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Austin and Quine on the Dogmas*

Marek Tomeček

Abstract: Austin and Quine both reacted to the logical positivism of Carnap, but they did it from different positions. While Quine with his pragmatic rejection of the analytic – synthetic divide and confirmation holism represents a modification and continuation of the tradition, Austin challenges its underlying assumptions: the prominent role of mathematics as a model for natural language and the dichotomy physical object – sense datum. His criticism is paralleled here by the later Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* and *Philosophical Investigations*, reacting to his earlier logical phase. But there seems to be no room left for the traditional questions of the philosophy of mathematics in Austin’s natural language approach.

Abstrakt: Austin a Quine reagovali na Carnapův logický pozitivismus, ovšem z rozdílných pozic. Zatímco Quine z pragmatických pozic odmítá rozdělení na analytické a syntetické věty, svým konfirmačním holismem pokračuje v tradici logického pozitivismu, Austin odmítá už samotné jeho předpoklady: paradigmatickou roli matematiky pro přirozený jazyk a dichotomii fyzický předmět – smyslové datum. Svoji kritikou zrcadlí Wittgensteinovu pozdní fázi v *O jistotě* a *Filozofických zkoumáních*, kteréžto knihy reagují na ranou logizující fázi *Traktátu*. Ovšem Austinův radikální postoj, zdá se, neumožňuje tematizování tradičních otázek filozofie matematiky.

Keywords: analytic, a priori, Austin, Quine, reductionism, synthetic

Klíčová slova: analytické, a priori, Austin, Quine, redukcionismus, syntetické

J. L. Austin (1911-1960) and W. V. O. Quine (1908-2000) were philosophical contemporaries who both criticised what they called “dogma” in the philosophy of their immediate predecessors. While Quine’s famous 1951 article “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (Quine 1961) provoked a series of fruitful replies from other thinkers (Paul Grice, P. F. Strawson, Hilary Putnam, Rudolf Carnap, et al.) and initiated a lively debate, with which most students of analytical philosophy are familiar, Austin’s two pre-war papers (“Are There A *Priori*

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Concepts?” (Austin 1961a) from 1939 and “The Meaning of a Word” (Austin 1961b) from 1940) and the book *Sense and Sensibilia* (Austin 1962) dealing with the same topic have gone largely unnoticed. This might have something to do with the relative obscurity of their publishing history: the papers were read at pre-war philosophical meetings and the book was reconstructed only posthumously from notes for lectures from late 1940s and 1950s. It might also have something to do with Austin’s idiosyncratic approach to the topic, which simply did not catch the philosophers’ imagination in the same way that Quine’s arguments did. Nevertheless, we believe a fruitful comparison of the two philosophers can be made, interesting not only for historical reasons, but also for systematic philosophical understanding of the debate. As Quine’s views are probably the more familiar ones to the reader, we will project onto them Austin’s arguments and contrast them, where necessary.

The First Dogma: the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

Let us start with Austin’s views on the analytic/synthetic statement distinction. In his 1940 paper he calls it a “dogma” (Austin 1961b, 63) (just as Quine will a decade later) and says it rests solely on the philosophers’ mistaken belief that meanings of words have parts and that a word can be “contained” in another word. Only on this basis do we say that, for example, “Being a professor is *not* part of the meaning of being a man” (Austin 1961b, 63) and treat the sentence “He is a professor” as synthetic. But “the meaning of a word”, says Austin, is a slippery phrase which cannot support such an elaborate philosophical superstructure.

“The meaning of a word” has its benign as well as dangerous uses. It comes handy when we do not know a particular word and inquire as to its meaning: “what is the meaning of the word *raciness*?” To answer such a question, I may describe what raciness is and perhaps give examples, or I may consult a dictionary. And similarly, to find out whether a person knows the meaning of the word, I may ask him some questions about it (teachers do this all the time.)

So far so good, but philosophers have a tendency to carry their questioning further and generalise it: after asking “what is the meaning of the word *raciness*?” they go on to ask “what is the meaning of a word?”, thereby asking not after one particular word, but any word, or no particular word at all. And such a general question is nonsensical and gives birth to that bogus philosophical entity “the meaning of a word”.

To bring out its misleading nature, we may run a series of controlling questions. The question “what is the meaning of the word *rat*?” can be substituted by the equivalent and simpler question “what is a *rat*?” and in this case the generalizing move from “what is a *rat*?” to “what is anything?” clearly becomes preposterous. The thing we are asking about cannot simply be left out. Or again, the question “does he know the meaning of the word *rat*?” cannot be generalized into “does he know the meaning of a word?” Austin illustrates his point by taking a parallel case of asking about goals: “what is the point of standing on one’s head?” makes perfectly good sense when we see someone we know unexpectedly performing the stunt, but the generalized question “what is the point of doing *anything* – not anything *in particular*, but just *anything*?” (Austin 1961b, 59) somehow moves the goal posts of the semantic playing field well beyond the horizon. (Austin wryly comments that some people who raise this question and try to answer it either commit suicide or join the Church, though

the more intellectually adventurous of these go on asking “what is the “point” of doing a thing?”, and “what is the-point-of-eating-suet?” (Austin 1961b, 60) thus inventing a whole universe of metaphysical entities called “points”, some of which are “points-of-eating-suet”).

Nevertheless, the spurious philosophical pseudo-question “what is the meaning of a word?” has an equally spurious series of traditional answers: a concept, an idea, an image, a class of *sensa*, etc. and so is firmly embedded in the philosophical jargon. But let us confront the philosophical theory with the plain man. If a non-philosopher were to ask: “what is the meaning of the word *muggy*?” and the informed philosopher “were to answer “The idea or concept of ‘mugginess’” or “The class of *sensa* of which it is correct to say ‘This is *muggy*’”: the man would stare at me as at an imbecile.” (Austin 1961b, 59) The simple question does not admit of such an answer, and the philosophical conceptions of meaning are simply an idle wheel in the mechanism of language, which does not communicate motion to the other wheels. We should not expect these qualms about the philosophers’ usage of the phrase ‘the meaning of a word’ to constitute a knock/down argument against the analytic/synthetic distinction just yet. Austin is simply preparing his ground by problematising the concepts on which the whole edifice rests, his method being that of unpicking verbal fallacies of the philosophers’ jargon.

Surprisingly, Quine makes many points similar to Austin’s observations. He, too, claims that the analytic/synthetic divide “appeals to a notion of containment which is left at a metaphorical level” (Quine 1961, 21) but without further specifying what is wrong with the metaphor. So whereas for Austin the metaphorical language used in talking about the meaning of a word is full of pitfalls (“Can I “lose” a concept, as well as acquire it?”) (Austin 1961a, 41n) and there is no such entity needed, Quine simply notes the talk of meaning-containing-other-meanings is metaphorical and continues to analyze the prevailing theories of meaning.

Secondly, Quine warns against the danger of confusing meaning with naming, and he does so by invoking Frege’s example of the Morning and Evening Star. Austin makes the same point, though without the stellar reference. He thinks that philosophers have a propensity to assimilate words to proper names, to suppose that they uniquely refer to one thing. (Austin 1961b, 61) Thirdly, for Quine the same generalised question about the meaning of a word also leads to the traditional answers: objects of the theory of meaning are mental or Platonic ideas. But he proposes to side step the whole question of the status of such objects by sharply separating the theory of meaning from the theory of reference. The former one should deal only with “the synonymy of linguistic forms and the analyticity of statements; meanings themselves, as obscure intermediary entities, may well be abandoned.” (Quine 1961, 22) So whereas for Austin the whole quest for the meaning of a word is a wild-goose chase spawned by a bloated metaphor, Quine orders a division of labour. The result, at least for the time being, seems to be the same.

And finally, both authors claim that sentence meaning is primary and word meaning secondary. While Quine attributes the shift from words to statements to Frege and sees it exemplified in Russell and the verification theory of meaning (it is, after all, statements that are verified, not individual words), Austin does not specify when the shift occurred and just

mentions “more recent philosophers” (Austin 1961b, 56) who do not commit the mistake of concentrating on individual words’ meanings.

So from these four areas of overlap we see that both philosophers criticise the same then-prevalent “modern empiricism”, for Austin personified primarily in his Oxford colleague A. J. Ayer, the English exponent of the Vienna Circle, with whom he conducted heated weekly discussions of current philosophy, for Quine the logical empiricists themselves, especially Carnap. But whether they do it from the same position or from different perspectives remains to be seen.

The first point of disagreement concerns the role of dictionary in ascertaining the meaning of a word. Austin is not against the practise once we realize that sentence meaning is primary and word meaning secondary: “All the dictionary can do when we ‘look up the meaning of a word’ is to suggest aids to the understanding of sentences in which it occurs.” (Austin 1961b, 56) And from biographical sources we know that he usually started a philosophical discussion of a topic with a thorough analysis of the dictionary entries of the words involved¹. Though it would be a gross parody of his views to claim that philosophical problems could be solved simply by checking the dictionary, the work should start there.

Quine also mentions checking the dictionary when trying to make sure that two expressions are synonymous, but he is less enthusiastic about the value and importance of such an enterprise: for him, the dictionary can give us only “the lexicographer’s report of an observed synonymy” but not “the ground of the synonymy”. Apparently, the creator of the dictionary is “an empirical scientist” (Quine 1961, 24) and he merely records what he finds on the ground, so to speak, or in the speakers’ linguistic behaviour. And for Quine, this is not enough, he wants “a ground” for such behaviour, which would be “prior” and “antecedent” to it. But why does he want it? He gives the example of two English phrases “bachelor” and “unmarried man”, which are usually given in a dictionary entry as synonymous². Presumably, Quine wants to claim that when a lexicographer connects these two phrases as synonymous in his dictionary, he already knows what synonymy is. And how does he know this? He has learnt it from other instances. And what is wrong with this? The lexicographer has a personal history of language competency and there certainly was a time when he learnt what synonymy is and how to recognize two expressions as synonymous, but once he has mastered it, it is his job to apply this relation to other words, and he does it competently, that is why he is a lexicographer, after all.

But somehow we feel that Quine is not after the lexicographer’s personal history when he wants the relation of synonymy to be “prior” and “antecedent”. Just what he *is* after is not very clear as long as he talks about English words and dictionaries. He soon changes the topic of discussion, though, and reveals what his main target is: it is not the dictionary definition of a word, but a scientific definition, or better still, a mathematical definition which does not merely report a pre-existing relation of synonymy, but creates it. And Quine wants to elucidate this formal mathematical definition for the purpose of abbreviating notation, this

¹ “Austin, who must have read through the Little Oxford Dictionary very many times, frequently insisted that this did not take so long as one would expect” (Urmson 1969, 79).

² As early as 1755 Dr Johnson defines in his famous *Dictionary* “bachelor” as “a man unmarried”.

synonymy by a fiat is also his model for the other synonymies: “would that all species of synonymy were as intelligible. For the rest, definition rests on synonymy rather than explaining it.” (Quine 1961, 26) Mathematics, by defining its concepts purely arbitrarily, becomes superior over natural languages like English, whose already-existing lexical fields somehow presuppose synonymy.

The much-maligned lexicographer might retort to this construction that though it is true that he *finds* certain phrases to be synonymous with other phrases, this synonymy might become apparent only through those phrases, and comes into being with them, and thus need not be prior, antecedent to them. It is not the case that we have a notion of synonymy *apart* from the particular pairs of phrases which are connected in this peculiar relation, which is *then* exemplified *through* them. We simply call some pairs of phrases synonymous and other not synonymous, but there is no synonymy without words. To put it into words that Quine would use, there is nothing wrong with defining synonymy and definition circularly.

The logical empiricist assumption that mathematics with its conveniently conventionally defined notions should be a model of clarity for natural languages is a particularly widespread one, shared by Quine despite his criticism of “empiricism”, together with many concomitant commitments: that notions are of the same type in mathematics and in natural languages, that definitions are also of the same type, and that mathematics is simply a language, albeit a clear and precise one, whereas natural languages are muddled and their concepts’ meanings unclear due to their convoluted evolution and the carelessness of speakers who use them. However, Austin is one of those philosophers who question this traditional balance of power between mathematics and natural languages.

When discussing the dangerously general and misleading question “What is the meaning of a word?”, Austin pointedly contrasts it with another general but this time meaningful question “What is the square root of a number?” The latter asks for a definition of the mathematical entity “square root” which is then given as follows: for any given number x , the square root of x is a definite description of another number y . But such a mathematical definition is “precisely *unlike*” the “meaning of a word” because the latter “is not a definite description of any entity” (Austin 1961b, 60). Mathematics and natural languages are heterogeneous systems whose components function differently, mathematical definitions are very unlike definitions of words in a dictionary and it will not do treating the former as examples of or for the latter. And when we discuss such humble English words as “bachelor” or “unmarried man”, it is difficult to see mathematics as a language at all. From this simple perspective mathematics is a language only metaphorically, after all you cannot shout in it or whisper in it, it has no words or native speakers, no dictionaries and it is always expressed in a natural language, one cannot translate from it into another language. There are mathematical discoveries, but no discoveries in English or Czech. We do not find mathematical departments grouped together with linguistic departments at faculties of humanities. In fact, it is always mathematicians who call mathematics a language, never linguists. Though it might be revealing treating language and mathematics as having some kind of common structure, the question of how far this useful metaphor of mathematics-being-a-language can be pursued is the one that most divides our two authors. While Austin programmatically avoids discussion

of examples or questions drawn from mathematics, Quine sees philosophical questions only through it.

Both extreme positions would thus be blind to the fruitful treatment of the history of mathematics by linguistic means that we find for example in Ladislav Kvasz's *Patterns of Change*. Kvasz's linguistic approach to the development of mathematics abandons the cherished conception of mathematics as an ideal atemporal logical language and instead accepts its historicity and changes. Thus he is able to see the development of mathematics as a series of linguistic innovations. But mathematics still keeps the notion of syntax, semantics, rules, descriptions and other parts of the linguistic apparatus.

Nevertheless, most analytic philosophers often treated mathematics and English as homogenous and they glided insensibly between both registers. So Quine starts his famous paper with Frege's example of the Evening and Morning Star, then goes on to Russell's example of "Scott" and "the author of *Waverly*" before moving seamlessly to his own example of the abstract term "9" naming "the number of the planets". The example "John is married" gives way to "narrower notation", thus conflating both natural language and mathematics. The role of definition is the same in both: "In formal and informal work alike, thus, we find that definition – except in the extreme case of the explicitly conventional introduction of new notation – hinges on prior relationships of synonymy." (Quine 1961, 27)

It is only fair to point out that Quine finds fundamental flaws with the analytic/synthetic distinction in ordinary language *as well as* in artificial languages, so at least for him logic and mathematics cannot function as models for natural languages *in this respect*. But the general drift of his writing and the assimilation of the one to the other is never in doubt, whereas Austin is always quick to point to their differences. He in fact takes great pains to delimitate both areas and show where logic, at least in the minds of philosophers, encroaches on ordinary language and sets its standards which are simply too high.

In particular, Austin deplores the neat and tidy dichotomies that logic tries to impose on language. The chief and foremost of these is the one we have been discussing, that of dividing statements into analytic and synthetic, with the unfortunate and precarious third category of "synthetic *a priori* knowledge". But there are others, too. The common logical principle that every proposition has a contradictory is subjected to criticism. Austin imagines a case of a long and peaceful cohabitation with a cat which suddenly starts to talk. Instead of epistemologically pondering "Is it a real cat?" or conversely "Is it not a real cat?" we should simply admit that we are speechless, we do not know what to say, and that is not only because of our surprise, but mainly because our words are not designed for situations like these. The word "real"³ has many functions in our language, but the task of dividing things into two clear cut categories: "real" as opposed to "unreal" things is not one of them. Ordinary language simply breaks down in the talking cat example, and the reason is semantic: it is not designed to cover such outlandish cases. On the other hand, ideal artificial languages are designed for what they do, and do not break down easily. Physics is an example where "we *prepare*

³Much later, a detailed discussion of the word "real" and its many functions in our communication will feature in Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* as a separate chapter, thus testifying to a pre-war origin of some arguments of the book.

linguistically for the worst" (Austin 1961b, 68), though it is questionable whether the talking cat case would be best described using physical terms.

The above example is one of many Austin gives to show that the relationship between ordinary language and artificial languages is not as straightforward as many, including Quine, suppose. Although it is always in principle possible to improve the one or the other in particular cases, it is misguided to see an ideal language as a model for natural language.

The Second Dogma: Reductionism

The second dogma Quine identified and criticised in contemporary as well as historical empiricism is that of reductionism. Carnap had supposedly tried to work out a method whereby all meaningful statements would be translated into a sense datum language. This ambitious programme of reduction failed, however, because the sense datum language contained, apart from points and qualities, also words such as "is at" which could not be defined in the language. And even a weaker form of reductionism, which motivates the analytic/synthetic distinction, is rejected by Quine, especially the supposition that each individual statement can be confirmed (verified) or infirmed (disproved) due to its predicted sensory experiences. Instead he proposes to verify experiential statements "not individually but only as a corporate body". (Quine 1961, 41) This view came to be called confirmation holism.

Austin is not happy with the logical empiricist reduction either, he criticises it in a much greater detail, though. He is familiar with Carnap's version, but he concentrates on his successor and propagator A. J. Ayer whose linguistic version of reductionism he discusses in *Sense and Sensibilia*⁴ (Austin 1962, 33-43, 104-131). According to Ayer, statements describing directly our sensory experience are incorrigible, they are the foundations of our knowledge, and serve as evidence for our statements about material things, which, however, being mere inferences from them, are much less certain and can, in principle, never be conclusively verified. Sense-datum language is characterised by the use of expressions like "look, seem, appear" and other distancing devices to exclude the risk of mistake.

Austin's first objection is that these verbs do not refer, as Ayer claims, to private and subjective reports on our sense data. His extended discussion of the different roles the three verbs play in our communication emphasizes the fact that they do not refer to anything subjective⁵ and do not have the same one role of minimizing the risk of our judgements. In particular, the statement "It seems to me now as if there were a tiger", though portrayed as incorrigible because referring only to the speaker's sense data (sensible manifold in Quine's

⁴ Although reconstructed from manuscript notes by G. J. Warnock and published only posthumously, the material originates in the pre-war period, when biographical reminiscences indicate Austin read and discussed Carnap's works extensively with his colleagues and with Carnap's exponent in Oxford, Ayer: "...long discussions about verbal and non-verbal definitions; the relation of Carnap's syntactical properties to semantic ones ... The dissimilarity of approach between Austin and Ayer once more showed itself very clearly." (Berlin, 1973, 12)

⁵ "I am not disclosing a fact about *myself*, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water." (Austin 1962, 43) Austin's insistence on the public role of these verbs parallels Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument.

terminology) is in fact derived from the normal “There is a tiger there” and cannot function as evidence for this supposedly fallible material objects statement.

Austin’s second objection is perhaps more dangerous, however: the risk of mistake can never be eliminated, there is always the danger of a slip of the tongue, inattention, not enough experience or knowledge when reporting on our experiential states. (Austin 1962, 113) Surprisingly, Ayer concedes the point and admits that his experiential statements are not incorrigible. (Ayer 1969, 305) On this admission it is difficult to see how the whole construction can survive: if the foundations in experiential statements are not secure, the whole edifice of knowledge built on them comes tumbling down.

Nevertheless, Austin is still not content and sifts through the rubble. What could it mean, he wonders, that the material object statements cannot be “conclusively verified”? He takes the case of a telephone in front of me. When I want to verify whether the thing in front of me is a telephone, I can see it, touch it, and if I still feel mistrustful and think it is a dummy, I can ring someone up and get him to ring me up too, just to make sure. And if he gets through then that is a telephone, no doubt about it⁶. (Austin 1962, 119) What misled some philosophers was their insistence on treating sense datum language as “evidence” for our material object language “verdicts”. (Austin 1962, 141) But the question of what sentence counts as evidence for what other sentence is always a matter of the particular circumstances and can never be settled in advance or generally for a class of sentences, according to Austin⁷. (Austin 1962, 124) And here Austin surprisingly calls on Carnap as an ally against Ayer. For Carnap, any sentence can serve as an “observation sentence”, given the right circumstances, so Ayer’s “sense-datum” language cannot be predetermined. But Carnap does not get it quite right either, for he would like *any* kind of sentence to provide evidence for other sentences, whereas the evidence-giving language game has quite strict rules of its own and is not completely arbitrary.

So we see that also the second dogma is criticized by both our authors, albeit from slightly different positions and with differing emphasis. Before our final evaluation we should briefly look at whether they were aware of each other and the similarities and dissimilarities of their respective positions.

Quine on Austin

Quine and Austin met several times for they each spent some time at the other’s university: Quine at Oxford before the war and Austin gave a series of lectures, which would later be published as *How to Do Things with Words*, at Harvard in 1955. Austin did not react to Quine in his writings but Quine survived him by forty years and wrote a contribution to *Symposium on J. L. Austin*, published in 1969, where he gave his views of Austin’s method of doing philosophy.

It needs to be said that Quine finds Austin’s philosophy wanting, he even has great qualms about calling it philosophy at all: it is more of lexicography and semantics of certain

⁶ cf. also the previous example of “As a matter of fact I live in Oxford”, (Austin 1962, 117-8) once again mirroring Wittgenstein’s grappling with “My name is L.W.” in *On Certainty*.

⁷ Wittgenstein’s discussion of “hinge propositions” in *On Certainty* again makes much the same point.

selected English words, without any theoretical or generalizing import. Quine thinks Austin is engaged in the task of providing a theory of meaning, and that his definition of the meaning of a word is “circumstances of use” of that word, a common simplifying interpretation of the early reception of ordinary language philosophy by mathematically inclined analytical philosophers. Such a definition is useful for investigating particular words, but as a general theory it fails, and the failure “may be clarified by an analogy from proof theory”. (Quine 1969, 86) He then lists several mathematical problems (Godel’s theorem and Church’s theorem) that were solved by a general theory of meaning and expects us to infer that what works in mathematics or logic is to be followed in philosophy, which is precisely the point Austin argues against.

The only *accidental* connection Quine sees between Austin’s work and philosophy is in his choice of the words for analysis: Austin chose the words true/false which are very philosophical, but he, of course, went the wrong way about analyzing them for he ignored Tarski’s insights and concentrated on words, thus betraying “a basic impatience with philosophical perplexity”. (Quine 1969, 88) According to Quine, Austin came tantalizingly close to the right path in one footnote where he mentioned Tarski’s definition of truth, but “then he looked into usage to add to the story. Tarski, in contrast, concentrated on the mathematical significance of his paradigm.” (Quine 1969, 89) So Austin is not doing philosophy because he is not doing mathematics.

Quine’s reading of Austin through Tarski is thorough and not very sympathetic. Tarski’s paradigm, though originally designed for artificial languages, works for evaluations, statements of fact as well as performatives! Quine claims, explicitly against Austin’s intentions, that the performative “Good morning!” is true if and only if I bid you good morning. Subsuming everything under Tarski’s overarching definition of truth, Quine finds the performative an interesting sort of utterance, a limiting case: “it makes itself true; but then it is true.” (Quine 1969, 90)

Quine’s concluding remarks, ironically calling Austin’s work “relevant to the philosophy of law” and non-ironically a “mistaken preconception” (Quine 1969, 90) makes one wonder why was such a negative piece included in the collection of essays at all, and also about the chasm between the two approaches to doing philosophy.

Austin on Quine

It might seem audacious to write about Austin’s view of Quine’s work after we have said he did not have time to react in writing. Nevertheless, given the convoluted history of twentieth century analytical philosophy, our task might not be so hopeless after all. Before the war, Quine, much like Ayer, made a pilgrimage to Central Europe, stopping at Vienna, Prague and Cracow, to hear the latest philosophical opinions, and he became converted to the then-reigning logical empiricism. He became instrumental in bringing over Carnap and Tarski to the US and spreading the news there, thus fatally sidestepping criticism of logical positivism that was taking place in England just before and after the war, in Cambridge by Wittgenstein reacting to his own earlier phase in *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, in Oxford by Austin. So it came to pass that American analytical philosophers became direct heirs of the

Austrian and Polish schools without having to confront the many and scattered arguments against them in the cryptic and obscure writings of Wittgenstein and Austin. And when what came to be known as “ordinary language philosophy” finally reached the US in the 1960s, it was in the sanitised interpretation of the gravediggers of the movement, John Searle and Paul Grice⁸. So we can view Quine’s positive proposal in the last part of *Two Dogmas* (Empiricism without the Dogmas) as having been anticipated by Austin, for it relies on some fundamental traditional building blocks found already in Carnap, Ayer et. al. who were available to Austin.

The first example, which we have already mentioned, where Austin criticises Carnap and Ayer, and through them Quine, concerns the status of mathematical and logical truths. Even though Quine rejects as the first dogma of empiricism the analytic/synthetic distinction which would give to mathematical statements a different status among other statements, he still reserves a privileged position for them. How else can we interpret his metaphor of centre and periphery statements from the sixth part of *Two Dogmas*? Or the allegedly non-metaphorical talk of “germaneness” of some statements to particular experiences? True, every statement can now be re-evaluated and none is immune, but some are centrally located and their falsification involves “drastic adjustments” to other statements together with the fact that little connection with sense data “obtrudes” in them. (Quine 1961, 44)

Austin, as we have already noted, does not believe in a special place for mathematics or theoretical physics. He chides Ayer for the general claim that certainty applies to propositions of logic and mathematics as such. Austin rather points out that certainty cuts across mathematical and logical propositions, some of which are uncertain and the rest certain “because, say, they have been particularly firmly established.” (Austin 1962, 117n) Austin’s pragmatic approach to certainty embeds it in such mundane activities as making sure the thing in front of me is a telephone, or telling what kind of bird it is in the garden. In this he is paralleled by Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, where the special status of mathematical propositions is also questioned and contrasted with the certainty of other everyday propositions “653. If the proposition $12 \times 12 = 144$ is exempt from doubt, then so too must non-mathematical propositions be.” or with the proposition “I am called Ludwig Wittgenstein”: “660. I might ask: ‘How could I be making a mistake about my name being L.W.?’ And I can say: I can’t see how it would be possible.”⁹ Such a dethroning of mathematics is something Quine the mathematician, together with Carnap the logician, cannot countenance.

Secondly, Quine simply takes over the logical positivistic epistemology with its predictive value of science and the dichotomy between sense data and physical objects. True, he gives it a pragmatic twist, but the broad outline as well as the contamination of everyday talk with scientific jargon is all too familiar to readers of Austin’s critique of Ayer: physical objects are cultural posits that Quine “believes in” for they have shown themselves to be more useful than Homer’s gods in structuring our “flux of experience”. By this Quine presumably means that the theory of physical objects explains better than ancient Greek mythology what

⁸ See my Tomeček (2006) for arguments for this reading of the tradition.

⁹ On the incontrovertibility of such a proposition, or rather the illocutionary act of introducing oneself, see my Tomeček (2010).

future sense data will follow my present sense data. (Here he might have overstretched himself a bit, for Homer's gods explain rather why the Trojans lost the war against the Greeks, a task in its complexity hardly explainable with the help of physical objects.) The theory of physical objects is only a cultural myth, the only hard data available to us is our experience, i.e. sense data. However, this myth is quite ancient, in fact it is coeval with language itself for it introduces intersubjectivity without which it cannot function. And Quine cannot help himself and introduces another mathematical analogy which is supposed to explain this function of physical objects vis-à-vis experience: irrational numbers also simplify our algebra of rational numbers. (Quine 1961, 45)

Now, Austin criticises in Ayer, and consequently in Quine, the dichotomy between experience and physical objects. He in fact traces the dichotomy all the way back to Locke and Berkeley, Hume and Kant. All these philosophers treat seriously only the subjective half of it, the objective being somehow a legitimate construction out of it and sanctioned as a way of speaking only. (Austin 1962, 61) But the schizophrenic distinction between the "sensible manifold" and "external objects" cannot be expressed in language, as both Wittgenstein in his Private Language Argument and Austin in his analysis of words *look*, *seem*, *appear*, and *real* show (see above, p. 6 n5). Words of a common interpersonal language have to refer to common, interpersonal objects. If they referred to private experiences (the sensible manifold), these references would not be capable of verification even by the subjective speaker himself and these private occurrences would become irrelevant semantically, just like Wittgenstein's beetle in the box. The logical empiricists had a theory of two languages, the "material objects" language referred fallibly to material object, while the "private datum" language referred incorrigibly to the "sensible manifold". And the first language was reducible to the second language, which served as evidence for it. But according to Austin and Wittgenstein, there is only one language, not two languages, and it has no hooks to fasten on private experiences as Ayer and Carnap and Quine would have us believe. No wonder Ayer never gives an example of a sentence in "sense datum language", it always collapses back into English.

The term "physical object" itself is criticised by Austin as a philosophical intruder into ordinary language. The plain man has no reason to regard the things he perceives as "physical". Philosophers are wont to give as examples of "physical objects" things they happen to see on their desk or in their study as they write: chairs, tables, books, pens. Austin calls them "moderate sized specimen of dry goods" (Austin 1962, 8) and asks whether he can include in this category such unprototypical things as people, people's voices, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures on the wall, vapours, gases, smells or pieces of music we hear. If all these are also "physical objects", then what is not a "physical object" and how do we perceive it? And we may add that "physical object" surely cannot predate the birth of physics if it is to be called "physical", yet Quine says it is "coeval" with language itself. How is that possible? Are we not staring in the face of an exemplary anachronism? It seems Quine wants to claim that our ancestors five hundred years ago, who had never heard of physics, still structured their "sensory stimulation" with the help of the concept "physical object". In this he is a bit too optimistic, as well as in the following statement, which might be true of himself and a few of his friends at Harvard, but definitely

not universally: “Each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation; and the considerations which guide him in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are, where rational, pragmatic.” (Quine 1961, 46)

To sum up our comparison of Austin and Quine on the two dogmas of empiricism: both criticise the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, often agreeing in their points but ultimately from different positions: Quine in a way continues it by claiming a special place for propositions of mathematics and logic, Austin does not give a privileged status to mathematics and there even seems to be no place for a philosophy of mathematics in his project. On the second dogma, that of reduction, Quine again continues it by keeping the dichotomy physical object/experience and claiming a privileged status for the latter. Austin rejects the distinction, his criticism is more radical and leads to abandoning the whole logical empiricist project, not its modification. So while Quine tweaks the dogmas but ultimately remains within the orthodoxy, Austin becomes the heretic.

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