September 8, 2020

**Handout for Week 4**

**Quotes from Misak's "Rorty, Pragmatism, and Analytic Philosophy":**

A complaint has run through pragmatism for the last few decades. That complaint is that analytic philosophy has nearly killed off pragmatism. On this view, which Robert Talisse1 has called the 'eclipse view', when Richard Rorty brought his considerable talents to the pragmatist scene in the 1970s, there were very few pragmatists or students of American philosophy in top-tier American universities. Pragmatism was operating on the margins, driven from philosophy departments by the reigning analytic philosophy. Rorty resurrected it from its near-death, but in a resolutely anti-analytic version, a version despised by the ruling philosophical class. The idea is that pragmatism is set against analytic philosophy and has suffered from challenging this wrong-headed but domineering winner of the philosophical stakes. A sense of persecution has thus hung over certain quarters of American pragmatism.  [369]

Many of Rorty's followers still believe that to have been his student or to work on pragmatist topics is to put oneself at risk failure in the academic job market. In the preface to his volume in the *Library of Living Philosophers*, which Rorty saw to completion in the final days of his life, Randy Auxier says: "Rorty prudently exiled himself from professional philosophy so as not to damage the careers of those who wanted to study with him". [370]

In *The American Pragmatists*, I argue that Rorty's view is a misreading of both the history of pragmatism and the history of analytic philosophy. Insofar as the distinction between analytic and non-analytic philosophy retains any force, the founders of pragmatism were pioneers of analytic philosophy.  [370]

The very idea of the believer-independent world, and the items within it to which beliefs might correspond or represent, seems graspable only if we could somehow step outside of our practices. The correspondence theory, Peirce says, 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".  Peirce is perfectly happy with the correspondence theory as a 'nominal' definition, good only to those who have never encountered the concept before. [371]

The eclipse view has it that pragmatism and logical empiricism did battle, with pragmatism quickly finding itself on the bullied end. But this is not, I shall argue, an accurate account of the engagement between logical empiricism and pragmatism. [373]

It is important to remember that pragmatism from the beginning thought of itself as being in the spirit of positivism. [373]

Carnap writes in the *Library of Living Philosophers* volume dedicated to him: "since I came to America, my philosophical views have clearly been influenced by pragmatist ideas" ([27], pp. 860–61). He says that as a result of these pragmatist influences, he puts more emphasis on the

social factor in knowledge and on the idea that a "conceptual system" involves practical decisions. [375]

## 4. The Next Generation of Analytic Pragmatists: Lewis, Goodman, Sellars, Quine [376]

Lewis taught (and influenced) the next generation of first-rank philosophers. The following of his students absorbed his view (not without first trying to distance themselves from their stern teacher) and made pragmatism the dominant philosophy: Quine, Goodman, Sellars. There is not space here to show how these three great pragmatists took their view directly from Lewis (and then how Quine, especially, attacked him). I will confine myself to Sellars, since Rorty says that he spent most of his career extending Sellars' (his own teacher's) view. [376]

As Rorty brings his preferred version of pragmatism into the spotlight, those who hold science in high esteem recede into the background. In his view, it is not clear "why natural science, rather than the arts, or politics, or religion, should take over the area left vacant" by philosophy ([40], p. 171). But while this complaint about Quinean holism may be bang on (it leaves no room for inquiry apart from science and logic), Lewis, Goodman, and Sellars (and Morton White) were putting forward analytic pragmatist positions that did not privilege science. [379]

Rorty was fighting not just against analytic philosophy, but against philosophy in general. In his view, philosophy cannot answer important age-old questions. What it does is dissolve philosophical problems. Philosophy is merely a kind of "therapy". It is more like poetry than science. Philosophy must replace the idea of knowledge with the idea of hope and in doing so the value of philosophy is reduced almost to a vanishing point. [RPAP 379]

But Rorty then takes a step beyond all other pragmatists. Inquirers aim not at truth, but at solidarity or what we have come to take as true. In his most extreme moods, he asserts that "truth" and "objectivity" are merely labels for what our peers will let us get away with saying ([40], p. 176). He would like to see a "post-philosophical culture" in which there are no appeals to authority of any kind, including appeals to truth and rationality. Truth is "not the sort of thing one should expect to have an interesting philosophical theory about". We are to "substitute the idea of 'unforced agreement' for that of 'objectivity' " in every domain of inquiry—science as well as morals and politics. [380]

As Jeffrey Stout puts the point today: "getting something right . . . turns out to be among the human interests that need to be taken into account in an acceptably anthropocentric conception of inquiry as a social practice" ([43], p. 18). The norms of truth and rightness are interwoven throughout our practices of assertion, belief, and inquiry. [380]

Conclusion:
Whatever the path pragmatism takes from this point onward, one thing is clear. The epistemology and the view of truth that dominated analytic philosophy from the 1930s logical empiricism right through to the reign of Quine, Goodman, and Sellars in the 1950s–60s was in fact pragmatism. The stars of modern analytic philosophy were very much in step with pragmatism during the years in which it was supposedly driven out of philosophy departments by analytic philosophers. It was Rorty who broke with the direction the pragmatist tradition was

taking and returned to James, even further radicalizing James's view. <mark>Pragmatism, that is, had a strong and unbroken analytic history until Rorty came along and cast aspersion on that kind of pragmatism</mark>. [380]

## Quotes from Misak's "American Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments":

Misak's Conclusion:

I want to turn to some brief and speculative thoughts as to how the debate manifests itself today. Although Quine started off calling himself a pragmatist,[BB: footnote is to *Ontological Relativity*, which is quite late (1968). This was a *pro forma* remark since these were Quine's Dewey lectures at Columbia.] he soon grew wary of the label. Perhaps he wanted to seem to not be simply trumpeting his teacher's view, although trumpet Lewis' view he most certainly did. Perhaps he felt that James had captured the pragmatist flag and wanted to distance himself from the position that had attracted so much scorn from Russell, Moore, and others. What-ever the explanation, Quine abandoned the pragmatist camp, leaving the ground wide open to be taken over by a new Jamesian.

That new Jamesian was Richard <mark>Rorty, who wanted to "substitute the idea of 'unforced agreement' for that of 'objectivity'"</mark>. It is no surprise to find Rorty saying that his own narratives about pragmatism "tend to center around James's version . . . of the pragmatic theory of truth". For one way of thinking of Rorty's position is as follows: if we need to think *p*, then we ought to believe *p*. There is nothing to say about truth and warrant over and above that. Given that norms are human norms<mark>, there is nothing but play and irony left to adjudicate between them. There is no place for the check of experience</mark>. All is chosen, if not by individuals, then by communities. By redescribing history and circumstances from our own point of view, we can say "thus I willed it" and we can make ourselves authors of our own stories.

But we must return, I submit, to the more moderate view first articulated by Peirce and Wright. We need to take seriously that which we need to believe while avoiding two mistakes. We must not make the mistake of taking what we need to believe so seriously as to think that it is necessarily true (the mistake of Kant and, I would argue, Habermas) or true in some plainer sense (the mistake of James). The future of pragmatism, I submit, lies in this modest stance, in which there are norms and standards, which come from within our practices of inquiry, reason- giving, and justification. They are not given to us by a direct connection with the world- as it is independently of inquirers. They are not given to us by God. And they are not given to us by the requirements of necessity. They <mark>are human standards, held in check by the force of experience</mark>. [APIA 269-270]

It is one thing to say a belief is true because the logical consequences that flow from it fit in harmoniously with our otherwise grounded knowledge; and quite another to call it true because it is pleasant to believe. [1909: 186–7] The essential difference between James's and Peirce's accounts of truth is that the Peirce latches on to the first option of which Pratt speaks. <mark>Peircean pragmatism links truth to good and satisfactory consequences—those which are empirically confirmed, fit with our otherwise grounded knowledge, etc.</mark> [AIPI 264]

Peirce's point is that a genuine belief—one that is aimed at truth—is such that it resigns in the face of recalcitrant experience or in the knowledge that it was ==put into place by a method that did not take experience seriously==. [AIPI 265]

Peirce's view is that "we are obliged to suppose, but we need not assert." A regulative assumption makes a claim about a practice and what those engaged in that practice must assume in order for the practice to be comprehensible and able to be carried out. [AIPI 266]

James's view that sometimes "faith in success could nerve us to bring success about, and so justify itself by its own operation" is, he says, "a thought typical of James at his worst—a worst in which there is always a good side" (2009 [1920]: 60). Santayana, Wright, and Peirce struggled mightily to articulate the good side of the thought. [AIPI 267]

C. I. Lewis was also James's student and, unlike Santayana, consistently a self- described pragmatist. [AIPI 268]

In the great debate between Peirce and James, he sides with Peirce (whose papers he "lived with" for two years upon arrival at Harvard as a faculty member): "When we determine truth, we determine that which it is correct to believe and that upon which it is desirable (not merely desired) to act". ==Lewis is dead set against the abandonment of evidence and reasons to the vagaries of wants and needs==. [AIPI 268]

For Lewis:
The a priori, on the other hand, is the "uncompelled initiative of human thought". It is a conceptual framework or network of categories and definitive concepts. Such frameworks, he says, "are peculiarly social products, reached in the light of experiences which have much in common, and beaten out, like other pathways, by the coincidence of human purposes and the exigencies of human cooperation". They are not necessary, as Kant argued. They are simply indispensable if we are to make sense of experience. The laws of logic are "principles of procedure, the parliamentary rules of intelligent thought and speech". [AIPI 268]

Here is how Lewis suggests we think of the a priori. The anticipation of Quine, it will be noted, could not be stronger:

the 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 such as ['all swans are birds'] etc, at the bottom; that with this complex system of interrelated concepts, we approach particular experiences and attempt to fit them, somewhere and somehow, into its preformed patterns. 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. . . . The decision that there are no such creatures as have been defined as 'swans' would be unimportant. The conclusion that there are no such things as Euclidean triangles, would be immensely disturbing. And if we should be forced to realize that nothing in experience possesses any stability— that our principle, 'Nothing can both be and not be,' was merely a verbalism, applying to nothing more than momentarily—that denouement would rock our world to its foundations. [1929: 305–6]

This is from *Mind and the World Order*, written in 1929, long before Lewis' own students—Quine and Goodman (and Morton White) bizarrely started to use these very thoughts against Lewis himself. And it is very similar to Peirce's view of how we should regard what we find indispensable. A priori

"truths" are not necessarily true. They are simply what we need to articulate our world view. They could be revised, but only at great cost to that world view. [AIPI 269]

## Quotes from Ramberg: "Being Constructive: Misak's Creation of Pragmatism":

Any academic philosopher, I suppose, has been trained to be bothered by some ques-tion or other that cannot be answered simply by doing science. Progress may be made by developing vocabularies that allow such questions to be refined, split up, and connected to other questions, including, perhaps, to relatively uncontroversially empirical questions. Some philosophers per-form this job with no particular concern for the genesis of the vocabulary they are work-ing in and contributing to. They (Type I philosophers) tend toward problem *solving*…
Other philosophers have been taught to worry about exactly the issue of genesis. ==Such philosophers believe an understanding of the historical nature and formation of vocabularies is useful, perhaps indispensable, in confronting, learning from, and dealing with the arguments and oppositions that form around the fissures and tension points that come to the fore as Type I theories are developed==. These philosophers (Type II) tend toward problem *dissolving*. [396-397]

"A strong, unadulterated version of the latter approach is associated with Richard Rorty.
Rorty and his admirers are holists about meaning, and because they are also naturalists and nominalists, this makes them what I call ==semantic historicists==.
Tersely and unguardedly put:
On the one hand, our thinking inevitably depends on and reproduces what is already thought.
On the other hand, what is already thought is incomplete—both in the sense that it is incapable of fully determining our response to it (both actually and normatively), and in the sense that its content is always unfinished, incompletely unfurled, as it were. In both these respects the meanings and significance of past utterances literally depend on how we respond, on what we go on to do with them, just as our dialectical options and semantic reach rest on the efforts of our conversational forebears. Narratives of philosophy thus make both past and present philosophy out of what they find. Or as Rorty might have said (perhaps he did), ==when it comes to historical narrative there is little sense in applying the finding-making distinction.  Such narratives are inevitably creative==. Clearly they can be better or worse in that regard, and no doubt along many dimensions—dimensions of varying significance depending on the purposes for which such narratives are constructed and deployed." [397]

Once historicism poses dissolution or destruction as an option—or "benign neglect," as Rorty once suggested with respect to the realism - anti realism opposition—producing refined theories is no longer a self- evident default option when we come upon intuitions in conflict. A case must be made for adopting a constructive strategy with regard to some problem or topic, and for the framing one takes it to have. Recognizing this obligation, Constructive ==Type II philosophers not only refuse a sharp distinction between philosophy and its history, they also think that meta-philosophical reflection is an intrinsic part of philosophical work==. Moreover, and importantly, they recognize that to accept this much is to give up on the idea that philosophical problems *have* definitive solutions. For ==neither recontextualizing redescription of the genetic kind nor justificatory reflection of the meta-philosophical kind has a natural end-point==. [Ramberg 398]

BR quotes Misak:
The overarching issue for pragmatism is the problem with which both the empiricists and Kant wrestle. How can we make sense of our standards of rationality, truth, and value as genuinely normative or binding while recognizing that they are profoundly human phenomena? How do normativity and authority arise from within a world of human experience and practice? (Misak TAP, xi)
The central divide she sees within the pragmatist tradition is:
a debate between those who assert (or whose view entails) that there is no truth and objectivity to be had anywhere and those who take pragmatism to promise an account of truth that preserves our aspiration to getting things right. (Misak TAP, 3) [399]

This construction of pragmatism around the question of the source of epistemic normativity puts Misak in a position to reject what is now commonly referred to as the "eclipse narrative" of the relation between pragmatism and analytic philosophy as it evolved with the arrival of the European expatriates in the middle of the last century. For it makes the differences between prewar pragmatists and later analytic philosophers appear more a matter of style than of philosophical concerns. So philosophers like Quine, and perhaps more tellingly C. I. Lewis, are assigned an important role— they make apparent the proximity, and continuity, of concerns between pragmatists' thought and analytic philosophy. Indeed, analytic philosophy appears as a continuation of work with the very questions that were central to Peirce and Wright and Lewis, albeit with new and perhaps refined techniques. [401]

Misak's pragmatism claims a place at the table of current debates about naturalism, about the scope and significance of representationalism, and about objectivity. Huw Price and Robert Brandom are paradigmatic examples. [401]

There is a strong tradition of opposition to mainstream analytic philosophy, particularly to its resurging metaphysics, in parts of the pragmatist camp. This internal division is one that Misak does little to illuminate and explicitly chooses to leave alone—it pertains to the ends and means of philosophical reflection, and involves views and works that are much harder to make commensurate with the problems and theories of contemporary analytic philosophy. [402]

Misak's dialectical use of Rorty means that she can find nothing in his work that is both distinctive and of lasting value to pragmatism. He represents, in her story, what you get if you put James's psychologism and subjectivism through the linguistic turn and call the result pragmatism. [402]

Rorty, and I follow him faithfully in this, takes Davidson to be rejecting the very idea of a framework and of framework relativity. The problem with representationalism, for Rorty and Davidson alike, is the very idea that we should explicate "reality" with reference to an epistemic framework of interpretation at all, to "our" contribution, whether we take that contribution monolithically ("the human framework") or pluralistically. [403]

That might give another picture of how the pragmatist impulse may be brought to bear on contemporary mainstream Anglophone philosophy, placing its working conception of the ends of philosophical reflection in question. That challenge, that oppositional force, is a part of the pragmatist heritage that to my mind is worth preserving and emphasizing. Rorty has been posing this challenge in various creative ways at least since the 1970s. [403]

Footnote 7:
We should keep in mind that Davidson, too, is clear that <mark>there is no interesting sense in which truth is a goal of inquiry</mark>. [404]

## **Ngram of frequency of 'pragmatism', 'Rorty', 'Quine', 'Carnap', and 'Sellars' over time**: