concerning the trend in contemporary naturalistic thought toward a new type of humanism. Sellars himself is no exception in this regard.

In contrast, then, to the older type of naturalism, which made little or no provision for the distinctively religious, ethical, cultural, and social aspects of human behavior, naturalism in its contemporary phase has devoted a considerable amount of attention to the meaning and significance of values. It is in view of this fact that the traditional objections raised by the idealists against naturalism with respect to the question of values are (from the standpoint of the contemporary naturalist) no longer to be considered as relevant. The reader will here recall the attempt that was made in the first chapter to show how the naturalist of today is even taking the offensive against the idealist on the grounds that the naturalization of values is the only way in which they can be rendered distinctively human.

Before considering Sellars' position with respect to different types of values, i.e., values taken in the concrete, it will be necessary first of all to devote our attention to his abstract analysis of the nature of value itself. What, in short, are values? Are they a peculiar property of things or do they

reside only in the judgments that we make concerning them? If the latter is the case, how does a value-judgment differ from one that is strictly cognitional? These are some of the leading questions which relate to the purpose of our present inquiry.

Sellars maintains that there are two extremes with respect to the question of values, one position maintaining that they are wholly objective, the other that they are entirely relative to the person or group that does the evaluating, and are, for that reason, subjective. The position which Sellars himself maintains is, as he puts it,

> as objective a view of value as possible...I shall treat it as an interpretation of an object as having the capacity to enter human life with certain consequences of importance to the self or the social group...Certainly, we are in some sense interpreting objects when we value them and we also feel that we can make mistakes in our valuation. And yet it seems to be undeniable that, in valuing objects, we take into account factors which we would not use in cognition. It is for this reason, I take it, that physical science does not discover value as a property of objects. (1)

It is clear, then, that for Sellars values are not, as they are sometimes supposed to be, strictly objective. That is to say, they are not "properties of objects." To think of them in this way is to fall heir to a type of naive realism which is very much analogous to the naive realism which Sellars rejects in his epistemology. The belief that values are "properties of objects" is a carry-over from the Platonic tradition of an absolute good-in-itself, concerning which Sellars has this to say:

---

(1) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 445. Underlining is the author's.

> It seems to be even harder to believe in good-in-itself than in universals of the logical sort. Ethical Platonism is to me less meaningful than logical Platonism. (2)

There have been some, on the other hand, who have been so much impressed by the role which affections, feelings, sentiments, and desires play in the assignment of values that for them values are, all of them, of a strictly relative nature. Values are, in other words, (according to this view) exclusively a matter of taste, concerning which, as the traditional saying goes, there can be no matter of dispute. The tendency to regard values in this subjective way is for Sellars a form of ethical and social positivism which he himself labels as "factualism:"

> By factualism in value-theory, I have in mind the acceptance of valuation as a brute fact with respect to which the question of validity and adequacy cannot be raised. (3)

For the factualist the question of that which ought to be, whether in regard to religion, ethics, politics, or art, is a meaningless one for

> factualism as such merely announces any response and does not involve principles of criticism and improvement...A reaction is simply an historical fact. (4)

Disclaiming the inadequacy, then, both of absolutism and mere factualism in value-theory, Sellars presents his own position which attempts to mediate these two extremes. (5) The

---

(2) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 458.
(3) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 451.
(4) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 475.
(5) "What I shall be trying to do, in short, will be to develop a via media between Platonism, on the one hand, and merely affective subjectivism, on the other." Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?, p. 30.

method of approach which he uses is by way of an analysis of our value-judgments. (6) As against a strictly objective interpretation of our value-judgments, Sellars points out that a value-predicate as applied to a given object is never to be construed as an interpretation of the object as it is in itself. Value-predicates, in other words, although they actually have an objective basis and an objective point of reference, are always an interpretation of objects in a manner that is relevant to our own lives:

> In valuation we are not trying to do the same kind of thing as in explicit cognition. In both cases we are dealing with objects, but not in the same way...(7) Valuing does not have the same intention as the act of knowing. In valuing we are seeking to appraise the object in the light of its bearing upon our lives as witnessed to by desires and sentiments. (8)

Since the above distinction between a value-judgment and one which is strictly cognitional comprises the very heart of Sellars' approach to the entire problem of values, it will be well to make it as explicit as possible. A judgment which is strictly cognitional is one in which, as Sellars frequently points out, the knower interprets the object from an impersonal point of view. Since, in this type of judgment, the aim of the knower is simply to know, "there is no need of a reference to the knower." (9) The end, in other words, of a cogaltional

---

(6) "The method I shall use will be that of working out the differences between cognitional judgment and value-judgments." Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?, p. 30.
(7) Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism, p. 284.
(8) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 473.
(9) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 473.

judgment is a knowledge of the object for its own sake. (10) Not so, however, in the case of a value-judgment, since here the predicate applies to the object only from the standpoint of its capacity for entering into our lives. That is, we are interpreting the object in a manner which is entirely dependent upon and relevant to our own personal interests and social objectives:

> What may be called intrinsic values really has no meaning. Is not value always with respect to? Is not a thing good because it is such that it can enter significantly someone's life? I confess that this is the way it seems to me. A good which is not a good for someone strikes me as meaningless. (11)

There is one further point I should like to make clear (a point already touched upon) before treating the more concrete aspects of Sellars' humanism. Because of the emphasis which he places upon the relational aspect of our value-judgments, it is not to be thought on this account that the selection of values is for Sellars a purely arbitrary process. There are many instances in which he allows for the fact that values do have a fundamentum in re. Although there is no clear-cut indication as to what this fundamentum might be, his acceptance of it as a fact is clear from the following passage:

> It is clear that evaluation is a process of a determinate type which aims at adequacy. It does not regard itself as arbitrary, nor is it satisfied with subjective individualism. After all, do we not feel that individuals are basically more alike than they sometimes suppose?...It is at this point that the inadequacy of mere factualism in the field of values is to be found...It disregards the possibility of new knowledge and creative

---

(10) "In pure knowledge we stand off from things and contemplate them, withstrain ourselves, withhold our passions and sentiments." R. W. Sellars, "Cognition and Valuation," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 35, (1926) p. 136. Underlining is author's.

(11) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 459.

> development in our experience. It makes the self fixed and closed both as regards knowledge, and as regards artistic, moral, and, in general, spiritual resources. (12)

Proceeding now to a fuller analysis of Sellars' humanism as it relates to values in the concrete, it is necessary first of all to make a few observations concerning what might be designated as the guiding spirit behind the humanistic movement. The leading assumption, or what the humanists themselves might prefer to regard as a scientifically gounded belief, is the thought that human intelligence is too valuable a treasure to be squandered in the contemplation of a metaphysical other-world which, together with the values it represents, cannot be empirically verified. The values which naturalistic humanism proposes are characteristically human values of here-and-now existence. It is in the full realization of these values, whether individual or social, that all the efforts of human intelligence should skillfully be devoted.

In this connection, too, it is important to note that the humanist is extremely resentful of the accusation that he has no ideals, or that he has no regard for ethical standards. (13) He maintains, on the contrary, that in the long run his ideals,

---

(12) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 454.

(13) "What I protest against is the parody of naturalism that it is usually involved in the claim that it involves the reduction of ethical notionsto non-ethical ones. Surely this is part of the old reductive position." Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?, p. 30. Again: "Modern materialism is, in its ethical implications, neither sensate nor reductive, but humanistically secular." R. W. Sellars, "Social Philosophy and the American Scene," in Philosophy for the Future, p. 73. Note Irwin Edman's very forceful statement of the humanistic outlook: "One does not need a certificate from another world to justify an ideal in this one. The ideal itself is human and natural and the grounds of the certification are human and natural too." Four Ways of Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937) pp. 292-3.

because they are realistically conceived, are the only ones that will eventually lead to the real improvement of man. The ideals of the humanist are, in other words, the only ones worthy of aspiration, because they are the only ones capable of achievement.

When, however, we come to a specific examination of the humanistic credo with a view toward discovering what the ideals it proposes actually are, i.e., what its values are in the concrete, we find that we are confronted with no easy task, for the program of humanistic naturalism is, despite its claims, characterized more by a consisteney of denial than one of affirmation. (14) In accordance, however, with the basic postulate of his naturalist ontology, i.e., that nature is an ultimate category, it is clear that for Sellars the locus and center of values is human life itself, i.e., understood as a part of nature. (15) Sellars as a humanist makes it known that contemporary naturalism

> is opposed to any other criterion of human value and policy than human needs and aspirations. It combats all forms of authoritarianism in morals and arts, opposes reduction of ethics to mere formalism, and rejects the appeal to any supposed extra-natural source of values. (16)

From the above passage it is clear that naturalistic humanism (or, as Sellars sometimes calls it, "reformed materialism") stands for a complete secularization of human values. Since, as we have seen in a previous paragraph, Sellars completely denies

---

(14) See "A Humanist Manifesto" signed by such men as Burtt, Dewey, Randall, Reiser, and Sellars. This Manifesto was first published in the May-June, 1933, issue of The New Humanist. Its fifteen theses are re-published in Werkmeister's History of Philosophical Ideas in America, pp. 580-1.

(15) "Human life is located in nature rather than apart from nature." Cognition and Valuation, p. 139.

(16) Philosophy for the Future, Forward p. ix.

a transcendental source of values, a good-in-itself, values are for him strictly empirical, and for that reason must be worked out within the category of man's temporal existence:

> The new naturalism must contain within itself the new humanism. It must be humanism which comprehends in the concrete that man's aims and satisfactions are not alien to his environment, but grow from it and secure their meaning from this setting. (17)

Since man in the humanistic scheme of things is an evolved product of his natural environment, the traditional idea of the human soul as an immaterial substance must be discarded. The doctrine of Epicurus which regarded the soul as "a complex of atoms which disintegrate after death when no longer held together by the fleshy wrappings of the body," (18) though "technically inaccurate," was sound at least in principle. Yet

> how different this soul is from the integrated complex of neuronic systems which modern materialism is beginning to identify with the soul. (19)

Although Sellars allows that he has "no objection to immortality if the facts permit us to believe in it," (20) there is no serious doubt as to what his own mind is on this all-important question. For him the belief in a life after death is ascribable partly to the fact that "many people love life very intensely and do not like to think of utter annihilation." (21) This desire, moreover, for a life after death, which "in the beginning, is indistinguishable from the impulse of self-preservation," (22) i.e., from the animal

---

(17) Emergence of Naturalism, p. 338.
(18) Emergence of Naturalism, p. 322.
(19) Emergence of Naturalism, p. 322.
(20) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 474.
(21) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 473.
(22) Religion Coming of Age, p. 181.

will-to-live, is a longing which "can be cultivated, and there is no doubt that Christianity has cultivated that longing." (23)

Now what Sellars, as a typical humanist, finds particularly undesirable about the belief in the immortality of the soul is that this belief has sought to sanction morality in terms of future punishments and rewards. Such a perspective is, from the standpoint of the humanist, unfortunate because it tends to ignore the fact that morality has its natural sanctions, both individual and social. It fails to consider, moreover, the unexplored possibilities which lie in the realm of purely natural existence:

> Perhaps, if from the first we thought of ourselves as purely mortal, the thought of immortality would trouble us less. We would accept life as it is and seek to make the most of it in its various seasons. (24)

In answer to the question as to whether religion can dispense with the belief in immortality, Sellars has this to say:

> It is my persuasion that it can, but that it must frankly and intelligently reorientate itself to this life. It must hunt out positive values whose furtherance is worth while. It must acquire a sense for life rather than for death. The salvation it must stress is not the semi-magical salvation of disembodied souls shrinking on the brink of an unknown eternity peopled with terrific powers but a salvation which consists in making the most of life here and now in a creative and adventurous way. (25)

---

(23) Religion Coming of Age, p. 181. For Sellars "the significant motives back of our belief in immortality are...(1) the dislike for annihilation; (2) the desire to meet again those we have loved; (3) the hope for a dramatic display of justice; and (4) the craving for a persistence of human values." Religion Coming of Age, p. 197.
(24) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 473.
(25) Religion Coming of Age, p. 200.

Proceeding now to a consideration of morality, the position of Sellars, as far as I can detect it, is basically that of a vague sort of humanitarianism which finds its expression in "intelligent living, the living which will give the kind of self you are the most satisfaction in the kind of society you are in." (26) Since, moreover, the term "spiritual" in its traditional usage implies values of an other-worldly sort, it is necessary that it should be re-interpreted by the humanistic naturalist "as referring to human sympathy, intelligent purposes, and ideals effective in human relations." (27)

In regard to the question as to whether there are any operative norms or principles of morality, Sellars affirms that there are, and

> that they do so operate is an empirical fact to deny which constitutes moral nihilism. In so operating they constitute social morality. (28)

It is, however, the work of the ethicist to clarify and systematize these principles. In reference particularly to the norms of a democratic society, Sellars suggests that all of them should turn

> on the <u>absolute principle</u> of the moral dignity of human beings. This absolute principle seems to me to be irreducible. Its base is the natural and inevitable demand of self-conscious personality to receive just social recognition. (29)

Apart, however, from this basic principle of the inherent dignity of man, it is to be understood that a "moral norm is directive

---

(26) <u>Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 426.
(27) <u>Principles and Problems of Philosophy</u>, p. 475.
(28) <u>Social Philosophy and the American Scene</u>, p. 72.
(29) <u>Social Philosophy and the American Scene</u>, p. 72. Underlining is the author's.

and regulative only as agents accept it. Moreover, the application of it is relative to social conditions and institutions."(30)

It is clear from the above passage that Sellars as a humanist is opposed to any code of morality whose standards or norms pretend to be absolute. Each particular code of morality must, in his opinion, stand or fall on its own merits. Although it is true, moreover, that all codes of morality have their own particular sanctions within the sphere in which they are applied, it is false to suppose that any one code of morality, whether taken from the standpoints of its precepts or sanctions, is valid for the whole of humanity per omnia saecula. All codes, including moral ones alike, are eventually subject to change and improvement:

> To improve them must always remain an ideal. We must think of them as experiments rather than as revelations. When we look at the matter historically, we soon discover that moral skepticism arose inevitably as a revolt against tradition as such, which had no rational explanation of its contents and value. Why should we do things just because our fathers did them?...The sanction of mere authority or of mere habit can never ultimately satisfy. The awakened human mind wants a deeper and more intrinsic sanction. And back of this revolt against mere authority was the feeling that many elements in the accepted codes were wasteful of life and based upon views which could no longer be held. (31)

Morality, then, is not reducible to any one of its codes, for

---

(30) Social Philosophy and the American Scene, p. 72. This same thought is characteristic of Dewey's outlook upon morality. Note, for instance: "Any restriction of moral knowledge and judgments to a definite realm necessarily limits our perception of moral significance...To assume the existence of final and unquestionable knowledge... To settle automatically every moral problem involves commitment to a dogmatic theory of morals. The alternative method may be called experimental." Intelligence in the Modern World (New York: Modern Library, 1939), pp. 774-5.

(31) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 427.

> Moral progress in the large means advance in knowledge of social conditions and methods and something of the nature of development in the range and delicacy of human living. When we once grasp this cultural view of morality, we realize that it is an intrinsic part of man's adjustment to his world and of his exploration of the possibilities contained in life. (32)

Since humanism (as I have remarked earlier in this chapter) means the complete secularization of values, and since religion, like morality, is a value distinctively human, it is not at all surprising to find the humanistic thinker re-interpreting religion itself in a manner which is conformed to his naturalistic thinking. Contrary to the pessimism of those who think that religion will in an age of secularism soon become a matter of mere historic interest, Sellars maintains that religion is only "coming of age." The present period of "religious deflation" is merely one of transition. (33)

Clearly, it is a mistake (from the standpoint of humanistic thinking) to identify religion with its traditional forms, just as it is a mistake to identify morality with one or another of its traditional codes. Instead, then, of looking back to the past with regretfulness, we must adjust ourselves (though the adjustment itself is not an easy one) to the conditions and demands of our present environment:

> The natural place to look today for the prophets of the coming religion is in the domain of sensitive thought...Now it is interesting to note the increase of naturalistic humanism in religious thinking. An ever-growing number regard this world as the domain and seat of human values and look upon religion as a kind of experience and activity directed to their furtherance. For them religion

---

(32) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 427.
(33) Religion Coming of Age, p. 184.

> is becoming a deep sense of human life... From petitioner, man is becoming creator and designer. (34)

That Sellars identifies himself with this group is a point which we need hardly labor.

Sufficient has been said both in the line of abstract analysis, and in consideration of the vital problems of ethics and religion to indicate what the essentials of Sellars' humanism are. To sum up, the humanism of Sellars is an extension of his naturalistic Weltanschauung into the realm of values. It is here where Sellars as a humanist takes his stand against traditionalism in the concrete setting of the ethical, cultural, social, and religious sides of human nature. Clearly, humanism is something more than a philosophical outlook. It is, as we have just seen, a religion as well. In the chapter that follows we shall attempt to examine from a critical point of view the leading assumptions upon which such a philosophy (and such a religion, if you will) rests. The question, at any rate, as to whether humanism is right or wrong, is one which can hardly be decided by a majority vote.

---

(34) Religion Coming of Age, pp. 131-2. Note also the following very interesting passage: "That such a radical reinterpretation of religion is taking place today among deeply religious thinkers is disclosed by the literature. Thus William James was led to define it as "man's (or a nation's) reaction upon life,' and we can add to this Santayana's 'any reasoned appreciation of life...is...areligion even if there are in it no conventionally religious elements.' Similarly, Ames has defined religion as 'the consciousness of the highest social values' and Haydon speaks of it as 'A cooperative quest for the good life.'" Religion Coming of Age, p. 133.

CHAPTER TEN

HUMANISM EVALUATED

Here, as in the preceding chapters in which I have attempted to give a critical evaluation of Sellars' thought, I shall restrict myself to an examination only of those basic points upon which the validity or non-validity of his entire outlook depends. Accordingly, the leading concern of this chapter will be not so much in the line of a point by point discussion of the manifold applications which a humanistic theory of values involves as a critical inquiry into the very foundations upon which it rests.

Now the leading assumption which, in the view of Sellars' himself, essentially characterizes humanism as a distinctive approach to the problem of values is the belief that the focal point of their realization lies within the empirical framework of man's natural existence. This belief has, of course all sorts of varying implications, not the least of which is the rejection that is implied in it of any and all of the past and present forms of "supernaturalism," whether in morality, art, or religion. Yet the leading question with which we are now confronted is whether or not humanism, as Sellars professes it, can measure up to the claims it makes. Even more pointedly, does the humanism of Sellars, whether considered from the standpoint of its abstract analysis of the nature of values, or from the point of view of what those values are in the concrete, adequately satisfy the demands of human nature taken as it really is?

Taking up first with a critical inquiry into Sellars' theory of the nature of values, i.e., his axiology, it will be recalled that the method of his approach to this entire problem is by way of an analysis of our value-judgments. Basically, what this

method reveals is that a value-judgment, unlike one which is exclusively cognitional, is always an interpretation of an object in the light of our own affective interest in it.

Now in favor of Sellars' theory, it is unquestionably true that values do not have the formally objective status which some thinkers seem to have attributed to them. It must be conceded, therefore, that just as universals formally exist only in the mind which knows them, values too exist as such only in an evaluating subject. Hence it is improper to think of something as a value apart from the relationship which that thing bears to an appetite. Such, as I see it, is the fundamental truth to which the value-theory of Sellars directs our attention.

Granting this fundamental point on which a thomist would find himself in basic agreement with Sellars as against the ultra-realism of a Platonic axiology, there yet remains the larger question of determining that which from a metaphysical point of view constitutes the objective groundwork of our value-judgments. If, as Sellars himself points out, mere "factualism" in value-theory is an untenable position, it would seem that an essential part of adequate theory of values would be a determination of those objective factors which make it possible for us in our judgments to think of things as valuable. In other words, presupposing and underlying our value-judgments, there must be, if we are to avoid a purely subjective interpretation of those judgments, a basis in things themselves which warrants our appraisal of them.

Now fully allowing for the fact that Sellars does (at least in principle) take "as objective a view of value as possible" by reason, that is, of the stress that he lays in the capacity of

the object for entering into our lives, the question that here presents itself is whether there is anything in the theory itself which makes adequate provision for an intelligible explanation of what this "capacity in the object" might be. Clearly, in the absence of any definite answer to this vital question, there would be little in the value-theory of Sellars to distinguish it from the factualism which he explicitly rejects. Just as it is necessary, if one is to avoid a purely nominalistic position in epistemology, to establish an adequately objective basis for universals in things, so likewise, if one is to avoid a positivistic interpretation of values, is it necessary to determine their fundamentally objective status.

As far as I can discern, there is nothing in Sellars to indicate (beyond the fact that objects do have a capacity for being transformed into values) what the fundamentum of our value-judgments is. Obviously enough, there is a fundamentum. But is the philosopher to remain content with a mere acceptance of this an empirical fact?

The point of criticism I am here suggesting is remarkably similar to one that I have extensively developed in connection with Sellars' critical realism. In Chapter Five it was shown that the critical realism of Sellars, what with all of its refinements and distinctions, is ultimately founded upon an acceptance of knowledge as a brute fact for which no intelligible explanation is provided. Must the acceptance of values likewise be taken as an "ultimate factuality" in nature? Must we, that is, resign ourselves to the bland acceptance of the empirical truth that objects have a capacity for being evaluated? Sellars apparently does.

This can be seen, first of all, from the standpoint of the method to which he restricts himself in his analysis of values. Indeed, no mere analysis of value-judgments as such, considered, that is, from the standpoint of their esse intentionale, is adequate to account for their metaphysical basis, just as no mere analysis of universals as such is sufficient to determine their "ontological status," i.e., their foundation in the nature of things themselves. An analysis of value-judgments, considered as such, will at best reveal the fact that they have a realistic reference. What there is in things which determines our judgments of them as valuable is determinable only by an analysis which is metaphysical in character. The method, therefore, which Sellars uses is basically a one-sided method, which, though sound as far as it goes, is inadequate.

Even apart from the question of method, it should likewise be clear that there is nothing in Sellars' ontology, nor in the view that he himself takes of it, which could make possible a satisfactory determination of the metaphysical groundwork of our value-judgments. It is easy to show this on the basis of points that have already been covered in our preceding section. Science, according to Sellars, does not discover values as a "property of objects." Neither, we might add, does it discover what there is in objects which makes them subject-matter for our appraisal of them. But considering that ontology for Sellars is "isomorphic with science," or what amounts to the same thing, that we have no knowledge of objects other than that which science reveals, it is obvious that Sellars precludes the very possibility of establishing a satisfactory explanation of the basis of our value-judgments.

To sum up my argument: If science as such has nothing to say concerning the basis of our value-judgments, and if, moreover, philosophic knowledge is intrinsically dependent upon and essentially related to our scientific knowledge of things, then, clearly, philosophy is no more capable of discovering the valuableness-aspect of reality than science is. The only avenue of approach, therefore, to which one can resort, and to which Sellars himself actually does resort, is an empirical analysis of our value-judgments -- an approach which, as we have just indicated, leaves unexplored the fundamentum upon which those judgments rest.

I should like to take occasion here to point out in regard to the humanism of Sellars, what I have already called to the reader's attention concerning his naturalism, the fact, viz., that it stands or falls on the claim that no other position or type of explanation is necessary. Now such precisely is the claim of scientific humanism with respect to the problem of values, i.e., that all other types of explanation (other than that which a humanistic interpretation of values involves) are superfluous. But are they? If the points of criticism thus far developed are valid, it is clear that a humanism which is based upon a naturalist ontology is inadequate to the solution of the problem of values, and does not, for that reason, measure up to the claims which it makes.

Since, however, it is the work of philosophic criticism to go beyond a mere denial of an opponent's position, I shall attempt in the next few paragraphs to suggest what in the thomist view is necessary to render intelligible the basis of our value-judgments. It is not aside the point to remark here that, since

thomistic philosophy is truly a rational philosophy of being which is a natural outgrowth of the demands of human experience, it is no great task to supplement the analysis of our value-judgments with an analysis also of that upon which they are based.

Now the question which remains unanswered in the value-theory of Sellars is simply this: Why (to use his own terminology) do objects have a capacity for entering human lives? The thomist solution to that problem is a simple one, though it must be rightly understood. In brief, the ultimate foundation of our value-judgments is the good which objects possess -- "good" understood here, not in a limited empirical sense, but as a transcendental attribute of being itself.

Why is it, one might ask, that objects appeal to us as good? Abstracting from the consideration that in order to desire a thing as good, our natural inclination or appetite must be conformed to that object, is it not true that we ultimately judge an object as good, because it has being, because it is? The goodness of things, in other words, is the measure of actuality which they as beings possess. What I am suggesting here, following the thought of Aristotle and St. Thomas, is that goodness is not a perfection which is superadded to the perfection of being, but that it is the perfection of being itself:

> Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says: Goodness is what all desire. Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect, for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect in so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect in so far as it is being; for being is the actuality of every thing...

> Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same reality. But goodness expresses the aspect of desirableness, which being does not express. (1)

Now it is the metaphysical good, thus understood, which supplies us with a basis for our value-judgments. (2) A thing, for that reason, is valuable because it, containing the perfection and the actuality of being, is good. This is the same as saying that the goodness of things constitutes them as potential values, in much the same way as the identical nature in things constitutes them as potential universals which are rendered actual by our understanding.

Now what is it that renders that which is potentially valuable actually so? Clearly, not a mere knowledge of the good (though knowledge does play an important role) (3), but an actual conformity of the appetite to the actuality of being which we call the good. (4) This conformity of the natural

---

(1) Summa Theologica, Q.V, a.1, c. Underlining is the author's.

(2) "The appetible good is the perfection of being. The actuality of being determines the degrees of appetibility or desirability. Therefore, the actuality of being is the basis of value, but is not itself 'value.'" Robles-Reinhardt, The Main Problems of Philosophy (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1946), p. 131.

(3) Nil volitum quin praecognitum. "Nothing is willed unless it is first known." Applying the truth of this axiom to values, we must say that in order for a thing to become a value, it must first be known. I might also add that a thing is evaluated to the extent that it is known. Clearly, there are many things which we do not sufficiently ap-preciate, because we do not sufficiently understand them. However, as our understanding of them deepens, so too does our appreciation and appraisal of them.

(4) "The correlative terms in the act of evaluation are the subject and the object. The object...is the actuality of being. The subject represents the natural inclination in a state of conformability with the actuality of being. There exists, then, a real, not merely a logical, relation between 'being' and 'natural inclination.'" The Main Problems of Philosophy, pp. 131-2.

inclination or the appetite to being, considered, i.e., from the standpoint of its desirableness, is expressed in the form of a judgment:

> The knowledge of values...is never realized in a simple act of apprehension: it is always the result of an 'evaluation' which the practical understanding exercises with regard to the object. (5)

It is clear from this brief analysis that the thomistic solution to the problem of values, while avoiding the extremes (as Sellars does) both of a factualistic subjectivism, on the one hand, and Platonic ultra-realism, on the other, nevertheless renders intelligible (as Sellars theory does not) the basis for our value-judgments. While the thomistic solution is based upon experience (as Sellars' theory likewise is), it is not (like the axiology of Sellars) "isomorphic with science," and hence limited to a merely empirical analysis of our value-judgments.

In the light of these remarks I should like to question the truth of one of the statements which Sellars makes concerning values. On the grounds that a value is "always with respect to" and that a thing is "good because it is such that it can enter significantly...someone's life," Sellars maintains (as we have seen in our last chapter) that "what may be called intrinsic values really has no meaning." (6) Now if all that Sellars means by this statement is that values are formally constituted only in the appraisal of an evaluating subject, the statement is true. If, however, he means that there is no

---

(5) The Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 131.
(6) Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 459. Underlining is the author's.

intelligible sense in which we can refer to things as intrinsic values and as being of intrinsic value, then the statement is false, for we are adequately justified in speaking of certain types of objects as being of intrinsic value, if they are thought of as being by their nature suitable subject-matter for our evaluation. Thus we might speak of an artistic masterpiece as being of intrinsic value (or simply as being an intrinsic value) in the sense that the objective qualities which it embodies are such that, once understood and seen, they are capable of eliciting our subjective appraisal. Thus too (and especially) in morals, the performance of an act, such as giving alms out of charity to a person in need, may be thought of as being of intrinsic value, because the act by its nature is eminently suited to the perfection of the person who performs it. Clearly, then, it is entirely reasonable to maintain that things do have intrinsic value or worth. As a matter of fact, they must, if we are to avoid axiological positivism.

This last point takes us to the very threshhold of a criticism of Sellars' humanism in its more concrete doctrinal implications. In answer, first of all, to Sellars' remark that he has no objection to immortality, "if the facts permit us to believe in it," (7) need I say that the facts not only permit, but require such a belief; what is more, it is because of his habitual disregard for certain kinds of facts that the naturalist finds the doctrine of immortality so much a matter of "belief" (8), rather than one which compels our rational assent.

---

(7) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 474.

(8) I am obviously employing the term "belief" here in its unfortunately modern signification, as implying a type of assent which has no rational foundation.

It is not my intention here, of course, to present an array of arguments in proof of the soul's immortality. What I do want to note, however, is that Sellars' attempt to "enlarge our concept of the physical" so that it includes the spiritual operations of man is hardly a method of approach that is conducive either to a "belief" or a rational conviction in the immortality of the human soul.

To express myself in more positive terms, Sellars' naturalistic interpretation of the distinctive operations of human intelligence (among other things) as proceeding from a principle which he calls the "brain-mind," is an interpretation which, I am sure, is motivated, not by a desire to face philosophical facts, but by the desire rather to dispense with for once and for all the swarm of dualistic "mind-body" theories with which philosophy has been plagued since the advent of Cartesianism. It is, in other words, so much a matter of concern with the naturalist to avoid a dualistic interpretation of man, and in so doing, to interrelate the various aspects of his being to the "organism," that certain very important facts get lost somehow in the shuffle.

In Chapter VIII it was pointed out that an impartial analysis of certain kinds of activity which man, as distinct from the brutes, performs, reveals that these activities are not intrinsically dependent upon matter, but are by their very nature spiritual. Accordingly, it is necessary to admit that the principle or "form" from which they proceed (traditionally called the "soul") must be itself of a spiritual nature. Now I am not suggesting that the proof of the spirituality of the soul is eo ipso a proof also of its immortality, but merely that

it prepares the way for such a proof. In point of fact, the conclusion that the soul is immortal is proximately based upon the fact that it is incorruptible:

> The intellectual principle which we call the soul is incorruptible. For a thing may be corrupted in two ways -- in itself and accidentally. Now it is impossible for any subsistent being to be generated or corrupted accidentally, that is, by the generation or corruption of something else. For generation and corruption belong to a thing in the same way that being belongs to it, which is acquired by generation and corruption. Therefore, whatever has being in itself cannot be generated or corrupted in itself...Now it was shown above that the souls of brutes are not self-subsistent, whereas the human soul is, so that the souls of brutes are corrupted, when their bodies are corrupted, while the human soul could not be corrupted unless it were corrupted in itself. This is impossible, not only as regards the human soul, but also as regards anything subsistent that is form alone. For it is clear that whatever belongs to a thing by virtue of the thing itself is inseparable from it. But being belongs to a form, which is an act, by virtue of itself. And thus matter acquires actual being according as it acquires form; while it is corrupted so far as the form is separated from it. But it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself; and therefore it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist. (9)

Proceeding now to a consideration of Sellars' views with respect to questions of morality, I should like to remark first of all that, although Sellars (as a typical humanist) has a great deal to say <u>about</u> morality, there is very little along the lines of a constructive development that would suggest what in the humanistic scheme of things morality should be. Perhaps, however, it would be expecting too much of a humanist

---

(9) <u>Summa Theologica</u>, Q.75, a.6.

to set forth a code of ethics all of his own, especially in view of Sellars' remark that we must think of moral codes as "experiments rather than as revelations." (10)

There is little doubt, however, in my own mind that Sellars regards his own particular views of morality as somehow mediating the two extremes of a rigid absolutism (of the sort implied, e.g., in the Kantian categorical imperative), on the one hand, and a sheer relativism, on the other:

> There can be no absolute, eternal standards, and yet...it seems quite possible to avoid the dilemma of either eternal and external standards or more whim and caprice. (11)

What Sellars suggests to avoid this dilemma is the recognition on our part that, although there is "an essential continuity and basic permanence" which characterize human (moral) experience (which it would be foolish to ignore), nevertheless

> individual choice should be permitted. Intelligence and sincerity are the essential factors. (12)

What I am particularly interested in calling to the reader's attention here is that Sellars' position, despite its respect for "the essential continuity and basic permanence" of man's moral nature, is, itself in the final analysis, a form of ethical positivism, and must accordingly be evaluated as such. Nor is Sellars any less a positivist because we find him condemning relativism as such. (13) As I see it, moral relativism

---

(10) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 427.
(11) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 464.
(12) Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 469.
(13) "Relativism in ethics has been overdone. Human nature and social relations are not as capricious and arbitrarily fluid as some have declared." Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?, p. 33.

of the sort which is based upon mere "whim or caprice" is philosophically speaking a position which is as rare as pure or absolute skepticism. In any case, however, it should be clear that even though his interpretation of the facts is different from that of a "mere" relativist, Sellars is, by and large, an ethical positivist, for the central point remains that moral codes are experiments and subject to improvement.

Now the very same point of criticism which was previously raised both against the epistemology of Sellars as well as his ontology again presents itself in connection with his view of ethics: it is not philosophically ultimate, or better, denying the need for a solution which is philosophically ultimate, it sets itself up as a substitute. Indeed, if morality has any meaning at all, i.e., from a philosophical point of view, it must (at the very least) have something to say concerning the ultimate end of man, and the ultimate criterion of what is right and what is wrong -- a criterion which, in the final analysis, is to be determined by what the end of man really is.

With regard first to the ultimate end of man, it would seem that for Sellars the goal of human existence "is probably human welfare in the context of demands, admirations, and social ties."(14) Now apart from the fact that Sellars does not seem too sure of himself, I must honestly confess that his statement is so vague that it is meaningless. What human welfare consists in is, as far as I can make it out, a matter which Sellars fails to specify. Certainly, it does not, on the one hand, consist in

---

(14) Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?, p. 41.

the fulfillment of the demands of material existence, for on frequent occasions Sellars makes it clear that he is not an ethical hedonist. Does it, on the other hand, consist in man's moral betterment? If this is the case, we are obviously proceeding in a vicious circle. Or possibly is human welfare a goal which, because it has not yet been realized, must be defined at some future date? Clearly, a millenium of progress which would take place at some unspecified time in the future would hardly be a satisfactory means of determining man's present needs and desires. Nor could man in the light of his historical past regard such a millenium as little more than a dream.

Since it is quite clear that there is no definite answer in the humanistic thinking of Sellars to the question of what the end of man might be, neither can there be a definite answer to the question as to what comprises the norm of human (moral) behavior. It is for this reason that Sellars so readily contents himself with the empirical fact that ethical norms do operate "to deny which constitutes moral nihilism." (15) What is more, Sellars maintains that these same norms by the very fact that they are operative "constitute (social) morality." (16) Do not these statements leave completely unexplained both the nature of the norms themselves as well as the morality which they supposedly "constitute." Clearly, the operation of an ethical norm presupposes the principle according to which it operates, whether it is custom, authority, or reason. Are we to be led to think, moreover, that there are no universal principles

---

(15) Social Philosophy and the American Scene, p. 72.
(16) Social Philosophy and the American Scene, p. 72.

of human moral behavior -- principles which would determine that certain actions, regardless of the circumstances under which they are performed, are by their very nature wrong?

When Sellars maintains, moreover, that "a moral norm is directive and regulative as agents accept it," (17) is he referring to the obvious fact that a norm does not operate as a norm except on the condition that it is applied by an agent? Or is he possibly suggesting that the sole determining reason for the norm itself is its acceptance, on the part of the agent? If the latter is the case, how can one account for the fact that certain universal norms have, over a period of centuries, been accepted by individuals and social groups alike of the most heterogeneous denominations? At the very least it would seem necessary to note the acceptance of the primary postulates of the natural law as an empirical fact. Yet it would seem that for Sellars all morality in the traditional sense has been conditioned solely by way of extrinsic denomination, such as authority (whether civil or religious), or tradition, or custom.

There is one last point I should like to raise to illustrate the poverty of humanistic naturalism with respect to matters of ethical import. In our last chapter we have seen Sellars' assertion of the "absolute principle of the moral dignity of human beings." (18) Although it may seem strange to find Sellars speaking of any principle as being absolute, it is nevertheless interesting to note that for him this principle is irreducible. Now granting full well that this principle is

---

(17) Social Philosophy and the American Scene, p. 72.
(18) Social Philosophy and the American Scene, p. 72.

irreducible in the sense that it is rooted in man's nature, there must nevertheless be a sufficient reason in man's nature which warrants our assertion of it.

In view of what Sellars has previously asserted concerning the radical immanence of man in nature, what might this sufficient reason be? The answer which he gives to this question is hopelessly vague and unsatisfactory:

> Its basis is the natural and inevitable demand of self-conscious personality to receive just social recognition. (19)

To me this appears more as a restatement of the principle itself rather than an explanation of the foundation upon which it rests. What is more the demand for "just social recognition" assumes the very truth of the principle it is meant to explain. In the absence, then, of anyconvincing explanation of the belief in the moral dignity of man as a principle which is absolute, must we not conclude that this belief (among other praesupposita in the thinking of Sellars) has no rational foundation?

All that I shall say by way of comment concerning Sellars' remarks pertaining to religion is simply that there is nothing to be found in them which adequately distinguishes religion from morality. Why, one might ask, if religion merely means the subservience of human actions to the promotion of humanitarian ends, why speak of "religion" at all, as if implying that it were something distinct from morality? Concerning the fact, moreover, that religion and morality must be kept distinct (though they are never in practice to be separated), I quote the following penetrating remarks of Whitehead:

---

(19) Social Philosophy and the American Scene, p. 72.

> The non-religious motive which has entered into modern religious thought is the desire for a comfortable organization of society. Religion has been presented as valuable for the organization of life. Its claims have been rested upon its function as a sanction to right conduct. Also the purpose of right conduct quickly degenerates into the formation of pleasing social relations. We have here a subtle degradation of religious ideas...Conduct is a by-product of religion -- an inevitable by-product, but not the main point. (20)

The "main point" of religion, as Whitehead later remarks, is worship -- a concept which is completely lost in the humanistic view of religion according to which man himself is both "creator and designer." (21)

By way of conclusion, it is to be noted that the validity of the humanistic outlook is entirely dependent upon the explanations it can give of certain vital facts which comprise the very fabric of human existence as a mode of existence which is infinitely superior to any of the lower "levels" of nature. The entire import of our criticism has been to show that the humanism of Sellars does not get beyond these facts, i.e., in order to give them an intelligible meaning. Sellars, indeed, accepts the fact that values do have a basis. But where lies the basis? He accepts the fact that ethical norms do operate. But what is it that determines these norms? He accepts the fact that man has a moral dignity properly his own. But how can he adequately account for it? Lastly, he accepts the fact that man is by nature religious. But how can he distinguish religion from morality?

---

(20) Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 274.
(21) Religion Coming of Age, p. 184.

Secularistic humanism, as I see it, though claiming to have all the answers (at least in semina) stops short of where the real problems lie. It is more of a front than a philosophic creed. Its failure, moreover, to explain what it purports to explain, i.e., the so-called higher "level" of human existence is the final proof of the bankruptcy of a naturalistic world-view as applied to the "problem of man."

Indeed, a true humanism is incompatible with any view of man which in the final analysis regards human nature as coterminous with the world of physical nature. An adequate appreciation of the facts pertaining to man entirely forbids us to regard him simply as another "level" in nature. A true humanism is one which can do justice to man's transcendence over nature. It is a humanism in which immortality is something more than a romantic dream and in which traditional religion is something more than an inspired myth.

CONCLUSION

Philosophers, however divergent their opinions may be, have at least one thing in common, namely, the problems with which they deal. There have been some, indeed, who, in rejecting the opinions of certain philosophers, have denied the very validity of the problems themselves. To anyone, however, who is only superficially acquainted with the history of philosophy, one thing should be clear, viz., that the problems of philosophy cannot easily be ruled out of court, or, even if they are, that they will soon make their re-appearance under a different form. The problems of philosophy are persistent problems, as persistent as the human mind itself in its unending quest for truth.

It is in view of the persistence of the problems of philosophy (problems which are always basically the same) that there is ever to be found some common ground of comparison between philosophers, however widely separated they may be in other respects. As I have indicated in the fifth chapter by "common ground of comparison" we should be given to understand "not necessarily a unified solution to a given problem, or, for that matter, a common method of approach," but rather "the presence of the problem itself, however different the terminology, approach, or solution may be."

The terminology, approach, and solutions which Sellars as a contemporary naturalist brings to bear upon the problems of philosophy are widely different from those of traditional scholastic thought. Yet apart from my attempt to present as precisely as possible a descriptive analysis of Sellars' naturalistic system, a comparison has actually been made. The purpose, moreover, of that comparison (presented in the form of a critical analysis) has

been to determine whether the philosophy of Sellars as philosophy is true or false.

To say that there are many "half-truths" in the system of Sellars would be, in my opinion, to use an expression which is per se ambiguous. All knowledge, after all, is expressed in the form of propositions, and every proposition is either true or false. Now unquestionably there are many propositions in the thinking of Sellars which are purely and simply true. Indeed, however false a position may be from the standpoint of its principles, it is as difficult for a person who holds that position to be consistently wrong as it is for a person whose position is basically sound to be consistently right in all of its applications. Over and above this general fact, it must be said in favor of Sellars that there is a comprehensiveness in his thinking, which, combined with a measure of philosophical insight and a sense of the history of philosophy, deservedly commends itself to our attention. Perhaps I should apply the remark here which Maritain applies to his criticism of Descartes that "after all, to be the adversary of a philosopher does not mean that one underestimates his genius." (1) What is more, the thinking of Sellars is, as a rule, characterized by a clarity of expression which is unfortunately lacking in many of his fellow-contemporaries, -- a quality for which I personally am more than grateful.

When, however, we shift our attention from these more or less accidental features of his system to a consideration of its basic principles (and that as philosophers is our chief concern), we find that the position of Sellars as an out-and-out naturalist

---

(1) The Dream of Descartes, p. 164.

is fundamentally erroneous. The entire import of our criticism has been to show that Sellars' system, whether considered from the standpoint of his analysis of the problem of knowledge, the problem of being, or the problem of man, is incompatible with the primary demands of a truly philosophical approach.

As regards his critical realism, we have seen that Sellars' attempt to drain knowledge of all the elements of a genuine intuition of the object and to restrict it essentially to a denotative act of affirmation is an attempt which results in a realism which is little different from what I have called the "fideistic" realism of Locke. We have seen that a realism such as Sellars, whose fundamental feature is a distinction between the contents of knowledge and the object of knowledge, is condemned to failure in any subsequent attempt that might be made to re-unite them. A realism which merely affirms its object is one which must also affirm its realism, for it is incapable of intelligibly accounting for the faith that lies within. What is more, an adequate appreciation of the fact of knowledge, as implying a real union between subject and object is inconsistent with the view of Sellars that knowledge is another of the many "levels" to be found in nature. The entire burden of Chapter V has been to illustrate the truth of the principle that immateriality is the root of cognition. Deny this principle, and knowledge becomes a blind fact.

Next as regards his ontology, we have seen that Sellars' endeavor to construct a world-view which is "isomorphic with science" does violence to the laws of reason, even the principle of contradiction itself. This was exemplified in Sellars' attempt

to regard matter both as *esse* and the subject of change. And as regards the fact of change itself, -- a fact upon which a consistent theory of evolution so vitally depends, it was shown in Chapter VIII that Sellars' denial of a First Universal Cause of change, i.e., a Prime Mover, makes impossible any attempt to give an adequate account of that fact. Indeed, any theory of evolution which, in claiming to be absolute, denies the existence of a Universal Cause is undermining its own foundations. (2)

Lastly, in Chapter X we have seen that Sellars' analysis of the nature of values is inadequate to provide for their objective basis in the nature of things themselves. As a result of this failure, -- a failure which inevitably stems from his ontology, there is little in Sellars' theory of values to distinguish it from the axiological positivism which he himself condemns. Viewing his humanism in its more concrete phases, we have seen that Sellars' denial of the immortality of the human soul is based upon the capital mistake of regarding all of man's distinctive activities as stemming forth a principle which he calls the "brain-mind". Further, the inaptitude of humanistic naturalism to establish the ultimate end of human existence results in a theory of ethics which at best, in the language of Sellars himself, is only an "experiment." Religion, too, though the name is preserved, must lose its distinctive meaning, if it is confused, as Sellars confuses it, merely with ethical conduct.

---

(2) For this reason, then, "a theory of evolution which remains strictly and properly a theory of development of new species would not contradict...metaphysical principles...since to be a consistent theory it would assume the existence of a First Efficient and Ultimate Final Cause which alone can ultimately account for the new species appearing in the evolution...In a word, a consistent theory of evolution could only be stated within a general theistic view of reality." Charles A. Hart, "Twenty-five Years of Thomism," The New Scholasticism, Vol. 25 (1951) p. 26.

Without a doubt the "new" naturalism (or "reformed materialism"), of which Sellars is a leading representative, is widely different from the mechanistic atomism of the past. Examining it, however, as we have examined it, in its fundamental principles, there is nothing in the "new, evolutionary" naturalism which (from a philosophical standpoint) commends itself to the title of "non-reductionist." The over-all conclusion of our entire analysis has been that <u>naturalism, whether old or new, is by its very nature reductionist.</u> It is reductionist in its attempt to level off the methods of philosophy to the methods of the sciences. It is reductionist in its treatment of knowledge, of man, and of values; it is reductionist in its failure to recognize that these "phenomena" cannot be included in the scheme of pure nature, however "enlarged" our notion of the physical may be.

However sound his protests may be against the speculations of certain idealists (such as those of the Hegelian sort), it were foolish for the naturalist to await the day when the truths of philosophy are experimentally verified by science. (3) That day will never come, and the sooner the naturalist gives up his vain hope that it will, the better a position will he be in to discover a philosophy which, though in no way contradicting the demands of science, explains what science as such is not qualified to explain, the <u>ultimate</u> causes of the world in which we live.

The philosophy to which I am here referring is the <u>philosophia perennis</u> of scholastic thought, as represented chiefly by its most distinguished expositor and synthesist, St. Thomas Aquinas. What I am suggesting is not a return to tradition as such, but a return

---

(3) Science can and does, of course, provide philosophy with many useful facts, but those facts are not themselves the truths of philosophy.

to tradition in the fundamental truths which it embodies, -- truths which properly speaking are neither old nor new, but eternal.

Philosophy, however, is not a closed book. Although the fundamental truths of philosophy are eternal, to be living truths they must constantly be applied to the problems of the times in which we live. Neither for Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, or St. Thomas was philosophy the closed system, which so many moderns have regarded it to be. As Gilson points out:

> Their ambition was not to achieve philosophy once and for all, but to maintain it and to serve it in their own times, as we have to maintain it and serve it in ours. For us, as for them, the great thing is not to achieve a system of the world, as if being could be deduced from thought, but to relate reality, as we know it, to the permanent principles in whose light all the changing problems of science, of ethics and of art have to be solved. A metaphysics of existence cannot be a system wherewith to get rid of philosophy, it is always an open inquiry, whose conclusions are both always the same and always new, because it is conducted under the guidance of immutable principles, which will never exhaust experience, or be themselves exhausted by it. (4)

There have been some who, pessimistically inclined, have pronounced the death of American culture before it has scarcely had the chance to be born. Indeed, in any land in which philosophy is a living, growing thing (or to use a favorite expression of Sellars a "going concern"), there is at least a vigorous sign of genuine cultural development. Neither is it to be thought, as it is thought by many Europeans, that the whole of American culture is materialistic. Perhaps on the surface, yes. But there

---

(4) The Unity of Philosophical Experience, p. 317.

is a strong undercurrent of American thinking in the line of a truly spiritual development which refuses to be ignored. The fact of the matter is that in America there is being waged a battle of ideas, more important than any battle of the sword, which is not being recorded on the front pages of our daily newspapers -- a battle from which the scholastic philosopher, if he is genuinely interested in the cause of philosophy, can ill afford to withdraw:

> There has never been a more propitious time for American scholastics to enter into full participation in the philosophical activities of our country. As the historical lineaments of the scholastic past become more firmly established, a major share of talent and energy among the younger men to the perennial issues precisely as they take shape in the present situation must generously be given. Our main responsibilities as philosophers lie here. The net effect of such wholehearted concern for the contemporary philosophical enterprise can only be a mighty increase in the vitality and relevance of scholastic philosophy.

---

(5) James Collins, "A Quarter Century of American Philosophy," The New Scholasticism, Vol. 25, (1950) pp. 79-80.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Books and Articles by R. W. SELLARS

Critical Realism (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1916).

Evolutionary Naturalism (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1922).

The Essentials of Logic (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917).

The Philosophy of Physical Realism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1932).

The Principles and Problems of Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1929).

Religion Coming of Age (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1928).

"Knowledge and its Categories," in Essays in Critical Realism, ed. by Drake, Lovejoy, Sellars, et al., (New York: Peter Smith, 1941).

"Materialism and Human Knowing," in Philosophy for the Future, ed. by Sellars, McGill, and Farber (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1949).

"Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism," in Contemporary American Philosophy, ed. by Adams and Montague (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1930), Vol. II.

"Social Philosophy and the American Scene," in Philosophy for the Future, ed. by Adams and Montague (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1940).

"An Analytical Approach to the Mind-Body Problem," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 47 (1938).

"Can a Reformed Materialism Do Justice to Values?" Ethics, Vol. 55 (1944).

"Cognition and Valuation," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 35 (1926).

"Critical Realism and the Independence of the Object," Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 34 (1937).

"Emergence of Naturalism," International Journal of Ethics, Vol. 34 (1924).

"On the Nature of our Knowledge of the Physical World," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 27 (1918).

"Realism and Evolutionary Naturalism," The Monist, Vol. 37 (1927).

"Reformed Materialism and Intrinsic Endurance," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 53 (1944).

B. Books and Articles by Other Authors

ALEXANDER, SAMUEL, "Naturalism and Values," in Basic Problems of Philosophy, ed. by Bronstein, Krikorian, and Wiener (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949).

BACON, FRANCIS, Selections from his Novum Organum in Burtt's The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill (New York: Modern Library, 1939).

BAKER, RICHARD C., "The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars," The New Scholasticism, Vol. 24 (1950).

BENIGNUS F.C.S., BRO., Nature, Knowledge, and God (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1949).

BERKELEY, GEORGE, Selections from his Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonus in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

COLLINS, JAMES, "A Quarter Century of American Philosophy," The New Scholasticism, Vol. 25 (1951).

COPLESTON S.J., FREDERICK, A History of Philosophy (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Bookshop, 1946), Vol. 1.

DEWEY, JOHN, "Intelligence in Morals," in Intelligence in the Modern World, ed. by Ratner (New York: Modern Library, 1939).

EDMAN, IRWIN, Four Ways of Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937).

EKBERY, GEORGE, "First Principles of Understanding," Aquinas Paper No. 10 (Oxford, Publ. by Blackfriars, 1949).

GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, R., God: His Existence and Nature (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), Vol. 1.

GILSON, ETIENNE, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937); God and Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941); The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940).

GRENIER, HENRI, Thomistic Philosophy (Charlottstown, Canada: publ. by St. Dunstan's University Press, 1948), Vol. 2.

HART, CHARLES A., "Twenty-Five Years of Thomism," The New Scholasticism, Vol. 25 (1951).

HAWKINS, D. J. B., A Criticism of Experience (London: Sheed and Ward, 1947).

HOBBES, THOMAS, Selections from his Leviathan in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

HOCKING, W. E., Types of Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929).

HUME, DAVID, Selections from his Treatise on Human Nature in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

JAMES, WILLIAM, The Meaning of Truth (London: Longmans Greene and Co., 1919); Psychology (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1892).

LARRABEE, HAROLD A., "Naturalism in America," in Naturalism and the Human Spirit, ed. by Krikorian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).

LAVINE, THELMA Z., "Naturalism and the Sociological Analysis of Knowledge," in Naturalism and the Human Spirit, ed. by Krikorian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).

LOCKE, JOHN, Essay on Human Understanding in Smith and Greene's From Descartes to Kant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

LODGE, SIR OLIVER, Life and Matter (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906).

LUCRETIUS, De Rerum Natura in The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, ed. by Oates (New York: Random House, 1940).

MARITAIN, JACQUES, The Dream of Descartes (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1944).

McCORMACK, JOHN F., Natural Theology (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1943).

MILLIKAN, ROBERT, Evolution in Science and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928).

MORGAN, LLOYD, "The Case for Emergent Evolution," Journal of Philosophical Studies, Vol. 23 (1926).

PHILLIPS, R. P., Modern Thomistic Philosophy (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Bookshop, 1935), Vol. 2.

PRATT, JAMES B., Matter and Spirit (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1922).

RANDALL JR., JOHN HERMAN, "The Nature of Naturalism," in Naturalism and the Human Spirit, ed. by Krikorian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).

ROBLES-REINHARDT, The Main Problems of Philosophy (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1946).

ROWAN, JOHN P., The Soul (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1949).

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica in The Basic Writing of St. Thomas, ed. by Anton Pegis (New York: Random House, 1944); De Coelo et Mundo, Vives Edition; De Veritate, Marietti Edition; Contra Gentiles, Marietti Edition.

STOUT, GEORGE F. The Groundwork of Psychology (London: University Tutorial Press, 1898).

WARD, JAMES, Naturalism and Agnosticism (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), Vol. 1.

WERKMEISTER, W. H., A History of Philosophical Ideas in America (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1949).

WHITEHEAD, ALFRED N., Science and the Modern World (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947).