VERSITA

HUMAN AFFAIRS *21*, 280–293, 2011
DOI: 10.2478/s13374-011-0029-1

THE LINGUISTIC-PRAGMATIC TURN IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

SHANE J. RALSTON

> ". . . the pragmatic turn encompasses the linguistic turn, since a turn toward the full range of human practices of course includes our linguistic practices, our historically instituted ways of speaking and writing."
>
> Vincent Colapietro (2004, 54)

> "By mid-century, however, pragmatism's broad vision was eclipsed as philosophy became increasingly professionalized and specialized: an "analytic" turn toward powerful new techniques in formal logic and the minute analysis of language designed to make philosophy more scientific and free from 'metaphysical' abuses."
>
> Frank X. Ryan (2002, 1)

Abstract: Did the pragmatic turn encompass the linguistic turn in the history of philosophy? Or was the linguistic turn a turn away from pragmatism? Some commentators identify the so-called "eclipse" of pragmatism by analytic philosophy, especially during the Cold War era, as a turn away from pragmatist thinking. However, the historical evidence suggests that this narrative is little more than a myth. Pragmatism persisted, transforming into a more analytic variety under the influence of Quine and Putnam and, more recently, a continental version in the hands of Richard Rorty and Cornel West. In this paper, I argue that proof of the linguistic turn's presence as a moment in a broader pragmatic turn in philosophy can be garnered from close examination of a single article, W. V. O. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," and a single issue: whether the analytic-synthetic distinction is philosophically defensible.

Keywords: pragmatism, language, Quine, Dewey, Bentley

Did the pragmatic turn encompass the linguistic turn? Or was the linguistic turn a turn away from pragmatism? Some commentators tell a story about how analytic philosophy "eclipsed" pragmatism, especially during the Cold War era, which would suggest that the

linguistic turn was a turn away from the classic pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey (McCumber 2001, Menand 2001). A growing number of skeptics argue that the eclipse narrative is a myth.[1] However, my intention is not to add to that cacophony of critical voices. There is nothing about the eclipse narrative that makes it incompatible with a more modest claim that strains of pragmatist thinking continue unabated in parallel philosophical traditions. According to this view, pragmatism survived its brief (if incomplete) eclipse, transforming into a more analytic variety under the influence of Willard Van Orman Quine and Hilary Putnam as well as, still later, a continental form in the hands of Richard Rorty and Cornel West, but always with some trace of its classic origins intact. As Rorty (1982, xvii) aptly declared, "James and Dewey were . . . waiting at the end of the dialectical road analytic philosophy traveled . . ." This wildly adaptive character, the ability to cross, fuse, preserve and resuscitate traditions, is what Joseph Margolis (2010, 1) calls "pragmatism's advantage." In this paper, I explore the possibility that instead of eclipsing pragmatism, the early twentieth-century turn toward linguistic philosophy might constitute a moment within a broader pragmatic turn in the history of philosophy. While admittedly an ambitious thesis, evidence of the possibility lies dormant in a single essay, W. V. O. Quine's (1953) "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," and the fundamental philosophical issue at the heart of this essay: namely, whether the analytic-synthetic distinction is a sound conceptual tool for appreciating the nature of linguistic meaning.

According to the logical positivists' version of the analytic-synthetic distinction, linguistic statements can be divided into two types, (1) those the meaning of which is dependent on facts about the world, or the synthetic type, and (2) those the meaning of which is independent of such facts "come what may," or the analytic type. Rudolf Carnap (1974, 1967) and A.J. Ayer (1936) exempted statements of the second type from the strict standard of empirical verification demanded of the first. Although Immanuel Kant introduced the analytic-synthetic distinction into the annals of Modern Philosophy, it took a starkly different form once appropriated by leaders of the twentieth-century movement known as linguistic (or analytic) philosophy. For Kant, a judgement is analytic if and only if the meaning of its predicate term is contained in the concept of its subject term; so that, for instance, "all bodies are extended" is analytic because the sense of the term 'extended' belongs to, or is a property of, what it means to be a body. Synthetic judgments, on the other hand, expand our knowledge of the world by "add[ing] to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any wise thought in it, and which no analysis could possibly extract from it" (Ayer 1936, 71).[2]

---

[1] John Shook (2010) writes: "There has been much talk of pragmatism's 'eclipse' during analytic philosophy's greatest dominance from 1950 to 1990. The myth must be corrected: ***pragmatism was never eclipsed***" (author's emphasis). Likewise, Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse (2011) note that "the Eclipse Narrative is corrosive in that it obstructs deeper and potentially fruitful engagements between current philosophy and some of the classical expressions of pragmatism. Perhaps more importantly, the Eclipse Narrative is demonstrably false."

[2] Kant's analytic-synthetic distinction incorporated the idea that objects can be known prior to experience (apriori) or in experience (aposteriori), which can be represented schematically as a four-way block-diagram (letters A, B, C and D are used to represent analytic-apriori, synthetic-apriori, analytic-aposteriori and synthetic-aposteriori, respectively):

By the twentieth century, the analytic-synthetic distinction's credentials had fallen into disrepute because of two problematic features: (1) its exclusive application to statements of the subject-predicate form and (2) its highly metaphoric notion of belonging or containment (Quine 1953, 21). Rather than adopt Kant's formulation, the logical positivists accepted A.J. Ayer's (1936, 73) version of the distinction, such that "a proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience."[3]

1.

In "Two Dogmas," Quine's attack on the credentials of the analytic-synthetic distinction is an attack on the logical positivists' version, not Kant's seminal formulation. The distinction relies not only on its own credentials, but also on a host of related notions, including definition, consistency, necessity and synonymy. Quine (1953, passim) exploits this insight in his "Two Dogmas," demonstrating that in every attempt to unpack synonymy, the explanandum draws on a related notion which itself requires explanation. On Quine's assessment, then, there is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions for a statement to be analytic, such that it would be true "come what may," wholly in virtue of its own meaning or in every possible language, for each related notion recursively enumerates some conventionally accepted meaning in an already existing language.[4] Therefore, Quine concludes that with enough alterations in our "web of beliefs," any statement in our language

	Analytic	Synthetic
Apriori	A	B
Aposteriori	C	D

In Kant's formulation, all aposteriori judgments are synthetic, so that type C judgments (analytic aposteriori) are impossible; type A judgments (analytic apriori) are entirely formal and true independent of experience (or in virtue of their meaning); type D judgments (synthetic aposteriori) are empirical and extend our knowledge of the world; while type B judgments (synthetic apriori) have (i) an apriori factor which is universal and necessary and yet (ii) are synthetic, in that the meaning of the predicate is not contained within the concept of the subject, so that these judgments apply to the world around us.

[3] Note that the logical positivists' analytic-synthetic distinction is not identical to Kant's seminal formulation. They deliberately conflate Kant's logical division of statements (or judgments) into synthetic, or those whose predicate is not contained in the concept of the subject (type 1), and analytic, or those whose predicate is contained in the concept of the subject (type 2) with his epistemological distinction of truths known through our sensory experience, or a posteriori (type 1), and those known prior to and apart from all sensory experience, or apriori (type 2).

[4] To say that a definition of analyticity holds true in every possible language system means that it does not constitute, nor is it contingent upon, one or more conventions of any particular language. It is, in other words, universally applicable to all languages, or as Ernest Lapore (1995, 471) puts it, the definition satisfies a "transcendence requirement, [such that] any adequate criterion for a metalinguistic notion must specify features common and peculiar to all languages." According to David Marian (1996, 282), Quine demonstrates that every reasonably related notion that a definition of analyticity could rely upon is "a recursion based on a list of members of a particular language," and therefore it "cannot yield anything but a definition that is restricted to a particular language."

can be designated analytic; ergo, the analytic-synthetic distinction is a distinction without a difference.

The path that leads to the conclusion that the analytic-synthetic distinction is one without a difference takes several twists and turns, several of which are worth exploring. Quine (1953, 27) initially inquires about the possibility that analyticity might be the same as synonymy. Quine describes synonymy as "interchangeability in all contexts without change of truth value—interchangeability, in Leibniz's phrase, *salva veritate*." However, many examples come to mind in which "bachelor" and "unmarried man" do not interchange (e.g., "bachelor of arts"), just as in the case of "man" and "rational animal" (e.g., "mentally insane man"). Next, Quine suggests that interchangeability might take a stronger form, or what he calls "cognitive synonymy," but says no more about what this expression means, other than giving three examples (numbered 3, 4, and 5): "(3) All and only bachelors are unmarried men"; "(4) Necessarily all and only bachelors are bachelors"; and "(5) Necessarily all and only bachelors are unmarried men" (29). If (5) is held to be true then (3) is as patently analytic as (4), and consequently 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' are as identical as 'bachelor and 'bachelor'; thus they are cognitively synonymous. However, Quine is not persuaded, for the synonymy of these two terms presupposes a notion of interchangeability that is specific to a language with "modal adverbs like 'necessarily'" and extensions, the identity of which are merely arbitrarily, such as "creature with a heart" and "creature with kidneys" (30-31). To understand the notion of interchangeability in terms of a language containing the adverb "necessarily," an understanding of the notion of analyticity must already be presupposed. Likewise, in order to understand the notion of interchangeability in terms of a language in which extensional identity implies synonymy, the established language, Quine argues, will be "intelligible only in so far as the notion of analyticity is already understood in advance" (31). Similar to definition, consistency and necessity, the appeal to interchangeability as a path to understanding analyticity proves viciously circular.

Quine's attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction in "Two Dogmas" ends with the following negative conclusion: No statements of theory, even those about logical laws, are immune to revision in the light of observational experience. All observations taken together at any particular time always underdetermine a theoretical explanation. So, any number of possible theories may be adopted to accommodate unobserved (or postulated) entities and logical standards.[5] However, to avoid building elaborate metaphysical systems, what the scientific inquirer must regularly do is subject his beliefs about the world and its laws *en toto* to the rational test of experience: "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually, but only as a corporate body" (Quine 1953, 43). Moreover, Quine's test of experience is pragmatic, for any statement can be shown to be analytically true, that is, true "come what may," so long as substantial enough alterations are made in other places within the inquirer's system of beliefs. Within this system, or what Quine calls a "web of beliefs," the most secure beliefs are held stationary at the center, e.g. those of

[5] In its more developed form, this becomes known as the "Duhem-Quine" or underdetermination thesis. In terms of formal and natural languages, there are "alternative 'equally valid descriptions'" of any natural language that can be codified or modeled in the form of an artificial language. For a more comprehensive explanation of this position, see Putnam (1975, 63).

mathematics and logic, while the more insecure and questionable dangle precariously at the periphery (44).[6] One model of analyticity proves most successful or paradigmatic when it is found to be "more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience" (43).[7] On the other hand, serious enough changes in the system can also mean that statements previously identified as analytically true—e.g., in virtue of the logical laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle—suddenly come out false or only synthetically true. If Quine's test of experience is universally applied, then the force of the analytic-synthetic distinction becomes a mere shadow of its former self (especially the logical positivists' formulation)—that is, a distinction lacking a genuine difference.

2.

John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley's transactional/pragmatist approach appears to offer a genuine middle way between the positions of Quine and the logical positivists. To explore the possibility that this approach successfully mediates the debate over the acceptability of the analytic-synthetic distinction, I begin with a treatment of Dewey's logical theory in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* and then complement it with a summary of Dewey and Bentley's transactional method of linguistic analysis in *Knowing and the Known*, before applying them to the problem at hand.

In Dewey's logical theory, inquiry aims to resolve unique problematic situations, while "inquiry into inquiry" reveals a generic pattern of experience underlying problem solving activity.[8] At the outset of this activity, a person is in a doubtful state, arising from a tensive difficulty he detects in the immediate situation, a difficulty that invites inquiry. Inquiry is defined by Dewey (LW 12, 55) as "the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole." According to this definition, inquiry has existential consequences (in "converting the elements . . . into a unified whole"), but altogether lacks existential content (as the functional elements, "distinctions and relations" of an "indeterminate situation"). Those elements of a situation

---

[6] For an elaboration of Quine's holism and the concept of a web of belief, see Quine and Ulian (1978).

[7] According to one critic of Quine's holism, Crispin Wright (1986, 193), this pragmatic methodology of appraising the efficacy of beliefs produces inconsistent results because in order to avoid an infinite regress of questions about efficacy it is necessary to exempt certain principles, for instance, the pragmatic criterion itself, from pragmatic appraisal. However, Wright's criticism is not entirely sound, for both classic pragmatists and neo-pragmatists (for instance, William James and Richard Rorty) have successfully applied the pragmatic criterion to itself. To evaluate whether the pragmatic criterion works means simply assessing whether, on par, most of the changes in beliefs resulting from the criterion's imposition were themselves efficacious.

[8] Inquiry is itself patterned after the flow of life activity. "The structure and course of life-behavior," Dewey (LW 12, 39ff) declares, "has a definite pattern, spatial and temporal. This pattern definitely foreshadows the general pattern of inquiry." All citations to Dewey's (1996 [1882-1953]) *Collected Works* follow the conventional method, LW (Later Works), MW (Middle Works) or EW (Early Works) volume, page number.

undergoing inquiry (i.e. its subject matter) include (i) observable material and connections, or the conditions of the situation, (ii) instruments or means for manipulating those conditions, and (iii) "objects." "If surveyed in an observable world—in what we call cosmos or nature—the object observed," Dewey (LW 14, 116) writes, "is as much a part of the operation [of inquiry] as is the observing organism." One way, perhaps the common-sense way, of understanding individual objects (whether chairs, tables or humans) is as discrete, separable things, the existence of which is independent of how they are experienced. While this approach is acceptable when objects are "over and above board," or outside of inquiry, once objects are undergoing inquiry this common sense approach only impedes effective problem solving.[9] So, in the course of inquiry, the transactional approach asks inquirers to treat distinctions and objects as having a thoroughly functional status. Distinctions—for instance, mind-body, fact-value, and analytic-synthetic—do not represent fixed dualisms. Instead, they resemble tools that prove their fitness by consistently guiding inquiry towards successful results. In this functionalizing (or transactional) account, an "object" is then a regulative end or "objective of inquiry" (Dewey LW 12, 122).[10]

To claim that knowing or cognitive experience exhausts problem-solving inquiry, however, would misrepresent Dewey's robust metaphysics of experience. Indeed, it would cast Dewey as far closer to Quine on epistemological matter than deserved. According to Quine (1969, 81-85), epistemic objects are outside the purview of ordinary lived human experience except insofar as they are known with respect to a set of beliefs that together constitute a theory. In contrast, Dewey (LW 13, 222) recognizes that only a minority of lived human experience (especially that of mature adults) consists of cognitive or reflective experience. According to Dewey's (LW 12, 21) postulate of immediate empiricism, "what *is* [exists] . . . is what it is experienced *as*," or as it has been previously learned through focused inquiry, funded as meaning in immediate experience and henceforth apprehended and acted upon as a matter of habit.[11] Contrary to Quine's position, the majority of human experience

---

[9] This point about treating all things, including objects, distinctions and relations, in inquiry as functionally rather than ontologically significant is most clearly stated by Dewey in his letter replying to Albert G. A. Balz in the appendix of *Knowing and the Known*. Dewey characterizes his own effort to distinguish experience of objects in inquiry versus objects outside of inquiry as "an attempt to convert all the ontological, as prior to inquiry, into the logical as occupied wholly and solely with what takes place in the conduct of inquiry" (Dewey LW 16, 287).

[10] Dewey (LW 4, 160) tried to clarify his positions in response to the consistent misunderstanding of his realist critics, who could rarely if ever appreciate the "double status" of "object" as (i) a "common sense thing" with a status independent of inquiry versus (ii) the consequence, result, outcome or objective of inquiry.

[11] Cognitive experience, or knowing, is secondary to its non-cognitive counterpart, or having "an experience." Conversely, having is primary, the repository of tentatively settled meanings that are both the outcome of successful past inquiries and potentially employable resources in subsequent inquiries. The cyclical relation between knowing and having is perhaps best represented metaphorically, as an ebb and flow movement of the sea tides; the tide, although initially out, flows in and then recedes, leaving its deposit of objects (seaweed, shells, sand etc.) on the beach. The tide represents the phases of knowing and having that alternatively constitute experience; when the tide is out, having is emphasized and much of the meaning deposited by knowing has been previously funded or embedded in a habit background that mediates immediate experience; when the tide is in, knowing takes the foreground

is habitual, non-cognitive or had in immediate experience, though mediated by the products of prior inquiries—a notion Frank X. Ryan (1994, 31) calls "mediate immediacy." Therefore, human experience is not limited to theoretical explanations of an object's existence relative to a scientific theory, as Quine claims. Instead, the world and its objects on Dewey's account are more often immediately felt or had (in non-reflective, immediate, or primary experience), rather than theoretically explained, known or cognized (in reflective or secondary experience).[12]

Among those instrumentalities that transform human experience and fund primary experience with meaning, logical forms are crucial. What they are not are fixed formal rules or viewings of a pre-given logical structure underlying all language. Logical forms are instead defeasible operational principles that consistently guide inquiry towards valid conclusions, or "warranted assertions," based upon previous experience and experimental results.[13] Operations in experimental science include observation, record and manipulation of conditions. By repetitively deploying the findings of these experimental operations as "limited postulates" in successive inquiries, the scientist develops workable propositions, or hypothetical proposals to the effect that if specific conditions are implemented, then the predicted consequences will follow. Eventually general principles or "logical forms as postulates are the outcome," from there on guiding inquiry toward successful results under sufficiently similar conditions.[14]

Communication plays a crucial role in this problem-solving process, as does language, the quintessential means—or as Dewey (LW 1, 134) describes it, the "tool of tools." Yet,

---

and having the experiential background, as the meaning, terms and conditions of problems become functional subject matter for inquiry. See Ralston (2009, 195-196).

[12] Dewey's principle of immediate experience can be fruitfully compared with Quine's ontological commitment thesis, or "To be is to be the value of a variable." Although I am unable to adequately do such a comparison justice here, it will hopefully suffice to note a difference, namely, that Quine's thesis applies to theory-laden linguistic statements, while Dewey's applies to the whole of experience, including and especially the non-theoretical and non-cognitive dimension; on the other hand, a distinctive similarity is that neither asserts that a specific ontology is true, only what it is—in Quine's case, the value of a variable and, in Dewey's, what it is experienced as. For a fuller comparison of Dewey and Quine regarding this matter, see Shook (2002) and Koskinen and Pihlström (2006).

[13] The term "operation" is employed in the *Logic* to mean actual doing or physical activity, yet later, in correspondence with Bentley, confesses that he meant "manipulation," which covers both physical and intellectual activity. According to Dewey (LW 12, 11), the development of these logical forms is a fundamental requirement of a theory of inquiry, or what Dewey terms logic: "The theory, in summary form, is that all logical forms (with their characteristic properties) arise within the operations of inquiry are concerned with control of inquiry so that it may yield warranted assertions."

[14] Only within the a series of connected inquiries does the warranted assertion or conclusion of one inquiry provide the operational means or tools for the next, such that logical forms develop out of and regulate the chain of inquiries in which they are successively employed (Dewey LW 12, 46). The qualification that sufficiently similar conditions are required to repeat experimental results, or the *ceteris paribus* assumption, is a substantial obstacle for determining logical forms that govern social activity, since it is uncommon that all factors besides one will be held constant across different times, locations or situations within the context of a complex social system. For this reason, Dewey believes that social control and planning are preconditions for effectively employing the experimental method in the social sciences (Dewey MW 11, 95).

for Dewey, propositions are not the sole carriers of meaning, for all kinds of sign-behavior, from pre-linguistic signaling (e.g. a porcupine bristling its needles) and verbal cueing (e.g. a yelp or cry) to ostension and linguistic naming (e.g. pointing to the sun setting over the horizon and uttering 'sunset') communicate meaning (LW 16, 139-44). In the context of inquiry, linguistic and pre-linguistic meanings function as instrumentally useful means for achieving intermediate goals or ends-in-view.[15] As the purposes that language fulfills become increasingly sophisticated, the users must progressively refine the instrument's design. Language helps inquirers to record observations, formulate suggestions (or hypotheses) and deploy experimental procedures and theories, so that in explaining a scientific phenomenon or solving a practical problem, these means serve to connect the conditions of the situation with the inquirer's eventual objective.[16] "To find out what facts, just as they stand, mean, is the object of all discovery; to find out what facts will carry out, substantiate, support a given meaning, is the object of all testing" (Dewey LW 6, 271). Once imbued with meaning, factual-material conditions become useful means for achieving successful results through inquiry. When problem solving is combined with communicative behavior, these activities also become transactionally related, or parts of a reciprocal interplay of "knowings," i.e. the factual-material conditions and functional means operating in inquiry (or reflective experience), with "knowns," i.e. the warranted assertions, judgments or outcomes of inquiry (including habits and meanings funded in non-reflective experience) (Dewey LW 16, 21-24). What meanings of all kinds, linguistic and pre-linguistic, hold in common is that they serve as instrumentalities or transactional knowings for channeling habits into intelligent action. These acts generate the desired consequences, products or transactional knowns of inquiry. In other words, they direct activity which resolves the problem at hand, thereby reunifying the initially disrupted situation.

Besides meanings, Bentley and Dewey also discuss the function of signs and symbols in the context of both discursive and problem-solving activity. Signs are "existent things, as . . . evidence of the existence of something else, this something being at the time inferred rather than observed. A sign thereby designates that a thing other than itself exists,

---

[15] There is an astounding resemblance between Dewey's account of meaning as a means that serves to advance inquiry and Wittgenstein's account of meaning as use. In the PI § 11, Wittgenstein (1967, 6e) compares words in a language to tools in a toolbox; according to this analogy, they function differently depending on the particular demands of usage. In PI § 43, he declares that the meaning of an expression is equivalent to the way in which it is used: "For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we use the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (20e).

[16] In *How We Think*, Dewey describes a complex problem solving situation that begins with the observation of an odd physical phenomenon, whereby the inquirer must explain it in terms of physical laws. In putting a hot glass recently taken from hot soapy water down on a counter, bubbles go outside of the glass and then immediately travel back inside. As in more common sense problems (such as finding the fastest means of transportation to get to an appointment on time or identifying the function of a pole on the front of a tugboat), the goal is to discover intermediary means or tools to connect the conditions in the situation with the object or objective: "Here the method of solution is also to seek for intermediary terms which will connect, by regular linkage, the seemingly extraordinary movements of the bubbles with the conditions known to follow from processes supposed to be operative" (Dewey MW 6, 238).

even when that other thing is unobserved; such as when a puff of smoke designates the existence of an unseen fire, a hypothesis designates some unobserved experimental result or a prediction designates a future state of affairs" (Dewey LW 14, 52). On the basis of a theory of "connections" or "involvements" between observable "signs" of existent things, an inference is drawn to the possible existence of the unobservable thing, thereby making the sign significant (LW 12, 101). The need to test the inference and thereby render the sign-significance determinate—i.e., prove the existence of the unobservable thing—leads the individual to embark on a process of inquiry.

In comparison to signs, symbols have a much more specialized function in inquiry. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey reminds his readers that words as symbols enable meanings to be manipulated and transmitted in familiar activities; they codify and communicate ideational content. Not only do symbols occur within single words, but they also manifest as elements of sentences and entire languages, such that their "meaning [is] carried by a language in a system" (LW 12, 57). In addition, meaning grows out of a broader biological and cultural context, what Dewey (LW 12, 27) calls a "matrix," in which communities of language-users employ symbols as tools to (i) solve problems, (ii) refer to things and events and (iii) transmit cultural artifacts and techniques from one generation to the next. So, from the simplest activity (such as extinguishing a flame or building a shelter) to the most complex (such as translating a physical phenomena into a set of differential equations or assessing the age of a prehistoric skeleton), symbolizing behavior implicates "a more inclusive social or cultural environment." When Dewey (LW 12, 60) treats symbols as representing other symbols, marking the "development of symbol meanings in relation to one another," he anticipates the more precise notion of symbols he and Bentley will later adopt.

In the *Logic* and *Knowing and the Known*, the number of domains in which symbols operate is significantly restricted, but this in no way alters their function in inquiry. Instead of applying to the whole domain of communicative activity, symbols find their home only in "the regions of mathematical and syntactical consistency" (Dewey LW 16, 91). Dewey follows Charles Sanders Peirce's lead here by warning against treating symbols as isolable representatives of entities. Symbols used in the fields of mathematics and logic may have once been employed for practical purposes, such as in the activities of sea navigation or surveying land.[17] Pythagorean Theorem, for instance, states that, in algebraic terms, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, where 'c' is the hypotenuse while 'a' and 'b' are the sides of a right triangle. When inquiry turns to the manipulation of symbols within a system, symbolizing behavior is liberated from the exigency of existential reference.[18] Thus, the symbols 'a,' 'b' and 'c' need

[17] Dewey (LW 12, 28-9, 43, 153, 285-7) states that logic is to "controlled inquiry" what geometry is to "land measurement." Theoretical geometry arose out of the applied geometrical activity of surveying land. Although geometry has been formalized into a system of inter-related, but by no means existentially referential, symbols, this fact in no ways detracts from the function of its symbolically constituted principles in guiding inquiry, whether theoretical or applied..

[18] Bentley and Dewey (LW 14, 393) expand upon this point about the liberation of symbols from existential reference, stating that when "discourse is conducted exclusively with reference to satisfaction of its own logical conditions, or, as we say, for its own sake, the subject-matter is not only non-existential in immediate reference but is itself formed on the ground of freedom from existential reference of even the most indirect, delayed, and ulterior kind. It is then mathematical." For instance,

not refer to the sides of an existing right triangle; they need only establish the conditions whereby the logical principle (or form) of Pythagorean theorem guides successful ongoing inquiries.

Returning to the analytic-synthetic distinction, to designate certain statements as analytic involves rendering their constituent expressions (e.g. "man" and "rational animal") synonymous within a series of successful inquiries as an operationally apriori matter. By appending the predicate "is analytic" to certain statements consistently and discovering that by doing so the designation promotes successful inquiry, members of a community experimentally confirm and then agree upon which analytic designators deserve converted into valid logical forms. The distinction between analytic and synthetic statements is, at least in Dewey and Bentley's hands, no longer a distinction without a difference.[19] Once functionally discriminated, analytic and synthetic become mutually reinforcing phases of inquiry, instead of fixed categories (or bifurcated kinds) of statements. While the analytic phase "involves discernment, discrimination, marking off the trivial from the important," the synthetic "leaves the mind with an inclusive situation within which the selected facts are placed" (Dewey MW 6, 269, LW 8, 219). In other words, the analytic-synthetic distinction takes on a functional or transactional status, proving its worth to the extent that analytic and synthetic activities mutually advance the course of inquiry.[20] On Dewey's account, the analytic-synthetic distinction operates as a logical form, serving to guide inquiry, but having no existential (or ontological) content, except insofar as it delivers specific products into primary experience as a consequence of reflective activity.

3.

Let us reconsider the issue posed at the paper's outset, that is, whether the linguistic turn is a turn away from pragmatism or a moment in a greater pragmatic turn in philosophy. One must not overlook that in the final paragraph of "Two Dogmas" Quine identifies

---

symbolic systems, such as Peano arithmetic, rely on a set of axioms that license all the possible operations (addition, subtraction etc.); yet we need not say that "2 + 2 = 4" refers to the existence of those axioms which license the operation, for the axioms are only the logical conditions that must be met in order to successfully participate in the discourse we call Peano arithmetic. Quine, on the other hand, believes that logic differs from mathematics in that it highlights inference, rather than quantification, classification and relation; in eschewing analyticity, logic then becomes a tool for ensuring true predictions. This conception of logic is narrower than Dewey and Bentley's.

[19] Morton White is the most authoritative commentator on Dewey's treatment of the analytic-synthetic distinction. White (1950, 325) claims that "the kind of *gradualism* one finds in Dewey's writings" is preferable to the positivists' hard-and-fast distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions as well as Quine's complete skepticism about the distinction's credentials. White (2002) argues that versions of the distinction persist in the works of classical pragmatists, including Dewey and William James, who inspired a "revolt against formalism."

[20] Other distinctions, such as those between subject and object (or predicate) and analysis and synthesis, become functional phases of activity in inquiry that reciprocally reinforce each other's purposes as well as their shared objective, viz. promoting successful inquiry. Dewey writes: "Analysis leads to synthesis; while synthesis perfects analysis . . . Hence the folly of trying to set analysis and synthesis against each other" (Dewey MW 6, 270).

himself as a more thoroughgoing pragmatist than the logical positivists.[21] Quine's attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction was made in the spirit of Dewey's career-long offensive against philosophical dualisms. However, as evidenced by their differing assessments of the distinction's credentials, Quine's attack is also at odds with Dewey's logic. While Quine wishes to eliminate the distinction altogether, Dewey and Bentley seek to preserve it as an operational feature of successful inquiry, as a transactional knowing. In this way, Quine's pragmatism does not entirely square with Dewey's.

To appreciate analytic philosophy as a moment in a greater pragmatic turn, some evidence must be identified to support the contention that early pragmatism is a fellow traveler with logical positivism. Charles Sanders Peirce's work is a likely candidate, for he was directly responsible for the emergence of modern logic and semeiotic theory. In contrast, Dewey was reluctant to see philosophical logic transform into a completely formal system of symbolic notation lacking existential reference. In developing the new logic, Carnap and Ayer eschewed the classic Aristotelian understanding of predicated properties (e.g. rationality or bachelorhood) as ontologically real essences.[22] In its place, they substituted a modern understanding of essential predication in which predicated properties represent abstract logical categories, not essences that things or classes of things partake of; in this purely formal system, ontological questions simply do not arise. The positivists' new logic entertains linguistic meaning holistically. No longer does a word's meaning depend on its correspondence with an object (or existential reference)—a position parallel to Bentley and Dewey's later conception of symbolic meaning. Once freed of this dependence, symbols may refer to other symbols within a language system, making them especially useful in the domains of mathematics and logic. Therefore, the strategic move towards a notion of symbolic meaning in the absence of existential reference constitutes a thread of continuity between logical positivism and classic pragmatism.

---

[21] Quine (1953, 46) writes: "Carnap, Lewis, and others take a pragmatic stand on the question of choosing between language forms, scientific frameworks; but their pragmatism leaves off at the imagined boundary between the analytic and the synthetic. In repudiating such a boundary I espouse a more thorough pragmatism." Quine's critical reaction to C.I. Lewis is peculiar in that Lewis (1923) articulated an epistemic version of the distinction—specifically, between beliefs that resist experiential verification and beliefs that are sensitive to it—that closely resembles Quine's (1953, 44) distinction between core and periphery beliefs. Moreover, Quine's web of beliefs looks shockingly similar to Lewis's (1929, 305-6) hierarchical pyramid of conceptualistic exegeses: "[T]he whole body of our conceptual interpretations form a sort of hierarchy or pyramid with the most comprehensive, such as those of logic, at the top, and the least general . . . at the bottom; that with the complex system of interrelated concepts, we approach particular experiences and attempt to fit them, somewhere and somehow [. . .] Persistent failure leads to readjustment. [. . .] The higher up a concept stands in our pyramid, the more reluctant we are to disturb it, because the more radical and far-reaching the results will be if we abandon it."

[22] David Marian (1996, 283) explains how the logical positivists' program tried to convert philosophical notions into their appropriate linguistic counterparts, so as to make them compatible with the new formal logic: "The linguistic turn (Vienna-circle style) proposed to shift the application of these basic notions ["truth, logical truth, necessity, logical consequence, analyticity"] to linguistic items, to sentences. The advantage of this shift was supposed to be twofold: first, the avoidance of psychologism and metaphysics; second, the increase in precision resulting from the fact that the basic philosophical notions, when applied to sentences, could be rigorously defined by bringing to bear the powerful tools of formal logic—philosophy would become as rigorous as science."

In another sense, though, the logical positivists' move towards formalism is insincere to its holism. By embracing the assumption that logic is formalistic through and through, they ignore the biological and cultural factors that influence discursive practices, natural language development as well as problem solving activity, or what Dewey broadly terms "logic." Dewey (LW 12, 85) expresses dissatisfaction with the formalism of the positivists' new logic, complaining that "Logic in being 'purified' from all experiential taint has become so formalistic that it applies only to itself."[23] Proving Dewey's point, Carnap and Ayer privilege the formal structure over the material implications of language use by understanding the predicate as a logical category devoid of ontological status (rather than an Aristotelian essence or existent). While Dewey (LW 12, 127-30) also rejects Aristotelian essences, he accepts predication as a phase of inquiry, a natural step that alters the conditions of a situation and so has existential consequences as well as ontological significance. For example, stating that either mercury "is an exact" or "is an inexact" indicator of temperature has very different consequences for the activity of temperature measurement.

Quine's attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction shares something in common with logical positivism and pragmatism: namely, a concern for holism. Contrary to falsification theories, a single disconfirming experimental result does not undermine a theory, since adjustments may be made elsewhere (e.g. in related theories or standards for what constitutes relevant evidence) in order to account for the anomaly. Rather than evaluate single statements or postulated scientific objects (which only makes sense with reference to a particular theory), experimental scientists accept or reject a theory based on an evaluation of the entire sum of beliefs supporting it. According to Quine's minimalist semantic theory, entities with connections to observational-behavioristic criteria are retained, while ideas, properties, propositions, metaphysical objects and postulated entities are rejected *en toto*, even when they promote successful patterns of inquiry. Since words and sentences can no longer carry their own semantic credentials, they instead point to more comprehensive theories, patterns of physical behavior, and the support accorded them by a coherent web of beliefs. Thus meaning recedes from the picture, for the sense of a particular word or sentence is no longer tied to its usage, that is, to the particular ideas and posited entities they call out through the medium of language. Consequently, Quine pushes linguistic meaning to the brink of extinction.

While the conclusion that the linguistic turn is a moment in a greater pragmatic turn gets off the ground, the full case for it is still to be made. What has been shown is that pragmatism was not eclipsed by linguistic philosophy, since pragmatists such as Dewey and Bentley had developed the conceptual tools to effectively resolve one of the most difficult philosophical conundrums. Still, "Two Dogmas" marks a sharp cleavage between early and

---

[23] Dewey construes logic in much broader terms than most classic and modern logicians, understanding it as applied to all kinds of practical problem solving activity, not just formal systems. This is made clear in Dewey's (LW 12, 194-195) square of opposition, which introduces reverse subalternation (e.g., from "Some S is P" to "All Ss are Ps") as a means of inference on the ground that that inductive inference (e.g. generalizations and scientific hypotheses) should be on an equal footing with deductive inference in logical theory. His reconstruction of the square of opposition is unlike the modern version, in which contradiction remains the sole means of inference once existential import is eliminated, and unlike the classic, where subalternation can only occur in one direction, from universal to existential (deductive inference), and affirmative and negative correspond to essential qualities of objects.

late (or classic and neo-) pragmatisms, for despite the presence in classic pragmatism of the conceptual resources to sustain the analytic-synthetic distinction, Quine concludes that it is a distinction without a difference, eviscerates linguistic meaning and declares himself a more thoroughgoing pragmatist.[24] So, while evidence of continuity between early analytic-linguistic philosophy and classic pragmatism exists, what still awaits us is a thorough demonstration that a greater pragmatic turn in the history of philosophy encompasses neo-pragmatism, of which Quine's attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction is undeniably a part. [25]

References

Aikin, S. F., Talisse, R. B. (2011). The Eclipse of Pragmatism. *3 Quarks Daily*. May 30. Available at <http://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2011/05/the-eclipse-of-pragmatism.html>. Accessed June 2, 2011.

Ayer, A. J. (1936). *Language, Truth and Logic*. London: Penguin Books.

Carnap, R. (1947). *Meaning and Necessity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Colapietro, V. (2004). Toward a Truly Pragmatic Theory of Signs: Reading Peirce's Semeiotic in Light of Dewey's Gloss. In E. L. Khalil (Ed.). *Dewey, Pragmatism and Economic Methodology*, pp. 102-129. New York: Routledge.

Dewey, J. (1996 [1882-1953]). *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Electronic Edition.* L. Hickman (Ed.). Charlottesville, VA: Intelex Corporation.

Guignon, C. B., Hiley, D. R. (2003). *Richard Rorty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hildebrand, D. L., Pappas, G. F. (2010). Review of Koopman's *Pragmatism as Transition*. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, August 29. Available at <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=21068>. Accessed September 2, 2010.

Koopman, C. (2007). Language is a Form of Experience: Reconciling Classical Pragmatism and Neopragmatism. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society 43*(4), 694-727.

Koskinen, H. J., Pihlström, S. (2006). Quine and Pragmatism. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society 42* (3), 309-46.

Lapore, E. (1995). Quine, Analyticity and Transcendence. *Nous*29 (4), 468-80.

Lewis, C. I. (1923). A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori. *Journal of Philosophy 20*, 169-77.

---

[24] Op cit. note 21. It might be objected that neo-pragmatists do not all agree with Quine. Although many neo-pragmatists (for instance, Richard Rorty) reject Quine's scientism, most still accept his critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Guignon and Hiley (2003, 9) attest that "[f]rom Quine, Rorty takes the critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction, the distinction between sentences that are true solely by virtue of the meaning of the words they contain and others that are known through experience." Given this source of stubborn incompatibility between classic and neo-pragmatisms, it would appear that classic pragmatism shares more in common with logical positivism than neo-pragmatism. This incompatibility could help to explain some recent disagreements between classic pragmatists and neo-pragmatists—for instance, the debate over whether Dewey's notion of primary experience constitutes a proxy epistemological foundation or 'Given' in the Sellarsian sense. See Koopman (2007, 696-7) and Hildebrand and Pappas (2010).

[25] I would like to thank Frank X. Ryan for his intellectual guidance, especially in exploring John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley's underappreciated book *Knowing and the Known*, Vincent Colapietro for reading and commenting on an early draft and the late Michael Eldridge for his kind and patient mentorship in my own development as a Dewey scholar. For an earlier version of the paper, see Ralston (2004).

Lewis, C. I. (1929). *Mind and the World Order: An Outline of a Theory of Knowledge*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Marian, D. (1996). Analyticity, Carnap, Quine, and Truth. *Metaphysics 10*, 281-96.

Margolis, J. (2010). *Pragmatism's Advantage: American and European Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

McCumber, J. (2001). *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Menand, L. (2001). *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Putnam, H. (1975). The Analytic and the Synthetic. *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers.*Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quine, W. V. O. (1953). Two Dogmas of Empiricism. *Logical Point of View.* 2nd edition, 20-46. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Quine, W. V. O. (1969). *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University.

Quine, W. V. O., Ulian, J. S. (1978). *The Web of Belief.* 2nd edition. New York: Random House.

Ralston, S. (2004). Linguistic Meaning as a Matter of Transaction: Mediating the Debate between Quine and the Logical Positivists. *De Philosophia 18* (1), 45-77.

Ralston, S. (2009). The Ebb and Flow of Primary and Secondary Experience: Kayak Touring and Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience. *Environment, Space, Place 1* (1), 189-204.

Rorty, R. (1982). *Consequences of Pragmatism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Ryan, F. X. (1994). Primary Experience as Settled Meaning. *Philosophy Today* 38, 29-42.

Ryan, F. X. (2002). Dewey's Reconstruction of Modern Philosophy. *Transactional Viewpoints 1* (2), 1-4.

Shook, J. (2002). Dewey and Quine on the Logic of What There Is. In F. T. Burke, D. M. Hester, R. B. Talisse (Eds.). *Dewey's Logical Theory: New Studies and Interpretations*, 93-118. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Shook, J. (2010). The Eclipse of Pragmatism? *Pragmatism Cybrary*. Available at <http://www.pragmatism.org/pragnews.htm#eclipse>. Accessed February 10, 2010.

White, M. G. (1950). The Analytic and the Synthetic: An Untenable Dualism. In S. Hook (Ed.). *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom*, 316-330. New York: Dial Press.

White, M. G. (2002). *A Philosophy of Culture: The Scope of Holistic Pragmatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wittgenstein, L. (1967). *Philosophical Investigations*. G. E. M. Anscombe (Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Wright, C. (1986). Inventing Logical Necessity. In J. Butterfield (Ed.). *Language, Mind and Logic*, pp. 187-209. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Humanities Department,
Pennsylvania State University Hazleton,
76 University Drive
Hazleton, PA 18202
USA
E-mail: sjr21@psu.edu