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Review of “In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars”

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Book Note

In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars, Edited by Kevin Scharp and Robert B. Brandom, Harvard University Press, 2007.

On July 6, 1989 the *New York Times* published an obituary to Wilfrid Stalker Sellars. Short, it stated the facts of Professor Sellars's various academic appointments, his time at the University of Pittsburgh and his long battle against illness; the obituary failed to characterize Professor Sellars's innovative and revolutionary place in American philosophy, even taking *Philosophical Perspectives* and *Naturalism and Ontology* as two of several "textbooks" he had published during his career. On July 29 a correction was printed; Professor Sellars's colleagues in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh wrote a letter to the *Times* noting that the works in question were philosophical—and not textbooks. On August 15, 1989, a proper obituary was published by the *Times*: "A Philosopher Who Shattered Our Complacency." Written by Professor Sellars's colleagues, it captured the significance of the loss. We were reminded that Professor Sellars "revolutionized both the content and the method of philosophy in the United States"; that "... many informed scholars believe [he] was the greatest philosopher of his time"; and that "[s]ome measure of Professor Sellars's impact on his discipline can be found in the professional honours conferred upon him." Finally, we were asked to start with *Science, Perception and Reality* if we wished to begin to understand not only Professor Sellars's work, but to also understand the "extraordinarily high regard" philosophers and others have of his work.

Since 1989 some excellent works have been published. Of note, the publishing of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" in 1997, with an introductory essay by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandom. Jay Rosenberg's *Wilfrid Sellars: Fusing the Images*, James O'Shea's *Wilfrid Sellars: Naturalism with a Normative Turn* and William A. DeVries's *Wilfrid Sellars* are excellent entry points.*

The book under review here, *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, Kevin Scharp and Robert Brandom, offer readers, in five parts, some of Professor Sellars's most important essays. The five parts are: "Language and Meaning," "Abstract Entities," "Mind, Language, and the World," "Science and the Mind," and "Kant". Each part includes three or four essays. Some of the essays placed in Parts I and II help orient one's reading of Professor Brandom's difficult work. I refer especially to "Inference and Meaning" (1953) and the seminal "Some Reflections on Language Games" (1954). Part III includes "The Lever of Archimedes" (1981), which deepens our understanding of Professor Sellars's view on the famous "myth of the given." Part IV includes the very well known essay, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (1962). And appropriately, three important essays investigating Kant's philosophy complete the volume. Part V is "Kant". For philosophers interested in Anglo-American philosophy, this volume is invaluable. It helps one enter not only the work of Wilfrid Sellars, but to enter the work of

many of today's most fertile minds in professional philosophy.

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*Kevin Scharp and Robert Brandom recommend DeVries's *Wilfrid Sellars* in their introduction to *In the Space of Reasons*.