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The Subterranean Influence of Pragmatism on the Vienna Circle: *Peirce, Ramsey, Wittgenstein*

Cheryl Misak

An underappreciated fact in the history of analytic philosophy is that American pragmatism had an early and strong influence on the Vienna Circle. The path of that influence goes from Charles Peirce to Frank Ramsey to Ludwig Wittgenstein to Moritz Schlick. That path is traced in this paper, and along the way some standard understandings of Ramsey and Wittgenstein, especially, are radically altered.

The Subterranean Influence of Pragmatism on the Vienna Circle: Peirce, Ramsey, Wittgenstein

Cheryl Misak

1. Introduction

Thomas Uebel, in his excellent “American Pragmatism and the Vienna Circle: The Early Years” rues that the bandwidth of that paper cannot extend to “the subterranean influence of Ramsey” on the Vienna Circle. “Subterranean” is precisely the right word. One has to dig deep to get to it and when one does, one finds a complex maze of interconnected channels. But a route can be traced that leads to philosophical gold. Uebel, I think, gets it exactly right in a note: “Ramsey’s appreciation of Peircean ideas may have had an influence on Wittgenstein’s fast developing ideas after his return to philosophy which in turn influenced Schlick”. In this paper, I will start to trace this under-appreciated route from Peirce to Ramsey to Wittgenstein to the Vienna Circle of 1929–30.¹ I very much look forward to Uebel’s future contribution.

The question of how Ramsey became an advocate of pragmatism is a fascinating piece of intellectual biography. He was as unhappy as Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein with William James’s suggestion in his 1907 book *Pragmatism*:

Any idea upon which we can ride . . . any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying,

¹This draws on a longer and more nuanced project titled *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein*, forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

saving labor, is . . . true instrumentally. . . Satisfactorily . . . means more satisfactorily to ourselves, and individuals will emphasize their points of satisfaction differently. To a certain degree, therefore, everything here is plastic. (James 1975, 34–35)²

It was Peirce’s more sophisticated pragmatism that influenced Ramsey. C. K. Ogden, inventor of Basic English, publisher of the *Tractatus*, and co-author of *The Meaning of Meaning*, was Ramsey’s mentor from the time he was a schoolboy. Ogden had a wealth of material of Peirce’s given to him by Lady Victoria Welby, an independent scholar who was one of the few people in correspondence with Peirce. Ogden also published in 1923 the first posthumously edition of Peirce’s collected papers, simultaneously with the Harcourt-Brace printing. It appeared in his *International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method*. Ramsey read it carefully in 1924, and his notes can be found in the papers he left when he died.

Wittgenstein had left Cambridge at the outbreak of the first World War, and wrote what was to become the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* on the Austrian front and in an Italian prisoner of war camp. In 1922 it was published, also in the *International Library*. Ogden had asked Ramsey, then a second year undergraduate, if he might help translate this difficult manuscript.³ Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge at the very beginning of 1929, in what turned out to be the last year of Ramsey’s life. While their relationship had the ups-and-downs that were inevitable with Wittgenstein, and while they did not see eye to eye on some important matters, they respected each other’s abili-

²See Misak (2013) for an account of Russell and Moore’s objections, and for an account of how James, at his best, was better than Russell and Moore gave him credit for.

³I think it’s pretty clear that Ramsey did most of the translating. The *Tractatus* is hard, and Ogden wasn’t a good enough philosopher and logician to do it. Ramsey was. He had also won the German prize at Winchester and was reading books in German, so those anecdotes about Ogden helping him learn German by giving him a book of Mach’s to translate are not accurate.

ties, talked often, and together dominated Cambridge philosophy. We shall see that Ramsey was responsible for a kind of Peircean pragmatism entering into Wittgenstein's philosophy. My suggestion will be that Wittgenstein, who was during this time heavily engaged in conversation with Schlick and Waismann, was in turn responsible for that pragmatism entering into the Vienna Circle.

2. The Logical Analyst Context

Russell, Wittgenstein and Ramsey were all taken by the Circle as being "Leading Representatives of the scientific world-conception," "sympathetic to" and "closely associated with" it (Hahn et al. 1929; Neurath 1930–31, 311, 329). The *problematik* that held all these philosophers together was the program Russell had started circa 1911. Schlick lectured frequently on Russell, corresponded with him, and invited him to Vienna.⁴ He was interested in Russell's marriage of empiricism with the new formal logic, of which Russell was a pioneer. Russell called the resulting position "logical atomism" or "analytic realism":

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. This philosophy is therefore an atomistic philosophy. (Russell 1911, 133)

As he was to put it in the 1918 course of lectures in London that became *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*: "you can get down in theory, if not in practice, to ultimate simples, out of which the

world is built, and . . . those simples have a kind of reality not belonging to anything else" (1918, 234). The world consists of logical atoms, such as little patches of colour, and their properties. Together these atoms combine to make more complex objects. Russell's solution to the empiricist problem of knowledge is to argue that we do not arrive by inference at knowledge of entities such as enduring physical objects. Such entities are logical constructions from the immediately given entities of sensation, so that the data yielded by acquaintance in a given case are simply "*defined as constituting*" the complex object in question (Russell 1918, 237; see also Russell 1959, 23). A logically ideal language would describe all such combinations using logical connectives and words representing the constituents of atomic facts. This simple language would mirror the world as it really is. The truth or falsity of an atomic proposition is a matter of its getting right the corresponding atomic fact. In its strongest articulation, logical atomism aimed to provide certainty all the way down: "[g]iven all true atomic propositions . . . every other true proposition can theoretically be deduced by logical methods" (Russell 1925, xv).

When Wittgenstein arrived in Cambridge in 1911, the program of logical atomism was gathering steam, and his early work, conducted between 1914–18 and culminating in the publication of the *Tractatus*, was enmeshed in it. The early Wittgenstein's mind was, as Ian Hacking (2014, 111) puts it, "most intimately moulded by Russell," and he "fought his duels with his internalized Russell". Wittgenstein presents us with a "picture theory" of meaning on which language, like a picture, represents that objects are a certain way. "The world divides into facts" (*Tractatus* §1.2), which he defines (§2) as existing states of affairs. These states of affairs consist of absolutely simple objects in a definite structure or set of relations with each other. Every meaningful proposition can be analyzed so it is a truth-function of elementary propositions, and once we get to these

⁴He seems to have not taken up the invitation.

elementary propositions, we get to something that looks completely unlike what we find in ordinary language (§§3.25, 4.221, 4.51). If a proposition is to assert a fact, there must be something in common between the structure of the proposition and the structure of the fact (§2.161). That form is a logical form. “We picture facts to ourselves” (§2.1), and those pictures present “situation[s] in logical space, the existence and non-existence of states of affairs” (§2.11). There is a logical space for every state of affairs, and if we could put all these states of affairs together, we would have a picture of the world.

Along with saying that the correspondence between elements of the picture and objects is a representation relation, Wittgenstein gives us a number of metaphors to make sense of the idea: a picture is “attached to reality”; it “reaches right out to it”; it is “laid against reality like a ruler”; it “touches” objects with “feelers” (§§2.1511–1515). Another metaphor gives us the concept of truth: “A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false” (§2.21). He ends the *Tractatus* (§§6.53–7) by telling us that:

The correct method in philosophy is to say nothing except what can be said: i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. . . .

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

But while Wittgenstein argued that a genuine proposition has to be stateable in the elementary or primary language, he main-

tained that what is really important is not to be found there. Statements of ethics, most prominently, are inexpressible, but more important than what can be expressed. Other kinds of statements are also not in the realm of the sayable. Logical truths do not tell us anything about the world—they are tautologies that “say nothing” (§6.11) and admit all possible situations. Philosophy says nothing, and it (and of all the unsayables, only it) should be abandoned. Scientific theories go beyond the elementary language in a different way, and merit a different metaphor: they are grids or meshes that we place on the phenomena in order to understand them (§6.341).

One can see why the Vienna Circle was so keen on the *Tractatus*. Schlick wrote to Einstein that it was the “deepest” work of the new philosophy (Schlick 1927). Herbert Feigl recalls:

In the Circle we began to penetrate Wittgenstein’s ideas on the nature of language and its relation to the world, his repudiation of metaphysics (notwithstanding a few aphorisms toward the end of the *Tractatus* that had a mystical flavor), and his conception of logical and mathematical truth. We had been well-prepared for this venture, especially by Hans Hahn, who in an extracurricular evening course had introduced us to the major ideas of the great work of Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica*. (Feigl 1968, 634)

In 1924 Schlick wrote to Wittgenstein, expressing his admiration of the *Tractatus* and his desire to meet with its author. After a fruitless attempt on Schlick’s part to visit Wittgenstein at his schoolteacher’s post in the country, the two finally met in Vienna in 1927. Each impressed the other, and during that year, while Wittgenstein was in Vienna to design and build a house for his sister, he met on Monday evenings with what he called the Round Table—usually Schlick, Waismann, Feigl, Carnap, and Maria Kasper. While on visits from Cambridge to Vienna in 1929–31, he started to restrict his meetings to Schlick and Waismann. Wittgenstein and Schlick continued to meet at least until 1933, when they took a philosophically intense summer

holiday together in Italy. That is, for half a decade from 1929, Wittgenstein was engaged with the ideas of the Vienna Circle, even if that engagement was often one-sided, with Wittgenstein using the Circle to help him clarify and promote his own ideas. Indeed, Wittgenstein wrote to Schlick in 1932 that Carnap's "Physicalistic Language as the Universal Language of Science" made it look like he was plagiarizing Carnap, rather than vice versa.

When Frank Ramsey, three years younger than the rest of his cohort, started his undergraduate degree in Cambridge in 1921, he walked into a philosophical air thick with logical atomism. He translated the *Tractatus* and then shortly afterward, in 1923, still an undergraduate, Ramsey traveled to Puchberg, where Wittgenstein was in self-imposed isolation as a schoolteacher. They spent five hours a day for two weeks going through the *Tractatus* line by line, at the rate of a page an hour.⁵ No one had such a window into Wittgenstein's early work as did Ramsey. That window opened even wider when in 1924 Ramsey spent six months in Vienna being psychoanalyzed. He met with Wittgenstein a number of times and "work" was the "mainstay" of their conversation (McGuinness 2012c, 150).

Ramsey too was taken to be part of the program. Ayer says: "The brilliant Cambridge philosopher F. P. Ramsey was marked as an adherent, but he died in 1930 at the early age of 26" (1959, 6). But while Ramsey and Schlick had a positive and warm relationship, Ramsey's doubts about the logical atomist/logical empiricist program started before Wittgenstein's and were more consistent. He thought that Schlick's *The General Theory of Knowledge* contained "some sad rubbish" (McGuinness 2012c, 160). He also had doubts about Carnap's attempt to reconstruct the world out of what Ramsey called a primary language. Ramsey wrote to Schlick:

⁵See the letters collected in McGuinness (2012c, 140) and von Wright (1973, 77ff).

I feel very guilty that I've not yet written a review of Carnap's book, which is really inexcusable. I found it very interesting, though some things I thought certainly wrong and others I felt very doubtful about.⁶

In 1921 the first year undergraduate Ramsey read a confident paper the Moral Sciences Club titled "The Nature of Propositions." It is a rejection of Russell's view of propositions, facts and truth. He argues that Russell is wrong to think that a belief is a dual relation between something mental and a proposition (Ramsey 1921, 109). There are no such "mysterious entities" as propositions in Russell's sense—"so unlike anything else in the world" (1921, 111, 112). Russellian analysis even in "the simplest case is so complicated" and for some cases, such as general propositions, it is "infinitely complex" (1921, 109). Similarly, Ramsey was a constant critic of what he called the "scholasticism" of Wittgenstein's Tractarian program, "the essence of which is treating what is vague as if it were precise and trying to fit it into an exact logical category" (1929b, 7). "Ludwig is a scholastic" (1991a, 64).

At the time of his death, Ramsey was working on a book manuscript titled *On Truth*, and in it, he was still hammering away at the correspondence picture. He thinks that we cannot "describe the nature of this correspondence". How does the theory cope with, for instance, the belief that Jones is a liar or a fool? He says his view is "superior" to the correspondence view because it is "able to avoid mentioning either correspondence or facts," two philosophically problematic notions (Ramsey 1991b, 90). He asks what the correspondence relation between a belief and the world might be. Does a belief resemble the world? Ontological accounts of truth, such as the correspondence theory,

⁶Vienna Circle Archives, Noord-Hollands Archief, #114-Ram-4. The letter is dated simply "Dec. 10", with no year given. But since he says "At the moment I am in bed with a very severe attack of jaundice", it is no doubt 1929, with that jaundice ending Ramsey's life the following month.

which single out a particular kind of entity as the one required to ground the truth of any belief or statement, do not make good on their promise to set out in a clear way how a proposition might get the world right.

He also rejected two other points in Wittgenstein's Tractarian view of philosophy. Philosophy and ethics cannot be in a realm of the unsayable, as Wittgenstein pretends: "what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either" (Ramsey 1929a, 146). Nor can philosophy start from first premises of ordinary thought and language, relieved of the burden of assessing their meaningfulness or warrant, as much of the *Tractatus* seems to encourage. The task of philosophy cannot be merely to clarify thoughts by setting out the rules of our language: "The standardisation of the colours of beer is not philosophy, but in a sense it is an improvement in notation, and a clarification of thought" (Ramsey 1991a, 55).

Ramsey's criticisms of Wittgenstein, I shall suggest, had an impact, as did his alternative. That alternative was a kind of pragmatism. By 1926 Ramsey was a full-on Peircean pragmatist. In the crucial time 1929–30, the last year of Ramsey's life, when he and Wittgenstein were together in Cambridge and before Wittgenstein turned his back with finality on the Circle, Ramsey transmitted that Peircean pragmatism to Wittgenstein. Moreover, I shall argue that Wittgenstein adopted, circa 1929, Ramsey's pragmatist position on generalizations and hypotheticals, and then went on to extend Ramsey's pragmatism to everyday beliefs. But while Ramsey also extended pragmatism to all beliefs, he would have objected to the particular direction Wittgenstein took pragmatism, had he lived to see it.

My final suggestion will be that Wittgenstein in turn planted the seeds of pragmatism in the Vienna Circle, preparing at least some of them to explicitly turn to pragmatism.⁷ The Vienna Cir-

⁷This is what I was getting at in the sentences Uebel quotes from my *The American Pragmatists* in his note 2. Taken out of context, they seem rather a

cle is often seen as a tsunami that washed away the homegrown pragmatism when it hit the shores of America. I argued in *The American Pragmatists* that this is a poor interpretation of the intellectual events, in that the best of logical empiricism and the best of pragmatism had much in common. In this paper I take a step farther and offer an argument as to how that commonality might have come about.

3. Ramsey's Pragmatism

As Keynes says in his 1931 review of Ramsey's posthumously published *The Foundations of Mathematics*, Ramsey was "departing ... from the formal and objective treatment of his immediate predecessors." He and Wittgenstein had been helping Russell to perfect the formal matters in *Principia Mathematica*. But, Keynes says, the effect was

... gradually to empty it of content and to reduce it more and more to mere dry bones, until finally it seemed to exclude not only all experience, but most of the principles, usually reckoned logical, of reasonable thought. Wittgenstein's solution was to regard everything else as a sort of inspired nonsense, having great value indeed for the individual, but incapable of being exactly discussed. Ramsey's reaction was towards what he himself described as a sort of pragmatism, not unsympathetic to Russell, but repugnant to Wittgenstein. ... Thus he was led to consider 'human logic' as distinguished from 'formal logic'. (Keynes 1931, 407).⁸

Keynes, who knew and understood both Ramsey and Wittgenstein well, gets so much right in the above passage. But while Wittgenstein did indeed say some harsh about pragmatism, we shall see that he did not find it altogether repugnant.

jumble of thoughts.

⁸The remark about pragmatism being not unsympathetic to Russell is not as strange as it first sounds. For by the time of Ramsey's death, Russell had written the behaviourist *The Analysis of Mind*. Ramsey cited Russell as one of his inspirations for pragmatism (Ramsey 1927, 51).

In the 1929 “General Propositions and Causality,” Ramsey put forward a pragmatist account of open universal generalizations, causal laws, and conditionals. Open generalizations (what he sometimes called variable hypotheticals), for example, “All men are mortal” and “Arsenic is poisonous”, range over an infinite number of individuals. Because such statements seem simply to be predicating the same property of one individual after another, Ramsey says that “everyone except us” thinks of them as conjunctions. Braithwaite is the other member of the “us”. Generalizations, Ramsey argues, can be taken to be conjunctions when they range over a finite domain, as in “Everyone in Cambridge voted,” but an open generalization “always goes beyond what we know or want” (1929a, 146). In Ramsey’s alternative view, an open generalization “expresses an inference we are at any time prepared to make” (1929a, 146). It is not a particular judgment, but a rule for judging. It is a habit with which we “meet the future” (1929a, 149). If I believe that all men are mortal, I adopt a rule or a habit of the form: if I meet a ϕ , I shall regard it as a ψ (1929a, 149).

Ramsey starts to work through the tricky issue of how these habits can be “cognitive attitudes”. He asks: “in what way can [such a habit] be right or wrong”? (1929a, 146–47). Take the belief that all men are mortal. This habit will play out in diverse ways: I will be disposed to assert and affirm that all men are mortal in appropriate circumstances; I will drive my car carefully around those pedestrians I wish to remain alive; I will think that every person I meet will at some point die; I will not treat myself as an exception; I may despair about the meaning of life; and so on. And my rule or habit can be *evaluated* in terms of whether it manifests itself in appropriate ways (whether I adopt dispositions such as the ones above) and whether it continues to cohere with experience.

We can also evaluate these attitudes because, as Ramsey puts it, they form *the system* with which we meet the future. If you

and I meet the future with different systems, then we *disagree*, and the future might be compatible with one of our systems but not the other (1929a, 149). Ramsey notes that “[t]his is Peirce’s notion of truth as what everyone will believe in the end; it does not apply to the truthful statement of matters of fact, but the ‘true scientific system’” (1929a, 161).

Ramsey was also against those logicians who argued that conditionals are to be analyzed in terms of truth conditions. He in effect sides with C. I. Lewis’s pragmatic account: conditionals are also rules for judging (Ramsey 1929a, 154). When I accept a conditional “if p then q ”, I commit myself to acquiring the disposition to judge q whenever I judge p .⁹ These conditional judgments are also cognitive. Ramsey gives the following example. If a man has a cake and decides not to eat it because he thinks it will make him ill, we can judge him mistaken even if he does not eat the cake. We have different “degrees of expectation” as to the outcome, and we can “introduce any fact we know, whether he did or could know it” (1929a, 155). Let’s say he knew that I carefully baked the cake, that I’m an excellent baker, that I know he has no food allergies or aversions, and that I bear no ill will towards him. Then we might judge that he is irrational. If all these things hold, but he does not know them, then we might judge him mistaken.

It is important to see that Ramsey’s arguments in “General Propositions and Causality” are but a piece of his larger view, in which he delivered a pragmatist treatment of all beliefs. Indeed, in Ramsey’s original manuscript (which was not finished and was titled and edited by Braithwaite for posthumous publication), this is the first sentence, crossed out and not mentioned in the published version: “The problem of philosophy must be divided if I am to solve it: as a whole it is too big for me”. The first sentence in the published version starts “Let us con-

⁹I can of course fail to meet my commitment. I might not in fact acquire the disposition, because I might be irrational, inattentive, and so on.

sider the meaning of general propositions”, but Ramsey initially wrote “Let us take first the meaning of general propositions”.¹⁰ His intention, that is, was to take *all* propositions and show how they are habits of action. In this paper, he only deals with a couple of kinds.

Ramsey had been arguing for three years prior to “General Propositions and Causality” that all beliefs are dispositions, habits or rules with which we meet the future.¹¹ As Peirce had put it, beliefs are “that upon which a man is prepared to act”; or “habits of mind,” which are “good or otherwise”, or “safe” or otherwise (1931–58, 5.12; 1900–, 3, 245). This idea—that belief has implications for action—is the spur for Ramsey’s best-known result, the argument in the 1926 “Truth and Probability” that we can measure partial belief by seeing how people would act, especially in betting contexts.

Ramsey is already clear in “Truth and Probability” that the dispositional account of belief tells us not just how we can *measure* beliefs, but how we can *evaluate* them. Here too he rightly says: “This is a kind of pragmatism: we judge mental habits by whether they work” (1926, 93–94). But Ramsey, like Peirce, and unlike James, was resolute in requiring that a belief’s working must be connected to how things are. As Ramsey put it in the 1927 “Facts and Propositions,” a chicken’s “belief” that a certain caterpillar is poisonous results in actions that are useful “if, and only if, the caterpillars were actually poisonous” (1927, 40). As Peirce put it, a belief must be put in place by a method not extraneous to the facts (1900–, 3, 253). Pragmatism, for Peirce and Ramsey, is the position that beliefs should be evaluated based on both hindsight (whether the belief-formation method is connected to the facts) and foresight (whether the belief continues to work, fitting future experience and enabling successful action).

¹⁰Cambridge University Archives, MS Add. 9781/2.

¹¹Like Peirce, he credits Alexander Bain.

4. Ramsey’s Influence on Wittgenstein

In the 1945 Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes of the “grave mistakes” he made in the *Tractatus*:

I was helped to realize these mistakes—to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate—by the criticism which my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsey, with whom I discussed them in innumerable conversations during the last two years of his life. (Wittgenstein 2009, 4)

We have seen that Ramsey rejects much in the Tractarian Wittgenstein. At one point, he stands back and puts his objection thus:

We cannot really picture the world as disconnected selves; the selves we know are in the world. What we can’t do we can’t do and it’s no good trying. Philosophy comes from not understanding the logic of our language; but the logic of our language is not what Wittgenstein thought. The pictures we make to ourselves are not pictures of facts. (Ramsey 1991a, 51)

The Tractarian picture is bankrupt for actual human beings trying to think through the concepts of belief and truth, and trying to evaluate beliefs. All our beliefs, hypotheses, and theories are habits of action or rules with which we meet the future.

Wittgenstein, as Keynes noted, was disparaging about Ramsey’s pragmatism. Wittgenstein does not write much about pragmatism, but an exchange of letters between G. E. Moore and Sydney Waterlow is especially interesting here. Waterlow wrote to Moore in June 1931:

If I say that my outstanding impression on a first reading of Ramsey is the contrast between his quite extraordinary powers and his immense vitality on the one hand, and on the other the poverty of his *Weltanschauung*, I don’t much advance matters. For what is it to have a *Weltanschauung*? Yet I feel sure it is wrong that there should be such a contrast: something has gone terribly wrong. His drift

towards stating everything in ‘pragmatic’ terms could not, however arguable, put the thought right; of that I feel equally sure, for I still obstinately cling, like you . . . to the conviction that there is an objective truth, goodness, etc. But what I mean by clinging to such conceptions as ‘absolute’ & ‘objective’, I haven’t the faintest idea. (Paul 2012, 117)

Moore replies:

I quite agree with what you say about Ramsey. I think his *Weltanschauung*, without objective values, is very depressing. Wittgenstein finds this too: he calls Ramsey a ‘materialist’; and what he means by this is something very antipathetic to him. Yet he himself doesn’t believe in objective values either! He thinks they’re nonsense, but *important* nonsense. For my part, I still believe what I believed when I wrote *Principia Ethica*. I gather this doesn’t at all satisfy you; but I can’t believe any more. (Paul 2012, 117)

The point made by both Waterlow and Moore (and attributed also to Wittgenstein) is that Ramsey’s worldview, in trying to account for value in terms of success, is left devoid of real or objective value. It is this criticism that Wittgenstein articulates by calling Ramsey a “materialist.” But even in the brief account given of Ramsey’s pragmatism above, we can see that he avoided reducing value to behavior or action by trying to build objectivity and irreducible normativity into the idea of success. I could add much more about how Ramsey thought that we must not ignore what he called the “pistic” or commitment aspect of belief (see Misak forthcoming-a). But perhaps it is enough to know that he was dead set against what he called an “insane” or extreme behaviourism (Ramsey 1929a, 70). Nonetheless, Ramsey’s worldview was certainly sparser than Wittgenstein’s. For Wittgenstein’s was full of the mystical, religious and unknowable. Ramsey was also dead set against appeals to such phenomena. He did not want to take a key philosophical concept like goodness (Moore), propositions (Russell), or probability relations (Keynes) to be unanalyzable

or mysterious. This is the heart of the dispute between Ramsey and Wittgenstein. Hence Ramsey’s retort to Wittgenstein’s idea that there might be *important* nonsense: what we can’t say, we can’t say. On his view, we can only stick to what we can say, but there’s no reason to think this precludes making an honest effort to spell out the norms that govern action, assertion and inquiry. We should make this effort without relying on metaphysical accounts that leave such phenomena unintelligible to us.

This fundamental philosophical difference, though, is overriden. Wittgenstein is in fact tempted by pragmatism. The first mention of pragmatism in his work comes the day after Ramsey’s death. During the 1929 Christmas break, Wittgenstein had travelled to Vienna and had conversations with Schlick and Waismann. He returned to England to find that Ramsey had taken ill. He died on January 19th. Wittgenstein returned to London to give his first lecture at Trinity, and wrote a substantial entry in his philosophical notebook. It sheds much light on his relationship to pragmatism. These remarks appear in MS 107, one of a set of extensive philosophical notebooks, sections of which became *Philosophical Remarks* and then *Philosophical Investigations*.¹² The notebooks 105–108, written in 1929–30, can be seen as the first draft of a long and evolving project. They are critical for grasping the transition from the Tractarian Wittgenstein to the later Wittgenstein, and they are critical for grasping the impact of Ramsey on Wittgenstein.¹³ Wittgenstein wrote:

Sentences [Sätze]—that is, what we ordinarily call so: the sentences [Sätze] of our everyday use—seem to me to work differently from what in logic is meant by propositions [Sätzen], if there are such things at all.

¹²See Nedo (1998) for a reconstruction of how the many notebooks were mined for future works.

¹³I rely on Anna Boncompagni for translations of the Nachlass material. See her excellent (forthcoming-a) and (forthcoming-b).

And this is due to their hypothetical character. Events do not seem to verify or falsify them in the sense I originally intended—rather there is, as it were, still a door left open. Verification and its opposite are not the last word.

When I say “There is a chair over there”, this sentence refers to a series of expectations. I believe I could go there, perceive the chair and sit on it, I believe it is made of wood and I expect it to have a certain hardness, inflammability etc. If some of these expectations are disappointed, I will see it as proof for retaining that there was no chair there.

Here one sees how one may arrive at the pragmatist conception of true and false: A sentence is true as long as it proves to be useful.

Every sentence we utter in everyday life appears to have the character of an hypothesis.

The point of talking of sense-data and immediate experience is that we are looking for a non-hypothetical representation.

But now it seems that the *representation* loses all its value if the hypothetical element is dropped, because then the proposition does not point to the future any more, but it is, as it were, self-satisfied and hence without any value.

It makes no sense to speak of sentences, if they have no instrumental value. (Wittgenstein 2003, MS 107: 247–50)¹⁴

What an important set of remarks for understanding the relationship between Wittgenstein, Ramsey and pragmatism. Von Wright remembers that Wittgenstein took his “biggest mistake” in the *Tractatus* to be the identification of open generalizations with infinite conjunctions (1982: 151). The passage above suggests that not only did Wittgenstein adopt Ramsey’s account of open generalizations, but he extended that pragmatism to cover all hypotheses. If you begin with logic and what you can know via direct acquaintance, you are taken to the idea that we cannot know much, or at least not much of any value. We are better off

¹⁴I am indebted to Anna Boncompagni and Joachim Schulte for translation of the passage.

thinking about our useful beliefs, and about how they are useful.

Wittgenstein continued to talk in this vein in lectures between 1930 and 1932. For instance:

There is a different kind of generality which applies to hypotheses. A proposition can be verified; a hypothesis cannot, but is a law or rule for constructing propositions and looks to the future—i.e. enables us to construct propositions which say what will occur and which can be verified or falsified.¹⁵

A hypothesis is a law for constructing propositions, and the propositions are instances of this law. If they are true (verified), the hypothesis works; if they are not true, the hypothesis does not work. Or we may say that a hypothesis constructs expectations which are expressed in propositions and can be verified or falsified. The same words may express a proposition to me, to you a hypothesis.¹⁶

Hypotheses, in the secondary language, are rules for meeting the future. Propositions, in the primary language, are not. Propositions are true or false, while hypotheses are evaluated in a different way—in terms of whether or not they work. But in the final passage above, Wittgenstein comes close to linking (without identifying) the truth of a hypothesis with whether or not it works. The hypothesis constructs expectations and those expectations are expressed in propositions. If the propositions are verified, they are true, and the hypothesis works. But the propositions are merely instances of the hypothesis. While the nature of an open hypothesis is that it can never be fully verified, the flip side of the coin is that a fully verifiable proposition is self-satisfied and is of little use or interest. That is, if we add Wittgenstein’s new thoughts about hypotheses and how we evaluate them with his worries about the primary language,

¹⁵This is from Easter Term 1930, Lecture A IX, in Wittgenstein (1980, 16).

¹⁶From the miscellaneous notes of Desmond Lee, 1929–31; in Wittgenstein (1980, 110).

we are pretty close to a general Peircean pragmatist account of truth, of the sort Ramsey was articulating. Once the Tractarian picture is abandoned, what we have are hypotheses that work or do not work. The way to pragmatism, the “access” to it, for Wittgenstein, is the trail Ramsey cuts. A hypothesis (Wittgenstein) or a belief (Ramsey, Peirce) is a set of expectations. If those expectations are met, and would continue to be met, then that is all we can ask of it.

The Tractarian picture is shaken to its foundations. Like Peirce and Ramsey, Wittgenstein now wants to say that our beliefs must be connected to experience, but that the philosopher cannot get any more precise than that:

All that’s required for our propositions (about reality) to have a sense, is that our experience *in some sense or other* either tends to agree with them or tends not to agree with them. That is, immediate experience need confirm only something about them, *some* facet of them. ... 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 2003, MS 107: 205, 25 Nov. 1929)

As we well know, the later Wittgenstein’s focus was on everyday beliefs. But as is not well-known, it is in 1929, under pressure from Ramsey’s pragmatism, that Wittgenstein shifts his attention away from the primary language and towards the secondary language—the language of expectations. He starts to argue that what is important is that we are able to handle a belief as an instrument in our practical activities, that a belief facilitates and does not obstruct the way we do things, that it properly guides our actions. It is during this period that he starts to use the idea of *eingreifen*, in its mechanical meaning of engaging like cogwheels and gear wheels (see Boncompagni forthcoming-a). Hence, a “wheel turning idly” is “a sentence

that cannot be verified in any way and which means nothing” (Waismann 1979, 65; see also Wittgenstein 1975, 1).

It is a short step from thinking that (A) hypotheses, open generalizations, and conditionals are expectations or rules for the future and (B) the only non-self-satisfied, valuable, propositions are hypotheses or expectations to (C) good or true beliefs are expectations we would never have cause to overturn. Wittgenstein wavers in 1929-32 and for the rest of his life on the point about truth. At times he holds on to the old Tractarian picture. For instance, two days after Ramsey’s death, he wrote in his notes that since a hypothesis always remains open, it can never be completely verified, and hence, “for it there is not truth and falsity” (Wittgenstein 2003, MS 107: 250). A hypothesis goes beyond immediate experience, and once we think of beliefs and hypotheses in terms of expectations, we must abandon the idea of truth for them. But at other times, he takes the step. The beliefs of everyday life are expectations or instruments, and the way we assess their truth is in terms of whether or not they work.

In the Preface to the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein credits the Italian economist Piero Sraffa, with whom he met with frequently during the years 1929–30, with showing him how his Tractarian aspiration of finding the logical rules of language was a dead-end. Norman Malcolm reports:

One day ... when Wittgenstein was insisting that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same ‘logical form’, the same ‘logical multiplicity,’ Sraffa made a gesture, familiar to Neapolitans as meaning something like disgust or contempt, of brushing the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the finger-tips of one hand. And he asked: ‘What is the logical form of *that?*’ (Malcolm 1958, 69)

But it was not only Sraffa who threw a spanner in the works of the *Tractatus*. We have seen that Ramsey did as well. In 1929, he drafted a paper titled “Philosophy” in which he contested what

he took to be Wittgenstein's view of philosophy. One method ("Ludwig's") is to "construct a logic, and do all our philosophical analysis entirely *unselfconsciously*, thinking all the time of the facts and not about our thinking about them, deciding what we meant without any reference to the nature of meaning" (1929b, 5). Ramsey thinks this is the "wrong" method (1929b, 5). Definition, he says, only goes so far—we need to explain the way words are used, "and in this explanation we are forced to look not only at the objects which we are talking about but at our own mental state"—"we cannot neglect the epistemic or subjective side" (1929b, 6).

Under pressure also from Ramsey, the later Wittgenstein—let's call him the post-Ramseyan Wittgenstein—abandoned the idea that the primary language was of interest or value, and became focused on the secondary, ordinary, language. He came to the view that the difference between the two systems is already resolved in ordinary language:

There is no need of a theory to reconcile what we know about sense data and what we believe about physical objects, because part of what we mean by saying that a penny is round is that we see it as elliptical in such and such conditions. (Wittgenstein 1980, 69)

It was not so much a set of technical problems (having to do with variable hypotheticals, or colour, or conditionals) that upset the Tractarian picture. It was the realization that we ought to be concerned with the diversity of propositions. That naturally led Wittgenstein to be concerned with human belief, rather than with the purely formal relation between thought and the world. It is Ramsey who sows the seeds of this idea, which becomes the hallmark of the later Wittgenstein. Ramsey, I contend, would have thought that Wittgenstein ended up paying too much attention to the epistemic or subjective side, but that is another story.

5. Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle

Some of Wittgenstein's moments of wavering on whether hypotheses or propositions in the secondary language are truth-apt occurred in his discussions with Schlick and Waismann. At one point, he asserts that a "natural law" cannot be verified or falsified, and hence is not true or false:

... it is neither true nor false but 'probable,' and here 'probable' means: simple, convenient. A statement is true or false, never probable. Anything that is probable is not a statement. ... [They] refer to the future *ad infinitum*. They never count as proved; we always reserve the right to drop or alter them, in contrast with a real statement, whose truth is not subject to alteration. (Waismann 1979, 100)

But he also asserts in one 1931 meeting that the Tractarian picture, on which there is a primary language of truth-apt propositions, and a secondary language of hypotheses that is at best probable or useful, is erroneous. For instance, the *Tractatus*, he says, is an example of dogmatism in that it states that although we are currently unable to specify the form of elementary propositions, logical analysis would be sure to discover them. It is now clear to him that "we cannot proceed by assuming from the very beginning, as Carnap does, that the elementary propositions consist of two-place relations, etc." (Waismann 1979, 182). All he wants to do now is

... simply draw the other person's attention to what he is really doing and refrain from any assertions. Everything is then to go on within the grammar. (Waismann 1979, 186)

He also says to Schlick and Waismann, in December 1929, just before Ramsey's death:

I used to believe that there was the everyday language that we all usually spoke and a primary language that expressed what we really knew: namely phenomena. I also spoke of a first system and

a second system. Now I wish to explain why I do not adhere to that conception any more. I think that essentially we have only one language. We need not invent a new language or construct a new symbolism, but our everyday language already is the language, provided we rid it of the absurdities that lie hidden in it. (Waismann 1979, 45)

Wittgenstein's 1929–30 unhappiness with the Tractarian primary language (that it only about self-satisfied and sterile propositions), unsteady as it was, was made apparent to the Vienna Circle. My suggestion is that when they too felt the force of such worries, from disparate sources,¹⁷ a kind of Ramseyan pragmatist fix for the problems—a turn to thinking about not about the primary language but towards the secondary language with its expectations and rules for meeting the future—was a natural step to take. It was a natural step because the verifiability principle itself says that we must look to the expectations of a belief. This is why, as Uebel so nicely shows, the Circle was attracted to Peirce's pragmatist account of meaning, when they encountered it.

I argued in *The American Pragmatists* that when members of the Vienna Circle arrived in America in the 1930s, they took the pragmatist positions of Peirce and Dewey to be close cousins. They all shared a commitment to first-order inquiry, to empiricism, to clarity, and they all shared the view that the meaning of a sentence is a matter of what we can expect of it. As the verifiability criterion was shown to rule out much of what was important to science, such as dispositional and law-like statements, some members of the Vienna Circle (most prominently Frank) moved to a pragmatist account of truth. What I hope here to have shown here is that the Vienna Circle had been pre-

¹⁷Thomas Uebel noted to me that what set Carnap on an anti-atomistic, anti-Tractarian path was Neurath's persistent and vehement criticism of his methodological solipsism. So while Carnap was a kind of pragmatist, he did not get the worries nor the pragmatist ideas from Ramsey via Wittgenstein. And Schlick took a dim view of Frank's endorsement of pragmatism.

pared for the pragmatist account of truth by Ramsey, through Wittgenstein. Indeed, here is Frank in 1930, already claiming that pragmatism is the Vienna Circle's account of truth and suggesting that to think of truth as correspondence is, as Ramsey said, a scholasticism:

The physicist in his own scientific activity has never employed any other concept of truth than that of pragmatism. The "agreement of thoughts with their object", which the school philosophy requires, cannot be established by any concrete experiment. ... In reality, physicists compare only experiences with other experiences. They test the truth of a theory by what it has become customary to call "agreements". (Frank 1949, 101–02)

Another clear resonance between Ramsey and the Circle is that the inferential treatment of open generalizations was adopted by Carnap (1963) in response to the problem that open universal statements are not verifiable.

Uebel has illuminated for us some clear pathways between what he calls the early Vienna Circle and pragmatism. I hope to have shown the existence of an additional, less clearly lighted, passageway between these two great and allied traditions. Wittgenstein at the turn of the 1930s, almost inadvertently showed the way (the "access") to pragmatism—through Ramsey. I say "almost inadvertently" because although Ramsey saw with great clarity that the empiricist and logical materials with which he started led to the pragmatist account of truth, Wittgenstein only at times glimpsed that conclusion.

Moreover, Wittgenstein was not inclined to adopt pragmatism or any kind of theory or "ism". In his very last work, he says: "So I am trying to say something that sounds like pragmatism. Here I am being thwarted by a kind of *Weltanschauung*" (1969, §422). He was deeply set against theory:

... we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. (Wittgenstein 2009, §109)

He especially did not like Ramsey's pragmatist theory, which drained religion and the ineffable out of the world. In 1930, he says this of their relationship:

But in the long run it didn't really go well. Ramsey's incapacity ... for reverence, disgusted me more and more as time went on. ... He was a very adept and clever critic when one put one's ideas before him. But his criticism didn't help one to advance: it only stopped and sobered one. ... He had an ugly mind. (McGuinness 2012a, x).¹⁸

Waterlow was right that Wittgenstein thought that Ramsey was materialistic. We have seen that, in turn, Ramsey was critical of Wittgenstein's idea that there is something unsayable yet important—that one could peer through the boundary between the thinkable and the unthinkable, and stand in awe of what one cannot say. This was precisely what drove Wittgenstein away from the Vienna Circle—Wittgenstein thought that they were too materialistic or scientific, missing what was important but unsayable. But the fact of these disputes does not place an obstacle in the path I have traced between Peirce, Ramsey, Wittgenstein, and the Vienna Circle. That Wittgenstein chose to step off the path, after he had laid part of it down does not diminish its existence, nor does it speak against its being the right path for a logically-minded empiricism to take.

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¹⁸While he seems to have been in two minds about Ramsey, he was unremittably negative about Braithwaite's abilities. See McGuinness (2012c, 264, 287).

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