

Sellars's Two Worlds – Abstract

Ryan Simonelli

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Sellars has carried out Kant's transcendental idealism farther than any other philosopher of the 20th century. Indeed, *Science and Metaphysics*, which can be regarded as a summation of Sellars's work though his most productive period, is nothing other than an attempt to articulate a Kantian transcendental idealist picture, fitting his career's work into that picture. What is perhaps most notable about this picture from the perspective of contemporary Kant scholarship is that it falls squarely in the traditional "two worlds" reading of Kant (Strawson 1966, Guyer 1979, Van Cleve 1999, Juarning 2021), rather than one of the various sorts of "two aspect" readings that have been dominant for the past four decades (Prauss 1974, Allison 1983, Langton 1998, Allais 2004, 2015). For Sellars, the Kantian distinction between appearances and things in themselves really does demarcate two distinct worlds—the world of everyday experience, which Sellars regards as "existing only as the contents of actual and obtainable conceptual representings" (SM, 173), and the real world, which contains the happenings that account for the existence of the conceptual contents that constitute the world of everyday experience. Crucially, fundamentally distinct sorts of entities constitute these respective worlds—conceptual contents, on the one hand, and non-conceptual material happenings, on the other—and there is no one-to-one mapping between the constituents of one world and the constituents of the other. Apart from

exegetical concerns, two worlds readings of Kant are widely thought to face serious philosophical problems, the most basic of which being that it seems impossible to coherently state the relation that obtains between the worlds, leaving such readings with an “air of intolerable paradox” (SM, 53). In this paper, I argue that, while such a charge may well apply to a two worlds reading of Kant himself, Sellars’s own naturalistic development of Kant’s framework gives him just the resources needed to coherently spell out his distinctive two worlds picture.

References

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