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Language *and* Experience for Pragmatism

Abstract: It is sometimes said that contemporary pragmatists place too much emphasis on language and not enough on experience. This objection might hold for the pragmatism of Richard Rorty and his students, but it does not hold for the pragmatism of C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. I shall argue that we should return to the classical pragmatists and their truth-and-experience position. Indeed, an important insight at the very heart of pragmatism is that language and experience cannot be pulled apart.

1. Introduction

It is sometimes said that contemporary pragmatists place too much emphasis on language and not enough emphasis on the relationship between experience, thought and action¹. This assertion seems to be justified if we focus on the particular branch grafted onto the pragmatist tradition by Richard Rorty in the 1970s. One of his revolutionary moves was to demote experience from the place of importance given to it by the classical pragmatists – C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. “Experience”, Rorty thinks, is a term we should give up when we set out our views of truth, reality, and ethics. We should replace it with “discourse”. We should “Forget, for the moment, about the external world, as well as about that dubious interface between self and world called ‘perceptual experience’” (1991: 93). As his student and torch-bearer Robert Brandom puts it: “‘experience’ is not one of my words” (2000: 205). In the *Library of Living Philosophers* volume on Rorty, put together just before he died in 2007, Rorty points in the direction he would like pragmatism to travel – the way Brandom’s “semantic inferentialism” (2010: 45). That position maintains that meaning consists in the inferential connections we make amongst beliefs. There is of course no mention of experience or the world. The world, Rorty thinks (repeating a phrase used by Nelson Goodman), is a world well-lost (1972).

It turns out that when experience is drained out of someone’s philosophical world-view, “truth” is also not one of their words. Rorty puts it thus: “no one should even try to specify the nature of truth”². Truth is nothing but disquotation: there is nothing more to saying “‘*p*’ is true” than removing the quotation marks and asserting *p* itself. Here is another student of Rorty’s, Michael Williams: “When we have pointed to certain features of the truth predicate (notably its ‘disquotational’ feature) and explained why it is useful to have a predicate like this (e.g. as a device for asserting infinite conjunctions), we have said just about everything there is to be said about truth” (1988: 424).

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1. See, for instance Godfrey-Smith 2014.

2. See Rorty (1991: 3; 1986; 1995: 281–87).

In my view, much of the damage Rorty has done to pragmatism comes from setting up a false choice between language or experience. Hence the title of this paper: “Language *and* Experience for Pragmatism”. It is not just that we can help ourselves to both if we want to. An important insight at the very heart of pragmatism is that language and experience *cannot* be pulled apart.

2. Language and Experience in Peirce, James and Dewey

The founders of pragmatism thought of their position as evolving partly from British empiricism. While Peirce was also heavily influenced by Kant, and Dewey by Hegel, it was the empiricism Alexander Bain, with his account of belief as a disposition to behave, that formed the center of the pragmatists position and method. Experience, for the classical pragmatists, was an essential notion. James, for instance, ever the “radical empiricist” was forever “remanding us to the sensation life” (1977: 118).

All the early pragmatists adopted one or another version of the pragmatic maxim, which requires beliefs and concepts to be linked to experience and action. As Peirce put it: we “must look to the upshot of our concepts in order to rightly apprehend them” (CP 5: 4); in order to get a complete grasp of a concept, we must connect it to that with which we have “dealings” (CP 5: 416). In other words, the classical pragmatists, wanted their explanations, ontology and philosophical theories to be connected to experience.

But the classical pragmatists moved away from the empiricism of their predecessors in rejecting the idea that all meaningful beliefs and concepts can be reduced to and guaranteed by sensation. Dewey famously regrets the fact that Locke and the other British empiricists brought to philosophy the “spectator theory of knowledge”. Knowledge and human psychology, Dewey argued, are inextricably interwoven. To know something, or to have a belief about what you experience, is for all the pragmatists, bound up with our human capacities, interpretations, and categories. Once we bring an experience into the realm of comprehension, or understanding or belief, we can no longer make sense of the idea of an experience unaltered by us. An understood or comprehended experience is always a joint project between reality and the experiencer. We cannot think with Hume and Locke that “mental life originates in sensations which are separately and passively received, and which are formed, through laws of retention and association, into a mosaic of images, perceptions and conceptions” (MW 10: 12). We must think of experience, rather, as an active relationship between an organism and its environment. Our experiential judgments are laden with our concepts and interests. Perceivers do not passively absorb inputs from the external world. We impose human categories on experience. Subject and object merge in experience. Moreover, pragmatist empiricism “does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action. And this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences” (LW 2: 12). Peirce and James, in slightly different vocabulary, put forward very similar rich conceptions of experience.

Also into the dustbin went the narrow-mindedness that tends to walk hand and hand with the atomist version of empiricism. The early pragmatists rejected the idea that *physical* or *sensory* experience is what is relevant for meaning and truth. Value, generality, and intention they argued, must be seen as part of the natural world. They tried, each in their own way and with varying degrees of success, to widen the concept of experience and bring under the scope of truth and knowledge. Our cognitive capacity covers not just science, but also logic, mathematics, art, religion, ethics, and politics.

It will not be surprising that the early pragmatists all rejected the idea that there is a tight connection between truth and the external world. When Peirce turns his pragmatic maxim on the concept of truth, the upshot is an aversion to “transcendental” accounts of truth, such as the correspondence theory, on which a true belief is one that corresponds to, or gets right, or mirrors the believer-independent world (CP 5: 572). Such accounts of truth are examples of “vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human habitation” (CP 8: 112). They make truth the subject of empty metaphysics. For the very idea of the believer-independent world, and the items within it to which beliefs or sentences might correspond, seems graspable only if we could somehow step outside our corpus of belief, our practices, or that with which we have dealings. The correspondence concept of truth fails to make “readily comprehensible” the fact that we aim at the truth or at getting things right (CP 1: 578). How could anyone aim for a truth that goes beyond what we can experience or beyond the best that inquiry could do? How could an inquirer adopt a methodology that might achieve that aim? The correspondence theory makes truth “a useless word” and “having no use for this meaning of the word ‘truth’, we had better use the word in another sense” (CP 5: 553). Again, one can find similar thoughts in James and Dewey. The early pragmatists are set against what we now call representationalist theories of truth – theories that take truth to be a matter of words representing, mirroring, or copying reality.

Peirce is the early pragmatist who spends the most time telling us what kind of theory of truth we should adopt. He offers us a complex way of understanding the concept of truth, on which correspondence is acceptable as a “nominal” definition of it, useful (only) to those who have never encountered the word before (CP 8: 100). But he argues that we want an account of truth that goes beyond a mere definition. We want an account of truth that is useful in inquiry and to those who already are familiar with the concept. Hence, we need to provide a pragmatic elucidation – an account of the role the concept plays in practical endeavors. We need to illuminate the concept of truth by considering its linkages with inquiry, assertion, and acquisition of belief, for those are the human dealings relevant to truth. He argues that the linkage is as follows: a true belief is one that would be successful in a robust way – it would best account of all experience, were we able to inquire as far as we could on the matter. It would be “indefeasible” (CP 5: 569).

Dewey puts a different spin on this idea. Inquiry is a matter of an organism trying to maintain stability or harmony in its environment. The organism faces a problematic situation – instability or lack of equilibrium – and tries to resolve it. A warranted belief is one that can solve a problem (MW 4: 64; LW 12: 15). And James, although

he sometimes adopts Peirce's view, is inclined towards the idea that truth is what works for an individual. They were all resolute empiricists and it would seem that if you don't like empiricism, you shouldn't like pragmatism.

3. *The Challenge*

The problem faced by all empiricists, and really, by every philosopher, is how to make sense of the relationship between our beliefs and reality. The answer for the kind of philosopher who argues that we cannot break out of the circle of language to even gesture at reality, is one way of responding to this problem. But for the early pragmatists, it is the rich conception of experience that is supposed to get us to the answer. Let us take Peirce as an example, but again, the argument could be made for James and Dewey as well. Experience, for Peirce, is that which impinges upon us and gives us indexical access to the world. He says: "Now the 'hardness' of fact lies in the insistency of the percept, its entirely irrational insistency, the element of Secondness in it. That is a very important factor of reality" (CP 7: 659). But this indexical pointing to reality is very thin. As soon as we form an experiential judgment, we have interpreted what impinged upon us. We must take the force of experience as it comes and then subject our subsequent experiential judgments to critical scrutiny. Experience can be had in diagrammatic contexts (hence mathematics and logic pass the test) and in thought experiments (hence moral, political, and aesthetic judgments might well pass the test).

It is interesting that Peirce thought that Hegel had things right, but for the fact that he whitewashed out the category of immediacy or Secondness:

The truth is that pragmatism is closely allied to the Hegelian absolute idealism, from which, however, it is sundered by its vigorous denial that the third category...suffices to make the world, or is even so much as self-sufficient. Had Hegel, instead of regarding the first two stages with his smile of contempt, held on to them as independent or distinct elements of the triune Reality, pragmatists might have looked up to him as the great vindicator of their truth. (CP 5: 436; 1904)

Hegel, that is, failed to take seriously the brute clash between perceivers and the world. He needed to be "educated in a physical laboratory instead of in a theological seminary" (CP 8: Bibliography). He would say the same thing about Rorty and all of those who follow him in not taking experience to be one of their words.

But Peirce's solution to the challenge faced by empiricism (a solution I have merely given the barest outline of) did not catch the attention of many of his successors. Peirce was hardly known by philosophers in his time and is hardly known by philosophers these days. He was a difficult man and his career was a stunted one. And the views of James and Dewey each contained elements that obfuscated appreciation of their views (James a tendency to put his view in subjectivist terms and Dewey a tendency to put his view in Hegelian terms)³. Perhaps if Peircean pragmatism had been in the air in

3. See Misak 2013 for the full story.

the next stage of empiricist philosophy, the revolution and the excising of experience would not have seemed necessary to Rorty.

For that next stage was the logical atomism of Bertrand Russell and then the logical empiricism of the Vienna Circle. Russell argued that sensation is a relationship – a relationship of “acquaintance” – between the mind and the world. This empiricist claim could well be absorbed by the empiricism of pragmatism, and indeed, Russell takes the language of “acquaintance” from James’s *Principles of Psychology*, where James says “Sensations first make us acquainted with innumerable things, and then are replaced by thoughts which know the same things in altogether other ways” (James 1891: 6), and “We can only think or talk about the relations of objects with which we have *acquaintance* already” (James 1891: 3).

But Russell goes on to outline a foundationalist view that he explicitly set against pragmatism:

The philosophy which seems to me closest to the truth can be called “analytic realism”. It is realist, because it claims that there are non-mental entities and that cognitive relations are external relations, which establish a direct link between the subject and a possibly non-mental object. It is analytic, because it claims that the existence of the complex depends on the existence of the simple, and not vice versa, and that the constituent of a complex, taken as a constituent, is absolutely identical with itself as it is when we do not consider its relations. The philosophy is therefore an atomistic philosophy. (Russell 1992: 133)

He was of the view that in a logically perfect, scientific, and transparent language, philosophers could solve all the old problems. Rorty says “Neither William nor Henry James would have had anything to say in a world without Russell” (1982: 160, 136). This is rather strained, since the James’s were putting their ideas forward before Russell came on the scene. But there was indeed some recoiling done on all sides. On the pragmatist’s part, the quest for certainty, and the seeking of it in experience, was misguided.

Notoriously, neither Russell nor the logical empiricists who succeeded him could make good on their promises. The strong atomistic program disintegrated, after failed attempts to say just what it was in the world that our experiences were supposed to hook onto and just how our experiences were supposed to do that. Wittgenstein was one of those who leveled devastating criticisms of the strong program. We can straight away see why the critic of the strong program might warn against taking experience to be central in epistemology, for it appears that experience is one of the main culprits in the problematic view.

But it is here that the story starts to spell trouble, or at least get interesting in a way that must be worrying for the anti-empiricist kind of pragmatist. Two of Russell’s colleagues opposed his view in the 1920s. One was Wittgenstein. The other was the young and brilliant Frank Ramsey, who was to die at the age of 26 in 1930. Rorty and Brandom find their inspiration in the former⁴. But the debate between Ramsey

4. The reader who wonders how Ramsey and Wittgenstein could possibly be called pragmatists will find the answer in my *Cambridge Pragmatism* (forthcoming).

and Wittgenstein for the heart and soul of pragmatism is a debate that we pragmatists ignore at our peril.

4. Wittgenstein and the Focus on Language Games

The early Wittgenstein seemed mightily attracted to the Russellian atomistic view. In the 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he sets out the grammar or structure of logic and language. He could not sound more like Russell when he asserts: “The way in which objects hang together in the atomic fact is the structure of the atomic fact” (T: 2.032). He presents us with a “picture theory” of meaning, on which a picture represents that objects are a certain way and there is a representing relation between the picture and the objects. The world, he maintains, consists of facts. The simplest facts – “states of affairs” or “atomic facts” – are meldings of absolutely simple objects. Wittgenstein thus puts forward a version of the correspondence theory of truth on which facts are entities in their own right, composed of particulars, properties, relations and universals.

But at the very end of the *Tractatus*, he advises us to use the structure as a ladder and then kick it out from under us. At the very end of the *Tractatus*, that is, Wittgenstein signals a major change of mind approach, and it is that approach that he is now known for. It was a clear rejection of the atomistic view and while Wittgenstein himself did not entirely excise the concept of experience from that later philosophy, he sets the stage for his followers to do so. The following passage does a remarkable job in summing up a view that resists quick characterization:

It is very difficult to talk about the relation of language to reality without talking nonsense or without saying too little. I do not now have phenomenological language, or “primary language” as I used to call it, in mind as my goal. I no longer hold it to be necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in *our* language. (Wittgenstein 2000, MS 107: 205)

One way of dealing with the difficulties of making the atomistic position work is to give up on it and on the entire project of trying to set out the relationship between language and the world. Thus we have Wittgenstein’s End-Of-Philosophy gesture, an attempt to bring philosophy to a close. The philosopher must advance no theses (PI: § 128) but assemble “reminders for a particular purpose” (§ 127); namely to attain “*a clear view* of the use of our words” (§ 122). This way we “battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (§ 109), so that we should be “capable of stopping doing philosophy” when we want to (§ 133). This is the Wittgenstein that Rorty was attracted to.

Wittgenstein, in his last work, *On Certainty*, said “So I am trying to say something that sounds like pragmatism. Here I am being thwarted by a kind of *Weltanschauung*” (OC: 422). What he might have meant by that last sentence is that the “worldview” of pragmatism is a theory and Wittgenstein only wanted a method of doing philosophy. That is, it is the *Weltanschaulicher* character of pragmatism (its “ism”) disturbs him.

Or he might mean that, in his view, pragmatism was a materialist reduction of value or the normative to behavior or action.

Either way, he got pragmatism very wrong. Peirce and James were explicit that pragmatism was a first and foremost a method and neither went near reductive materialism. Nonetheless, it is the revolutionary thought of Wittgenstein's that Rorty took on and labeled "pragmatism". This new pragmatism became the view that it is pointless to talk about matters such as truth or rationality. The problems of philosophy are linguistic in nature. In the preface to *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Rorty sums up his view as: "Hegelian historicism and a Wittgensteinian 'social practice' approach to language complement and reinforce one another" (2007: ix). He tries to bring James and Dewey on board as well, although as we have seen, they thought that philosophy was *not* all about language – it was about language and experience. Had they still been alive (like Quine and Davidson, who Rorty also tried to enroll in his program), I submit they would have declined the invitation.

Those who did come on board argue that it is our whole grasp of things that we must focus on, rather than worrying about guaranteeing the small bits so that we can demarcate a certain and pristine domain of knowledge. For this branch of Wittgensteinian pragmatists, we make judgments always within a social context. Meaning is use and we should not worry about how experience connects those judgments with the world, nor should we fuss about the notions of truth or falsity. We believe what we believe. The Wittgenstein-inspired pragmatist denies, in Brandom's words, that "linguistic practices and the vocabularies caught up in them typically admit of specification in terms of underlying principles specifiable in other vocabularies". Linguistic practice is, rather, "essentially dynamic" and "what practical extensions of a given practice are possible for the practitioners can turn on features of their embodiment, lives, environment, and history that are contingent and wholly particular to them" (Brandom 2008: 5-6).

One of the troubles that plagues this view is the quietism that seems to follow from directly upon its heels – a quietism that Wittgenstein himself endorsed. Once we have so thoroughly contextualized meaning and truth, it seems that there is nothing we can say about how to evaluate this or that claim to meaning and truth. All we can say is what Wittgenstein and Rorty say: is this is our practice, this is our stance, this is where my spade turns, this is what my peers let me get away with saying. But the worry is: if it's all a matter of language, then how can we adjudicate between inconsistent views?

I have argued elsewhere⁵ that this quietism is dangerous and makes no sense at all of our practices. It is dangerous because it gives us nothing to say to ourselves and to others when we encounter someone or some community whose spade turns, for instance, on the aim of installing substantive homogeneity in the population by eliminating the "other". And when we assert, believe, inquire, deliberate, learn from experience, revise and improve our beliefs, we betray the fact that we are not simply bound up in a cultural language game. For what it is to make an assertion or inquire into a matter is to take our beliefs to be responsive to experience and argument for or against it.

5. I first started arguing this in Misak 2000, and most recently in Misak 2013b.

Is there really no pragmatist position that lets us escape the deeply unattractive reductionist, atomist positions, without tossing us into a sea of arbitrariness? The answer to that question has already been given – Peirce started us on the right path. One great and terribly underappreciated pragmatist who continued on it was C. I. Lewis. The reader may want to turn to my *The American Pragmatists* to see how he gives the pragmatist a conception of values on which human beings are the judges of what is right and wrong, but that does not entail that “the evaluations which the fool makes in his folly are on a par with those of the sage in his wisdom” (1971: 398-99). But here I will be focused on Peirce’s other successor, Frank Ramsey, who was engaged with Russell and Wittgenstein at just the moment when Wittgenstein turned away from logical atomism and toward his revolutionary and quietist brand of pragmatism.

5. Ramsey: Belief, Behavior and Experience

As Wittgenstein was making his transition from the atomism of the *Tractatus* to the more radical view of the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, his friend and philosophical interlocutor, Frank Ramsey, was putting forward a different kind of pragmatist position. When he took ill with hepatitis and died at the age of 26, Ramsey had made his mark not just on his colleagues Cambridge, but also, indelibly, on a number of disciplines. In his brief life, he laid the groundwork for decision theory and game theory; founded a branch of mathematics and two branches of economics; made contributions to logic, the foundations of mathematics, semantics, philosophy of science, and the theory of truth. What is less known is that Ramsey was heavily influenced by Peirce⁶.

Ramsey, with the classical pragmatists, took at least one important message from the old British empiricism – Bain’s dispositional account of belief. He argued that once we understand that beliefs are habits of action, we will see the need to rethink our concepts of meaning and truth. His thoughts on this matter appear in an interesting interregnum period – just before the broad and plausible verificationism of Peirce was over-run by the narrow and far less plausible verificationism of the logical empiricists. Once the logical empiricists had captured the term, it was unusable for generations.

In “Facts and Propositions”, Ramsey articulates a dispositionalist account of belief on which beliefs are individuated by their causes and their effects, the latter being dispositions to behave. We can, of course, construct sentences “which express no attitude of belief at all”, but these should not be regarded as “significant” (FP: 47). He agrees with Wittgenstein that “formal logic”, for instance, is composed of tautologies: statements such as “*p* or not-*p*” can be added to any sentence without altering their meaning. Similarly, “*p* and not-*p*”: it excludes every possibility and thus “expresses no attitude”. That is, beliefs that have no function or no relation to experience have no meaning. Ramsey’s functionalism, however, is not a reductionist kind of behaviorism. He is on the same page as Peirce. He does not want to explain away mental states. He thinks they exist and are important. But he thinks that you cannot understand mental states without understanding their causes and their behavioral effects.

6. For the whole fascinating story, see Misak (forthcoming).

Ramsey is usually taken to be a straight redundancy theorist about truth. Hence, those who would like to do without experience and truth tend to be fans of his. But he is very clear that one must not stop with the redundancy theory. “Facts and Propositions” begins with the statement: “The problem with which I propose to deal is the logical analysis of what may be called by any of the terms judgment, belief, or assertion”. When I believe that Caesar was murdered, it seems that I have on the one hand something mental – “my mind, or my present mental state, or words and images in my mind” – and on the other hand something “objective” – “Caesar, or Caesar’s murder, or Caesar and murder, or the proposition Caesar was murdered, or the fact that Caesar was murdered” (FP: 34). My belief or judgment seems to involve some relation between the mental and the objective factors. Ramsey then makes a famous deflationary remark about truth:

there is really no separate problem of truth but merely a linguistic muddle...“It is true that Caesar was murdered” means no more than that Caesar was murdered, and “It is false that Caesar was murdered” means that Caesar was not murdered. (FP: 38)

But Ramsey thinks that once you have laid out the matter in this way, what is clear is that the first problem to tackle is not the nature of truth, but the nature of belief, judgment or assertion. He prefaces his deflationary remark with “But before we proceed further with the analysis of judgment” and finishes the whole discussion with “if we have analysed judgment we have solved the problem of truth” (FP: 39). That is, the deflationary move must be followed by an examination of belief, judgment, and assertion, and once that is undertaken, we will understand something about truth.

When Ramsey conducts that analysis, he finds, like Peirce, that we ought to be unwilling to abandon the distinction between language and reality, although we must get rid of the problematic version of it that underlies the atomist picture. Ramsey says his view is “superior” to the correspondence theory because it “is able to avoid mentioning either correspondence or facts”, two philosophically problematic notions (OT: 90). Not only is there a worry about disjunctive facts (if I believe that Jones is a liar or a fool, how am I to construe the “either-or” fact that he is a liar or a fool?), but we cannot make good sense of the idea that a proposition can be broken down into simple constituents that hook onto reality.

Ramsey proceeds with his examination of belief or judgment. If a chicken “believes” that a certain caterpillar is poisonous, it abstains from eating that kind of caterpillar on account of the unpleasant experiences associated with eating them:

The mental factors in such a belief would be parts of the chicken’s behaviour, which are somehow related to the objective factors, viz. the kind of caterpillar and poisonousness. An exact analysis of this relationship would be very difficult, but it might well be held that in regard to this kind of belief the pragmatist view was correct, i.e. that the relation between the chicken’s behaviour and the objective factors was that the actions were such as to be useful if, and only if, the caterpillars were actually poisonous. Thus any set of actions for whose utility p is a necessary and sufficient condition might be called a belief that p , and so would be true if p , i.e. if they are useful. (FP: 40)

Pragmatism, for Ramsey, is the view that a belief is individuated by the actions it entails and that if a belief leads to successful action, it is true. And, importantly, successful action must be caused by the facts being as they are. He says:

The essence of pragmatism I take to be this, that the meaning of a sentence is to be defined by reference to the actions to which asserting it would lead, or more vaguely still, by its possible causes and effects. Of this I feel certain, but of nothing more definite. (FP: 51)

How much better off pragmatism would have been if it followed Ramsey down the road of linking belief, fact and action. How different the trajectory of pragmatism would have been had the manuscript that Ramsey was working on when he died, titled *On Truth*, been finished and had seen the light of day. In that manuscript, Ramsey argues, with Peirce that, as long as it is taken in a commonsense way, the correspondence idea does no harm (OT: 90). He thinks that “a belief is true if it is a belief that *p*, and *p*” – “is merely a truism, but there is no platitude so obvious that eminent philosophers have not denied it” (OT: 12). It is “so obvious that one is ashamed to insist upon it, but our insistence is rendered necessary by the extraordinary way in which philosophers produce definitions of truth in no way compatible with our platitudes” (OT: 13).

But we can only adopt the truism “in a vague sense” (OT: 11). We cannot be precise about what correspondence to reality is – we just get ourselves in a lot of philosophical trouble if we try to do so. The correspondence idea is at best a “cumbrous”, inexact idea and at worst, a “misleading” or “illegitimate” interpretation of the truism⁷. Ramsey turns his back on the idea that Wittgenstein and Rorty recoiled from – the idea that we can get beliefs that hook onto the world.

But Ramsey would have been appalled at the pragmatism of the later Wittgenstein and Rorty, and indeed, he was appalled by the manifestations of that view in day. James, he says, seems to deny the truism. He seems to define truth as “the expedient in the way of our thinking” – a passage Ramsey quotes from James’s *Pragmatism*. It seems, that is, that James is committed to the possibility that someone “could think both that Shakespeare’s plays were written by Bacon and that someone else’s opinion that Shakespeare wrote them might be perfectly true ‘for him’” (OT: 15), a thought Ramsey takes from James *The Meaning of Truth*. Similarly, the coherence theorists also seem to deny the truism. They fail to speak of truth: “The beliefs of a man suffering from persecution mania may rival in coherence those of many sane men but that does not make them true” (OT: 94). The coherence theory is “absolutely irreconcilable” with the truism. The pragmatist need not hold that “*p* is true” is identified with “*p* is useful”.

Ramsey, like Peirce, wanted to articulate an account of truth in which “copying and pragmatism are both elements in the true analysis which is exceedingly complicated” (OT: 42) and which experience and language each play a central role. He and Peirce thought that philosophers cannot pull apart the content and truth of a belief from its experiential consequences. A wave of philosophers has picked up Wittgenstein’s

7. See (OT: 12, 19, 23, 90).

thought that all we need is language. Perhaps a new wave of pragmatists will pick up where Ramsey left off and give us that necessarily complicated account of truth and its relation to experience and behavior.

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