The Return of the Dad

——On Millikan-Brandom debate about the legacy of Wilfrid Sellars

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I

1. The title of this article, "The Return of the Dad," derives from an essay that Ruth Millikan published in 2005, 'The Father, the Son, and the Daughter'. As the subtitle of Millikan's paper——"Sellars, Brandom, and Millikan"——reveals, the "Father" refers to Wilfrid Sellars, the Son is Robert Brandom, and the Daughter is Millikan herself. In the paper, Millikan talks about a family story, focusing on what the two scions owe to their father.

However, already at this point, readers of Millikan might find it strange that her name is coupled with Brandom. In any case, Ruth Millikan, known for her path-breaking work of *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories*, is a philosopher of biology with a naturalistic creed, whereas Robert Brandom is a hardheaded philosopher of pragmatic rationalism, deeply immersed in the history of philosophy, who even professes his philosophical hero is Hegel, the great German idealist.

That said, one question naturally arises: What is it that connects or bridges the gap between these two philosophers? And of course, as the title of this paper suggests, the key to answer this question can be found in the philosophy of Wilfrid Sellars, or so I will argue.

2. First, let us keep in mind the fact that Millikan and Brandom are both students of Sellars, the bibliographic evidence for which can easily be found by reviewing the index of Millikan (1984) and Brandom's *Making it Explicit*. To some, this configuration of names——Millikan and Brandom with Sellars as via media——might evoke one philosophical backdrop: the now well-known division of Sellarsians into a right and left wing.

Roughly, right-wing Sellarsians are those who read Sellars as a scientific realist, taking the dictum of *scientia mensura*——"in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not[1]"——to be the core of Sellarsian enterprise. In contrast, left-wing Sellarsians are those who read Sellars as a social pragmatist, taking his idea of inferential approach to intentionality——bluntly,

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[1] Sellars (1956): p.173.

intentionality in a full-fledged sense is inseparable from our social practice──to lie at the center of his philosophy.

Offhand, as some of the literature point out, it might seem that this demarcation between right and left applies to Millikan and Brandom (to which possibility alludes Millikan herself in the opening paragraphs of Millikan (2005)). However, once you begin to dig deeper, this first impression disappears. As Brandom rightly says, "There is something right about this opposition [among the Sellarsians], [b]ut ...in our case the left/right division does not seem to cut at the joints. [Millikan] has sketched a different context, one that is much more helpful[2]".

That said, how are we to understand the siblings' relationship? As we saw, the discrepancy should be mapped from a different perspective than the traditional right/left division. Then, where precisely is the point of their bifurcation to be located? The first aim of this talk is to delve into the details of the debate and make explicit where the difference between the two Sellarsian thinkers lies.

3. Siblings' dispute originates from Sellars's consideration about the relationship between what he called languagings as "pattern governed behavior" and "rule governed behavior." The former is characterized as a propensity to exhibit a certain sort of behavioral uniformities (such as the disposition to utter "red" when presented with red objects), and this can be achieved through S-R reinforcement or causal conditioning in a linguistic community. However, as Brandom stresses, this much can be done by a parrot, which, say, has been trained to utter "Green" in the presence of green objects.

This brings us to one typical Sellarsian thesis that Millikan and Brandom both agree on: being merely pattern governed or dispositional will not suffice to explain the core element of our linguistic activity. Otherwise put, to use Millikan's phrase, Millikan and Brandom both acknowledge that our *linguistic, rule governed* behaviors, in contrast to *merely vocal, pattern governed* ones, must be in *some sense* "disposition transcendent."

However, as is predicted from what is said at the outset, their concord ends with this motto-like phrase and thus begins the discord. In a nutshell, the crux of the matter is to be found in the discrepancy between a *social pragmatist* reading of Sellars, on the one hand, and an *anthropologist* one on the other. In our current situation, Brandom represents the social pragmatist side of the divide, and Millikan the anthropologist side.

II

4. Brandom, in dealing with the disposition transcendent character of our rule governed behaviors, follows and adopts Sellars's famous dictum about "the logical space of reasons," viz. the idea that "in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying

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[2]   Brandom (2005): p.230.

and being able to justify what one says[3]."

Brandom's explanatory strategy about this idea is characterized as a "two ply" account of our linguistic activity. Of this, the first ply corresponds to Sellars's notion of Pattern Governed Behavior, and Brandom gives it a name of Reliable Differential Responsive Dispositions (RDRD), e.g., abilities or reliable dispositions to respond differentially to red objects as discriminated from things that are otherwise colored. However, as is already said, this first ply of our linguistic activity falls short.

Think of ordinary creatures with mere RDRDs, such as litmus paper that turns red when soaked in acid, or iron that rusts in water. Whereas they surely show a discriminating tendency toward different sort of environmental stimuli, we would not grant them the statuses as residents of the normative space of reasons. That is, we would not regard them as candidates for normative evaluation about their being correct or incorrect. If a particular sort of chemical paper turns yellow or blue when expected to turn red, we would not use normative sentences such as "They broke the rule. They are wrong." Instead we would just say "they are causally responding in a different way."

Thus cuts in the second ply of Brandom's argument, the key component in explaining the disposition transcendent character of our language use. Brandom posits, in the wake of Sellars, that agents with second ply are not merely displaying causally conditioned propensities to respond in a differential way, but show enough abilities to be players in the normative "game of giving and asking for reasons." For example, if you are a resident in this normative space, your utterance of "I saw fire" will be demanded of a reason to justify, such as "Because I saw smoke in the kitchen!" In this case, your utterance is interpreted and evaluated by the other players in the game. According to an important Brandomian terminology, you are "committed" to your claim.

5. Some comments are in order about the Brandomian rule governedness or conceptual-cum-intentional character of our language use.

(1) According to Brandom, a distinction has to be made between derivative and original sort of intentionality. For example, think of mere marks on a paper that are just interpreted with regard to their semantic correctness. There needs to be someone who interprets them, that the contents asserted by the marks be correct or incorrect. The normative status of a sentence is instituted by interpretation, and hence arises the distinction between interpreting / interpreted sort of intentionality.

(2) However, this does not mean that the interpreters that perform the institution job can interpret anyway they like. The "game" metaphor implies that our linguistic uses are evaluated according to a certain set of rules. The moves of linguistic items are like those of chess pieces, in that language use ought to proceed in accordance with the rules that govern the practice you are in.

(3) In addition, the interpreting systems become the candidates for normative evaluation

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themselves. That is, interpreting systems apply the rules that govern their practice *to each other*.

(4) The rules that govern the correct and incorrect uses of language are already and oftentimes implicitly in play in social practice. You don't choose which rules to follow. For example, whether your utterance "Leo is a lion." are entitled to further claims ("Leo is a mammal.") or not ("Leo is a fish.") is determined according to the rules that are already and implicitly in play in public practice. In this sense, the evaluation of our linguistic moves is normatively and rationally constrained by public practice called "social scorekeeping."

(5) The implication of this social pragmatist account of 'disposition transcendence' should be clear. Rules are instituted by social practice and our linguistic activities occasioned as RDRDs are constrained by the society as a whole. In this sense, rule-governed, normative character of our intentional states is instituted by and embedded in the community practice from top to bottom. As Brandom says: "Only communities, not individuals, can be interpreted as having original intentionality. ⋯the practices that institute the sort of normative status characteristic of intentional stares must be *social* practices[4]."

III

6. In contrast to Brandom's social pragmatist approach, Millikan takes an *anthropological* account of the disposition transcendent character of our linguistic behavior. *Anthropological* is a word that Millikan adopts from Sellars[5], which could be connected to a conception of "Evolutionary Naturalism," a philosophical vista that Sellars inherits from his father, Roy Wood[6]. Though generally unacknowledged, Millikan's path breaking and insightful contribution to philosophy of biology can be traced back to the Sellarsian lineage that extends from Roy Wood to Wilfird.

To illuminate, let us look to one typical passage that Millikan quotes.

...When you describe the process whereby we come to adopt the language of which [some inferential] move is a part, you give an *anthropological*, a (very schematic) *causal* account of how language came to be used⋯in which you stress evolutionary analogies and cite the language of the beehive.

In the case of bees

(a) The pattern (dance) is first exemplified by particular bees in a way which is *not* appropriately described by saying that the successive acts by which the pattern is realized occur *because of the pattern*. (b) Having a 'wiring diagram' which expresses itself in this pattern has survival value. (c) Through the mechanisms of heredity and natural selection it comes about that all bees have this 'wiring diagram'[7].

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[4] Brandom (1994): p.61.

[5] Sellars (1954): p.353.

[6] Cf. Roy Wood Sellars (1922).

[7] Sellars (1963): p.326; cited in Millikan (2005): p.64..

What is alluded to is the evolutionary mechanism by which the linguistic behaviors of bees are established as wired-in, pattern-governed disposition. And the key conception that supports the argument is that of "survival value," which accrues to the practical usage of the language of beehive.

With this, Millikan connects another idea from Sellars, that the proper function of language is found in its 'mapping' or 'picturing' function. As she says,

> ...our mental states embody a *picture* or *map* of our environment that enables us appropriately to maneuver within and modulate our behavior in response to that environment. ···I adopt his suggestion that this picturing or mapping may have immediate practical uses, as when one bee makes a dance-map that guides another towards nectar[8].

In short, Millikan deploys two Sellarsian ideas, that of "evolutionary naturalism" and that of a proper function of language as 'mapping' or 'picturing' rather than a 'game.' According to Millikan's anthropological approach, rule-governedness or disposition transcendent character of our linguistic activities gets clarified in accordance with the "survival value" that accrues to our linguistic practice. That is, language is disposition transcendent, in that "it has a broader benefit or utility for the kids or community as a whole."

7. What must not be missed about the considerations above is the reckoning that there should be another implication that emanates from the mapping use of language. Think of a case in which a person is able to map or locate the presence of a predator "in different ways, from different perspectives, under changing conditions, using different sensory modalities, employing different inferential patterns[9]." For example, by seeing him in the flesh, 20 meters ahead, by hearing his roar behind the bush, or by inferring his presence from his footprints, and so on. It should be obvious that this task of re-identification becomes much easier and more efficient if the agent can use some linguistic media or corresponding empirical concepts for that purpose.

Mapping or picturing use of language can also serve as a medium of identification and re-identification of the selfsame object, and what is of importance to our current interest is the plausible postulation that even a single agent should be able to enjoy this evolutionary utility. Seen from Millikan's perspective, "Playing a conceptual game of solitaire must also have its advantages," and in that sense, "Clearly there are benefits to the isolated individual as well. ···Conforming to the semantic rules embodied in a language is not just a social activity, of use only within a society. If learning a language is learning to think, having learned a language will also come in handy on Robinson Crusoe's island, with or without assistance from Man Friday[10]."

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[8]   Millikan (2005): p.67.

[9]   Millikan (1984): ch.18-19.

[10]   Millikan (2005): p.65.

IV

8. By now the main thread that runs through the familial discord should be clear, and this brings us to the next terrain to be explored: How would the 'Dad' respond to the siblings' dispute, were he to know about it? In prospect, bluntly, some respectful disagreement and some friendly (parental?) amendments will be offered to both of the scions.

9. Granting, Millikan's evolutionary story is much more sophisticated than Sellars's original version, one major complaint still has to be addressed. The crux of the matter concerns Millikan's conception about normativity. As she ungrudgingly approves, her 'anthropological-historical' (she prefers to say 'biological') account gives us a very schematic but causal explanation of disposition transcendent or normative character of linguistic rules. Accordingly and importantly, Millikan's conception about the 'normative' character of our language use gets somewhat peculiar flavor.

> The norms for language are uses that have had "survival value", as Sellars put it. As such these norms are indeed disposition transcendent, but they are not fraught with ought. They are not prescriptive or evaluative norms. Their status has nothing to do with anyone's assessments. A norm is merely a measure from which actual facts can depart; it need not be an evaluative measure. A mere average, after all, is also a kind of norm[11].

Clearly visible in this passage is Millikan's assertion that it is uses that produce useful outcomes that are called 'normative' qua 'standard' or 'normal' use of language. Also, evidently presupposed is the Millikanian-cum-Sellarsian slant that the proper function of language can be found in picturing or representing the world that is *external* to language use. Assuming, mapping consists in 'external' qua 'language to world-outside-language' relation, correctness of language is measured against the 'externalist' criterion about linguistic use. (Recall the evolutionary utility gained from re-identification through the mapping function of language.)

In short, Millikan is saying that survival value comes from *correct external use* of language. And on this regard, *internal* rules conformed to in understanding and speaking a language will not be considered to play any sort of essential function in her anthropological account. As she says, "The basic rules of language are mapping rules only[12]." "Having an empirical concept and understanding what one is thinking of involves only the ability to recognize "that again; oh, that once more; hey, the same thing again," nothing fuller[13]."

Also, according to this 'clean externalist' account of linguistic rules, the full, accomplished explanation of our rule governed behavior can boast of "perfectly ordinary and full immersion in the causal order." For, in a theory that aims to elucidate the survival value of norms, what counts is

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[11]   Millikan (2005): p.64f.

[12]   Millikan (2013): p.278.

[13]   Ibid: p.279

the correctness of rules that is "evidenced by consistently correct outcomes". "A mere average, after all, is also a kind of norm," as Millikan says, and it is a matter of evidence that descriptions that consist of the language-world correspondence in the causal order can fulfill the task of this sort.

As a consequence, in Millikan's anthropological account our linguistic behavior, no normativity is implied in the understanding of rules. That is, our language uses are not "fraught with ought," and the entire story about language can consist of "cause all the way up"

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10. That said, internal or conceptually governed sort of linguistic uses―paradigmatically those of justification―inevitably recede into the background. It seems as though she says, "internal use and sensitivity to ought could just be dropped off. In any case, rules that govern our linguistic behavior have nothing to do with the normative game of giving and asking for reasons."

However, it should be pointed out that there's some empirical evidence that shows this is not the case. Justification or being an agent in the normative space of reasons seems to be working as one of the wired-in dispositions in us.

Take, for example, Gazzaniga's classical study on "split brain confabulation." As one commonly known fact tells us, different functions are allocated for left and right part of our brain. Roughly, the left side of the brain coordinates our linguistic or interpretive sort of tasks, and the right hemisphere of the brain plays the functional role of processing sensory or perceptual information, such as seeing or hearing. Gazzaniga's peculiar phenomenon of 'confabulation' is a symptom that occurs to patients with "split brains", i.e., patients whose right and left parts of the brain have been severed.

What is noteworthy about this phenomenon is that the left hemisphere of the split brain, even when it is physically and functionally disintegrated from its cerebral peer, and gets no information about the perceptual situation he is in, seems to be functioning on its own. For example, when the word "walk" is flashed to the right side, typical patients would stand up and walk out of the room. However, very curiously, if they are asked why getting up, their answers would go something like "I'm going get a Coke." In this case, 'interpreter module' confabulates the justificatory reasons in an autonomous manner, as it were, and thus seems to dominate the agent's behavior[14].

At least, knowing this sort of empirical data should give us a pause to accept Millikan's radical remark, "The basic rules of language are mapping rules only." After all, there surely exists some internal or autonomous realm of linguistic activity that functions independently from the external or picturing module of our brains. If so, the conclusion is hard to avoid that Millikan's anthropological or biological approach to our linguistic practice should have taken the normative aspect of language into consideration. Come what may, internal linguistic responses to "why?" evolved at some point of the history, and belongings in the normative space of reasons came to be actualized as a part of

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[14] Cf. Gazzaniga (1985).

wired-in linguistic activities.

VI

11. Meanwhile, we still have things to say to Brandom, too. True, Brandom's work is much more elaborated than Sellars's original version in the *ordo cogniscendi* (as is Millikan's in the *ordo essendi*). However, this in turn makes us aware that Brandom's work leaves much to be desired as a study in the *ordo essendi*, especially as we now know that Millikan, also inspired by Sellars, has done a wonderful achievement in this respect.

One way to illuminate my discontent is to examine one of the central theses in his *Making It Explicit*: "deixis presupposes anaphora." As a first step, let us consider the following example: "What' that?" —— "It's a rabbit." Roughly, Brandom's analysis about anaphoric uses of language runs as follows: .

(1) In this case, the pronoun 'it' is referring back to the earlier deictic expression of 'that,' thus functioning anaphorically.

(2) Deictic uses are essentially unrepeatable according to types, as different tokenings of 'this' or 'that' are not in general recurrences of each other, or even co-identifiable.

(3) Deictic occurrences as such are merely causal, unrepeatable responses to environmental stimuli and cannot be accorded any semantic significance.

(4) Then, how is it possible that a deictic expression functions as a reference to some fixed object and obtains semantic significance?

(5) Here comes in the "deixis presupposes anaphora" thesis.

(6) Roughly, this can be understood as one essential aspect of Brandom's inferentialist program, in line with his insistence on the inferential role semantics. (Recall Brandom's thesis of inferentialism sketched above. No inference, no meaning, and no intentionality.)

(7) Picking out occurrences as semantically significant (that is, as indirectly inferential and so assertionally significant) is to undertake an anaphoric or substitutional commitment (as is seen in the example above).

(8) Otherwise put, objectivity or semantic significance of deictic use is instituted by recognizing an object as "the same again" by undertaking a substitutional commitment.

(9) Deictic tokenings obtain significant semantic role by anaphoric extension and connection through recurrence to other tokenings.

(10) Thus mere occurrences become repeatable tokenings and are taken to refer to one and the same object[15].

11. As is noted above, anaphora is a chain of word that composes an identity relation between recurrent tokenings about the selfsame object. That is, linguistic use that performs re-identificatory

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[15] Cf. Brandom (1994): p.464ff.

function of "that same thing again." In this sense, anaphora is exactly the mechanism which Millikan's evolutionary agent gets survival value from, namely, the mechanism of re-identification through linguistic media.

That said, is anaphora necessarily a discursive, "social" affair as Brandom consistently emphasizes? Millikan's evolutionary story tells us the answer is no. Anaphoric substitution as re-identification can be carried through by an solitary agent, as is shown in the previous considerations.

Let me add one more, and perhaps more important, comment. Anaphora is, as it were, a horizontal word-word relation. Then that continuous chain of anaphoric relation must start somewhere, paradigmatically by initiating vertical word-world relation by using deixis or demonstrative. Let's call such items 'anaphoric initiators'.

However, as is often pointed out, the word-world identity relations could be as diverse as possible. Taking one simple example, do the knuckles of my index finger point to a book or to its cover, its title, its color, its shape, and so on? (On this point, Millikan urges us to read Putnam's model theoretic argument). In any case, how do we come to know that our anaphoric initiators represent or refer to some particular, selfsame objects consistently? Brandom just leaves it an open question and the big question of "How did we come to pick up a particular object as a proper and consistent target of reference?" remains untouched.

Here is no place to get into this notoriously complex and difficult question about reference, but one amendment is worth mentioning in our current context: Millikan's teleosemantic approach to signs and signifieds and the stabilizing function of linguistic reference should be a promising alternative on this count. In any case, as Dan Dennett acutely and correctly gouges out, it is a crucial and conspicuous feature of MIE, that the index of this magnum opus doesn't include "evolution" and "Millikan[16]."

VII

One way to discern the core element in the Millikan-Brandom discord is to take notice of the difference in their philosophical orientations. It could be said: Millikan is concerned to give elaborate answers to the "*how* our linguistic practice came to be" question, whereas Brandom is trying to provide us with detailed solutions to the "*what* our linguistic, discursive practice consists in" question[17]. And as we saw, their meta-philosophical penchants that caused the discrepancy are their strong asset and soft underbelly at one time. For a reader of Brandom, Millikan's excellence manifested in "how the trick is done" questions implies her lack of considerations in "what is the trick" questions, and vice versa for a connoisseur of Millikan who reads Brandom.

Perhaps, this in turn makes us aware that one possible alternative to map out "The Next Step

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[16]   Dennett (2010): p.55.

[17]   cf. Brandom (2010): p.306.

[18]   cf. Roy Wood Sellars (1918).

in Philosophy[18]" might be to take up a broader perspective. That is, the one that integrates both of the how- and what- questions into one. Of course, what I bear in mind when I make this suggestion is the name(s) of (the two) Sellars(es). As the citations below vividly indicate, the original philosophical agenda of Sellars's own depiction was surely a bit exorbitant, but still sounds attractive enough for me.

Firstly, as Wilfrid goes;

> The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term[19].

And secondly, as Roy Wood goes;

> Evolutionary Naturalism is the reflection into a focal system and the interpretation of the general results of all the sciences. It is a system of philosophy. Nor would evolutionary naturalism stress science alone. All valid human experience can find a place in the *Weltanschauung* thus outlined[20].

Now that we've glanced through the merits and the demerits of the mighty (but perhaps a bit stringent) scions, I may be permitted to profess my own penchant for a philosophy of an archaic kind. As is conveyed to us by the impressive remarks from the forerunners, it might perhaps permit us to eat and have the cake at one time.

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[19]   Sellars (1962): p.1.

[20]   Roy Wood Sellars (1922): p. viii.

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