

## SELLARS ON NORMATIVITY: WHAT IS THE BEING OF THE NORMATIVE AND HOW IS IT STEREOSCOPICALLY FUSED WITH THE ONTOLOGY OF THE SCIENTIFIC IMAGE?

In this paper we will focus on the divergent interpretations of two leading Sellars' scholars, Willem deVries and James O'Shea, as regards Sellars' view on the being of the normative. It will be suggested that while this conflict between deVries and O'Shea's account of Sellarsian normativity can be resolved in favour of O'Shea's interpretation (provided that the latter is suitably enriched to account for the phenomenological presence of normativity in our everyday practical dealings with the world), the resulting 'phenomenologically' informed view of normativity, pointing towards as it does to its ideal integration not only with practical action but also with perceptual experience, can in fact pose problems to Sellars' own view on the matter, and, in particular, to the way normativity can allegedly be 'stereoscopically fused' with the ultimate ontology of the ideal scientific image.

Both deVries and O'Shea are sympathetic to Sellars' overall philosophical project and to his views on normativity in particular. This explains their essential agreement on a number of points regarding the proper construal of normativity within Sellars' philosophical system. However, there remains a crucial point of divergence (which, to my knowledge, has not been properly thematized in the literature), and this concerns the way in which what we might call 'ready-to-hand' normativity, that is, the normativity of *artifacts* and *persons* can be smoothly joined to the ultimate ontology of the scientific image. As is well-known, Sellars argues that normative properties, being essentially *functional* (rather than 'qualitative') in their 'being' do not present any ontological challenge to the scientific image; the normativity of persons is not something that has to be reconciled with the scientific image, but rather something to be *joined* to it. Although the scientific image explains normativity by identifying it with radically non-normative states and events, this does not eliminate normativity since the scientific image accounts only for its *contentual* aspect. The material ('contentual') aspect of normative states can be radically redescribed (e.g. in scientific terms) without in the least affecting normativity as such (although it may well affect our conception of its material realization in the world) since the individuation of an empirical process or state as 'normative' is functional, not 'contentual' (i.e. it is not based on intrinsic or 'qualitative' properties or processes of the state in question).

Now, the problem with 'ready-to-hand' normativity is that it seems to be 'phenomenologically laden', so to speak; that is, although it does not have the qualitative-intrinsic character characteristic of sensory experience, it also does not seem to be exclusively functionally individuated. Without putting it in this way, deVries seems to have something like that in mind when he insists that the normativity of artifacts, and ultimately of persons themselves, cannot be adequately described and explained in scientific image terms because it is built in the very description of the artifact itself (or, in the case of persons, it is built in the very description of ourselves as persons). In this way, deVries in essence holds that due to the absolutely fundamental *practical role* they play in our lives some normative descriptions

and explanations (of artifacts and of ourselves as persons) cannot be reconceptualised in scientific image descriptive and explanatory terms. The problem here is that deVries' (partly interpretive, partly philosophical) view of 'ready-to-hand' normativity patently violates Sellars' *scientia mensura* principle ("in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what it is that it is, and of what it is not that it is not" (Sellars 1956, §41)). According to deVries, the only way to accommodate what we termed 'ready-to-hand' normativity in our overall worldview is to reject -or at least seriously qualify- Sellars' *scientia mensura* principle.

On the other hand, from O'Shea's interpretive perspective, deVries' above-mentioned conclusion need not be considered as obligatory. By strictly distinguishing between logical/conceptual and causal/explanatory irreducibility of the normative to the non-normative (a distinction which Sellars himself explicitly makes (1953)), O'Shea seems to be in a position to accommodate any kind of normativity in our worldview without rejecting the *scientia mensura* principle, since the (logical/conceptual) sense in which the normative is irreducible to the non-normative is not one that would directly violate the *scientia mensura* principle (only a claim of *explanatory* irreducibility of the normative to the non-normative would do so). Of course, one may object, on deVries behalf, that 'ready-to-hand' normativity has not thereby been rendered consistent with the *scientia mensura* principle since its distinctively non-functional qualities make it *phenomenologically* (and not only logically or conceptually) irreducible to the non-normative level. But, I take it that so long as 1) this phenomenological character of 'ready-to-hand' normativity is understood in essentially relational (e.g. dispositional) terms, and 2) if what the scientific image descriptions and explanations are thought to capture is the intrinsic and strictly occurrent (i.e. non-relational and non-dispositional) aspects of what is present in ready-to-hand 'experience' of normativity, then it seems that the phenomenological aspect of ready-to-hand normativity is not in direct conflict with the *scientia mensura* principle.

However, even if the above analysis of the phenomenological presence of normativity in everyday practical experience can be accommodated within a Sellarsian framework along O'Shea's lines (at least in a suitably enriched version of his interpretation of Sellars), it will be further suggested that O'Shea does not at all thematize a further, special aspect of the 'qualitative' dimension of ready-to-hand normativity which may render its stereoscopic fusion with the scientific image problematic.

Specifically, it will be argued that the 'qualitative' dimension of ready-to-hand normativity is not only manifested in our practical dealings with the immediate environment but also, and more fundamentally, in the very content of our *perceptual experience*. Normativity is '*bodily present*' in perceptual experience itself (albeit, in a sense to be carefully distinguished from that in which normatively-laden things are present as 'available for exploration' in our everyday practical dealings with the world). We will suggest that this perceptual dimension of normativity, which neither deVries nor O'Shea explicitly thematize as such, can be understood on the model of the Sellarsian '*productive imagination*'. Thus, the issue of whether ready-to-hand normativity, as the latter is manifested in its most 'direct' and

'qualitative' manner, namely in perception itself, can be stereoscopically fused with the scientific image becomes the issue of the possibility of a synthesizing productive imagination infused with scientific image concepts, i.e. of an experiential 'openness' of the world at the level of 'lived experience' directly in scientific terms.