Modal Expressivism and Modal Realism: Together Again

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Kant saw that in addition to concepts whose principal use is to make it possible for us to describe how things are, there are concepts that make explicit features of the framework that makes such description possible. An important class of the framework-explicating concepts comprises alethic modal concepts, such as necessity and possibility.

1. "It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects… locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label." Wilfrid Sellars: "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and Causal Modalities" In *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, *Volume II: Concepts, Theories, and the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Herbert Feigl, Michael Scriven, and Grover Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p.225-308.] (hereafter CDCM), § 108.
2. It is an essential feature of the inferential relations in which, according to claim (1), descriptive concepts must stand that they can be appealed to in *explanations* and *justifications* of further descriptions.
3. "although describing and explaining…are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*… The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand…." CDCM § 108.
4. The expressive role distinctive of modal vocabulary is to make explicit these explanatory and justificatory relations.

The "Kant-Sellars thesis about modality": In knowing how to use ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do in order to be able (in principle) to use alethic modal vocabulary.

Sellars sees modal locutions as tools used in the enterprise of
"…making explicit the rules we have adopted for thought and action…I shall be interpreting our judgments to the effect that A causally necessitates B as the expression of a rule governing our use of the terms 'A' and 'B'." ["Language, Rules, and Behavior" footnote 2 to p. 136/296 in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds*.]

To make first hand use of these [modal] expressions is to be about the business of explaining a state of affairs, or justifying an assertion. CDCM § 80.

…some kind of openness, variableness, or satisfiability characterizes all hypothetical statements alike, whether they are recognized "variable hypotheticals" like "For all *x*, if *x* is a man, *x* is mortal" or are highly determinate hypotheticals like "If today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday.
Gilbert Ryle " 'If', 'So', and 'Because' ", pp. 302-318 in Black, Max (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis* [Prentice Hall, 1950], p. 311.

Shall we say that modal expressions are metalinguistic? Neither a simple 'yes' nor a simple 'no' will do. CDCM §82.

It is sometimes thought that modal statements do not describe states of affairs in the world, because they are *really* metalinguistic. This won't do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits. It is more plausible if it is meant that statements involving modal terms have the force of *prescriptive* statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language. Yet there is more than one way of to '*have the force of*' a statement, and failure to distinguish between them may snowball into a serious confusion as wider implications are drawn. CDCM §81.

By "modal realism" I mean the conjunction of the claims that:
MR1) Some modally qualified claims are *true*.
MR2) Those that are state *facts*.
MR3) Some of those facts are *objective*, in the sense that they are independent of the activities of concept-users: they would be facts even if there never were or never had been concept-users.

Many of the laws of nature (including all the Newtonian ones) exhibit a temporal symmetry: they hold indifferently at all times. So they are independent of the advent, at some particular time, of concept-users. And one of the mainstays of physics over the last century—substantially contributing to its distinctive conceptual shape—is the result of the Noether theorem that tells us (entails) that that this fundamental temporal symmetry is mathematically equivalent to the physical principle of conservation of energy. Denying MR3 is denying the temporal symmetry of laws of nature. And the theorem tells us that that means denying the conservation of energy.

Hegel's view is that determinateness is a matter of standing in relations of material incompatibility (his "determinate negation") and material consequence (his "mediation") to other determinates. We might think of these as related by the principle that one property, say **metallic** is a consequence of another, **copper**, in case everything incompatible with being metallic (say, being a mammal) is incompatible with being copper. A property possession of which rules out possession of *no* other properties, and has as a consequence possession of no others, is in so far such *in*determinate.

There is no further vocabulary to which ordinary empirical descriptive (OED) vocabulary stands in the same semantically explicative relation as alethic modal vocabulary stands to it.

The modal expressivism of Part I and the modal realism of Part II are not only compatible, but that that account of the expressive role distinctive of modal vocabulary is just what is needed to understand the central claims of modal realism.

Modal expressivism (ME) makes claims about what one is *doing* in using modal concepts, while modal realism (MR) makes claims about what one is *saying* by using modal concepts. ME says that what one is doing when one makes a modal claim is endorsing an inference relating descriptive concepts as subjunctively (including counterfactually) robust, or treating two descriptive concepts as incompatible. MR says that when one does that, one is claiming *that* possession or exhibition of one empirical property is a consequence of, or is incompatible with, possession or exhibition of another. The claim that ME and MR are compatible is the claim that one can *both* be *doing* what ME says one is doing in applying modal vocabulary *and* be *saying* what MR says one is saying by doing that.

According to this way of understanding the relations between ME and MR, the claims of modal expressivism are made in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary for modal vocabulary: that is, a vocabulary suitable for specifying the practices, abilities, and performances that make up the *use* of modal vocabulary. And the claims of modal realism are made in a *semantic* metavocabulary for modal vocabulary: that is, a vocabulary suitable for specifying the *meanings* or conceptual *contents* expressed by modal vocabulary.

Reconciling these claims requires specifying a sense of "describing" or "empirical fact-stating" that is broader than that applicable to the primary use of OED vocabulary, but still sufficiently akin to it that the broader sense applicable to modal claims and the narrower sense applicable show up as species of a recognizably descriptive genus.

A broader sense of "fact-stating" and "description" that is not yet so promiscuous as the declarativist candidate is defined by the dual requirements of *semantic government* of claimings by facts and *epistemic tracking* of facts by claimings.

What one is talking *about* is what exercises a certain kind of *authority* over what one says; what one says is *responsible to* what one is talking about, in a way that is characteristic of this relation as *semantic*. What one is talking about provides a standard for the assessment of what one says.

By "semantic government" I mean that descriptive claims are subject to a distinctive kind of ought-to-be. It ought to be the case that the content of a descriptive claiming stands in a special relation, which we might as well call "correspondence," to a modal fact, which it accordingly purports to state (and in case there is such a fact, succeeds in stating). In virtue of that semantic norm, claimings are answerable for their correctness (accord with that norm) to facts.

Normative semantic government of claimings by facts says that it ought to be the case that there is a fact whose content is articulated by objective modal relations of material consequence and incompatibility that line up with the subjective (in the sense of pertaining to knowing and acting discursive subjects) normative relations of material consequence and incompatibility that articulate the content of a claiming. If that norm is not satisfied, the claiming does not live up to the standard provided by the fact it purports to state.

Where semantic government of claiming by facts is a normative matter, epistemic tracking of facts by claimings is a modal one. It is a matter of the subjunctive and counterfactual robustness of the conceptual content correspondence between facts and claims. The tracking condition holds just insofar as the subjunctive conditional "If the fact were (or had been) different, the claiming would be (or would have been) correspondingly different," is true. Insofar as this condition holds, there is a *reliable* correspondence between the contents of facts and the contents of claimings. That is to say that the inference from a claim about the content of a claiming to the content of the corresponding fact is in general a good one.

When the two requirements of semantic government and epistemic tracking are satisfied, it makes good sense to think of the claimings in question as fact-stating and descriptive.

It is a consequence of the version of Kant-Sellars modal expressivism that I outlined in Part I that instituting semantic government of modal claims by modal facts, and of achieving epistemic tracking of modal facts by modal claims must be an aspect of the process of instituting semantic government of ordinary empirical descriptive claims by the facts they state, and of achieving epistemic tracking of those facts by ordinary empirical descriptive claims.

Determining and applying descriptive concepts inevitably involves committing oneself as to the subjunctively robust inferential and incompatibility relations they stand in to one another. Rectifying concepts, determining facts, and establishing laws are all projects that must be pursued together. Empirical evidence bears on all of the semantic, epistemic, and explanatory tasks at once, or it bears on none of them.

Modal claims (and the concepts that articulate them) exhibit semantic government by and epistemic tracking of facts no less than ordinary empirical descriptive ones do. Far from being incompatible with this fundamental modally realistic claim, modal expressivism is just what is needed to make it intelligible. By showing how the use of modal concepts and the use of ordinary empirical descriptive concepts are inextricably bound up with one another, modal expressivism also shows itself and modal realism as two sides of one coin.