



Perry, the ‘Ego-Centric Predicament’, and the Rise of Analytic Philosophy in the United States

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines Ralph Barton Perry’s analysis of the ‘ego-centric predicament’. It will be shown that Perry convincingly argued against prevailing contemporary versions of idealism and that it makes perfectly good sense to consider him a precursor of subsequent trends in American analytic philosophy. Perry’s appraisal and promotion of the contemporary logic of relations in the framework of early twentieth-century American neorealism provides further evidence of his being a proto-analytic philosopher. His personal acquaintance with Bertrand Russell proved instructive in this regard. On the whole, Perry’s distinctive approach to philosophy was instrumental in establishing the analytic style of reasoning in the United States. This paper is devoted to substantiating this claim. It is thus hoped that a clearer picture of early twentieth-century American philosophy will begin to emerge.*

KEYWORDS: Perry, ego-centric predicament, American neo-realism, analytic philosophy

Introduction

In 1910, Ralph Barton Perry (1876–1957) published a short essay titled ‘The Ego-Centric Predicament’. The principal aim of that essay was to examine critically three versions of what Perry called ‘ontological idealism’. According to Perry, ontological idealism amounts to the attempt to exploit the ego-centric predicament named in the title of his essay. By ‘ego-centric predicament’, Perry meant the undeniable fact that when talking about issues concerning ontology, we ourselves frame the relevant conceptions. However, neither ‘creative’, nor ‘formative’, nor ‘identity’ idealism succeeds in deducing from this very fact—that is, from the essentially mind-dependent framing of ontological categories—programmatically compelling consequences. According to Perry, the ego-centric predicament represents no obstacle for an essentially realistic attitude at all.

It is the principal aim of this paper to examine Perry’s analysis of the ego-centric predicament and to make it clear that by employing this anti-idealist analysis, Perry proved to be a precursor of subsequent trends of analytic philosophy in the United States. It must be emphasized in this connection that the immediate prehistory of American analytic philosophy is not very well researched. However, as early as 1950, May Brodbeck published an article entitled ‘The Emergence of American Philosophy’, in which she contrasted two rival currents of early twentieth-century



anti-idealist philosophy in the United States, namely, the ‘analytic school’ and the ‘pragmatist school’, with the former being largely identical to the neorealist movement around Perry (see Brodbeck 1950: 39–40). According to Brodbeck, neorealism and the analytic school differed very obviously from the pragmatist movement around James and Dewey by the ‘use of logical tools’ (51). Perry’s neorealism thus proved to be an early American, as it were proto-analytic, ‘technical approach to the problems of philosophy’ (Brodbeck 1950: 51; for similar assessments, see Kuklick 1977: 349–50, Misak 2013: 122–23, Soames 2014: 5). However, Brodbeck (as do Kuklick, Misak, and Soames) merely suggests this connection between American neorealism and analytic philosophy without going into detail.

My attempt in this paper is to elaborate on Brodbeck’s account. I will try to show that Perry indeed deserves attention as an important precursor of fully developed analytic philosophy in the United States. True, Perry was arguing in a somewhat different discursive context than American analytic philosophers in the 1950s. In contrast to authors such as Willard van Orman Quine (1908–2000) or Perry’s student Charles L. Stevenson (1908–1979), Perry still remained within the framework of unqualified ontology. That is, despite his focus on logic, he did not take the linguistic turn. Yet, being a precursor does not imply that one entirely anticipates what follows. Moreover, it would be rather whiggish (or, at least, selective) to equate analytic philosophy with philosophy of language. At any rate, Perry’s role in the context of emerging American analytic philosophy is worth considering at length.¹

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 1 gives some historical background including biographical information regarding Perry and the philosophical situation in America around 1900. Section 2 is devoted to Perry’s 1910 ‘The Ego-Centric Predicament’ (1910a). Section 3 briefly discusses the contemporary reactions to Perry’s essay. Section 4 broadens the perspective by discussing the connection between Perry’s essay, contemporary ‘new’ realism, the notion of independence, and Perry’s and the other new realists’ commitment to the ‘method of analysis’. Section 5 finally raises the question of why it is that the analytic tradition forgot about Perry, new realism, and the ego-centric predicament.

1. Historical Background

Perry received his PhD in philosophy in 1899 from Harvard. His academic teachers were William James (1842–1910) and Josiah Royce (1855–1916). From 1902 until his retirement in 1946 Perry taught philosophy at Harvard, first as instructor (1902–1905), then as assistant professor (1905–1913), then as full professor (1913–1930), and finally as Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy (1930–1946).

¹ According to Glock, ‘most contemporary commentators reject the idea that a linguistic turn is the defining feature of analytic philosophy’ (2008: 122). As he correctly observes, such a definition via language would be much too narrow. At the same time, it would be too wide, as it would include language-based approaches to philosophy that definitely do *not* belong to the analytic tradition (Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer, and others).

Being one of James's favorite students, Perry edited the latter's *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912). Among his most celebrated works are his 1936 two-volume biography of James (which won the 1936 Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography), *Puritanism and Democracy*, published in 1944, and his Glasgow Gifford Lectures *Realms of Value*, published in 1954 (see Perry 1954a; for more extended bio-bibliographical information see the obituaries Lewis [1957] and Williams [1958–59], see further Papas [2005]).

At least during his lifetime, Perry was quite a renowned figure in the American philosophical arena, especially because of his later writings on democracy and values (see Papas 2005). However, one might wonder why he should be of interest for the historical reconstruction of analytic philosophy. Here, it needs to be noticed that it is the *early* Perry who deserves attention. Thus, in 1910 he coauthored the 'Program and First Platform of Six Realists' (Holt et al. 1910) and in 1912 the volume *The New Realism* (Holt et al. 1912). As will be seen in section 4, both publications must be (at least to some extent) considered preparatory regarding the rise of analytic philosophy in the United States. Still, for the time being my main focus will be on Perry's 1910 'The Ego-Centric Predicament' (1910a) because it is in this essay that he paradigmatically demonstrates a proto-analytic style of reasoning. However, first and foremost, a few words should be said concerning the general philosophical situation in America around 1900.

To begin with, idealism was clearly the predominant philosophical direction in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. The unquestionably most influential figure in that context was Royce (see Werkmeister 1949: 133; further Randall 1969, Kuklick 1972, Guyer and Horstmann 2021: sect. 8). According to Royce, some Hegelian-inspired form of 'objective' or 'absolute' idealism must be brought forward. In his seminal two-volume Gifford Lectures *The World and the Individual* (1899–1901), he goes as far as to assert that *reality itself* is an idea, rather than something existing independently 'out there'. In his own words: 'We propose to answer the question: What is to be? by the assertion that: To be means simply to express, to embody the complete internal meaning of a certain absolute system of ideas' (Royce 1900: 36). Consequently, Royce rejects the realistic point of view, pointing out that 'realistic systems find it very much easier to assert or tacitly to assume the general definition of independent being. . . than to give any precise account of the logical consequences to which the definition leads' (108). Accordingly, it is the notion of independence on which Royce is focusing his critical assessment of the realistic point of view. In doing so he takes a quite polemical tone, remarking that

no idea, as we know, can refer to any independent reality, since in order for such reference to be itself real, two irrevocably sundered beings would have to destroy the chasm whose presence is determined by their own essence. In brief, the realm of a consistent Realism is not the realm of One not yet the Realm of Many, it is the realm of absolutely nothing. (137)

This is not the place to go into the details of Royce's idealism. However, the immediate reactions to his critique of realism are worth briefly considering. Thus

William Pepperell Montague (1873–1953), like Perry, a student of James and Royce, reports in his retrospective ‘The Story of American Realism’ (1937): ‘I think that Perry and I wrote the first two of the explicitly realistic articles, and these were each inspired by the bitter attack on the realistic standpoint contained in the first volume of his Gifford Lectures by our teacher, Professor Royce’ (Montague 1937: 142). In his own 1902 ‘Professor Royce’s Refutation of Realism’, Montague points out that the realist notion of independence is interpreted by Royce without any reason in an absolutist and thus too radical way. In Montague’s view, there is already a fundamental misunderstanding here. According to Montague, Royce confuses *ratio essendi* and *ratio cognoscendi*, that is, the ontological and the epistemological dimension, and thus lures the reader onto the wrong track: ‘The independence of an object is not what makes it real, it is what makes us aware that it is real’ (Montague 1902: 45). Perry’s response to Royce’s critique of realism appeared shortly after Montague’s, in April 1902, under the title ‘Prof. Royce’s Refutation of Realism and Pluralism’ in volume 12 of *The Monist*. Similar to Montague, Perry objects to Royce’s critique of realism as being highly misleading from the outset. He argues that coming to an understanding about the *intension* of the concept of being or reality is less important than bringing about an understanding about what the *extension* of this concept is. ‘Philosophy’, Perry writes, ‘is begotten by the desire to know more about a certain definite world that is already evident in part’ (Perry 1902: 447). Royce, however, proceeds scholastically, as it were, by demanding a meticulous dissection of concepts. To this Perry objects: ‘The philosophical spirit does not direct a man from the study of real things to the study of the adjective “real”, but to a study of more real things in the hope that he may compass all things in some thoughtful belief’ (1902: 447). In short, both Montague and Perry refused to follow the path paved by their academic teacher Royce. In doing so they set the stage for a whole range of anti-idealistic polemics, including James’s, their other teacher’s, famous essay ‘Does Consciousness Exist?’ (1904).

2. ‘The Ego-Centric Predicament’

Let us now make a short leap in time and focus attention on Perry’s 1910 ‘The Ego-Centric Predicament’. As already indicated in the introduction, this essay too was intended as an anti-idealistic polemic. Moreover, it should be regarded as an undeservedly forgotten trailblazer of the analytic movement in America. In the remainder of this paper I shall substantiate this claim by showing that Perry deserves to be called a proto-analytic philosopher. My crucial point will be that ‘The Ego-Centric Predicament’ both in method and in style anticipated much of what later developed into full-blown (institutionalized) American analytic philosophy. Moreover, in terms of content, Perry’s essay also places him close to the analytic movement.

Following Perry’s own procedure (see Perry 1910a: 5), the first thing to be noticed is the juxtaposition of two parts of a given intellectual constellation, namely, (i) a certain ‘circumstance’ called the ego-centric predicament (henceforth ECP) and (ii) a ‘theory’ called ontological idealism (henceforth OI). Perry’s central

question, then, is: Is ECP an argument for OI? Before delving into the discussion of that question, Perry provides us with the following methodological assumption:

Inexact discourse can not be criticized until it has first been converted into definite propositions; and these can never, with any certainty, be identified with the original assertions. For this reason polemics directed against historical opinions are like [*sic!*] to prove unconvincing and futile. I propose, then, to examine certain propositions which I have myself defined. (1910a: 5)

This reads like the statement of a typical analytic philosopher: definitional exactness is praised, historical accurateness completely downgraded. As we will see in the further course of this study, both Perry's plea for exactness and his downgrading of historicism fit pretty well with other features of his overall approach that allow to bring him close to the analytic tradition. (I am entirely aware that it is not at all innocuous to speak of a 'typical' analytic philosopher [see, in this connection, the brilliant disquisitions in Glock 2008]; however, for the time being, I will pretend that there is no dispute about what is meant by 'analytic philosophy/philosopher' in order to come back in the last section to the problematic aspects of that term.)

Given these preliminary considerations, the next question to be raised is: what does Perry understand by ontological idealism? In order to answer this question adequately, three factors must be presupposed: (i) the thing T , (ii) the ego E , and (iii) the conscious relation R^C , whereby (iii) implies the possibility of knowledge. OI, then, amounts to the principled claim that T is essentially dependent on the complex $(E) R^C (T)$. Or, in Perry's own words: 'Ontological idealism is . . . a name for the proposition: $(E) R^C (T)$ defines T ' (1910a: 6). Note that by letting T be *defined* by $(E) R^C (T)$, the use of the attribute 'ontological' in connection with 'idealism' appears to be sufficiently warranted.

As Perry immediately emphasizes, OI apparently goes along with a systematic problem, namely, that $R^C (E)$ is 'peculiarly ubiquitous' (7). This, in turn, gives rise to his statement of the ego-centric predicament (ECP). Thus, according to ECP, any attempt to locate an instance of T outside $R^C (E)$ already presupposes $R^C (E)$. That is, in order to determine T there is, as it seems, no other way than to remain within the conscious relation $R^C (E)$. For as soon as we try to locate an instance of T outside $R^C (E)$, our very attempt to locate this T is, as it were, inherently bound to $R^C (E)$.

To be sure, for OI itself this is not a problem at all but rather squares with its overall doxastic framework. But for OI's principal rival, namely, realism, ECP appears to be devastating because from the realistic point of view independence is the crucial assumption regarding T . If T cannot be located outside $R^C (E)$ for reasons of principle, then realism apparently must be abandoned. However—and this is Perry's crucial point—the problem associated with ECP is merely a *methodological* one pertaining to *all* philosophical positions; that is, ECP has no content-based or, more precisely, ontological significance at all. Drawing on John Stuart Mill's *A System of Logic* (1843), Perry clarifies this point by asserting that in the case of ECP, only the 'method of agreement' (two or more issues are

compared to see what they have in common) but not the ‘method of difference’ (two or more issues are compared to see what they do *not* have in common) is applicable (see Perry 1910a: 8; further Mill 1843: bk.3, ch. 8–10). Therefore, ECP as such does not decide anything regarding rivaling philosophical positions: we are all caught in ECP. ECP, in other words, is our *conditio philosophandi*. Consequently, any attempt to exploit ECP for ontological purposes must fail. Or, as Perry puts it at another place, ECP pertains to ‘a difficulty of procedure, rather than to a character of things’ (Perry 1910b: 339). When applied to things, ECP leads either to the *redundant* inference that all known things are known or to the *invalid* inference that all things are known. Consequently, ECP is of no help regarding the refutation of realism. Nor is it of any help regarding the justification of idealism.

However, as Perry elucidates in a next step, the idealistic point of view has by no means vanished. He distinguishes between three varieties of idealism, namely, (i) the ‘creative’ theory, (ii) the ‘formative’ theory, and (iii) the ‘identity’ theory (see Perry 1910a: 9–11). While (i) equals Berkeley’s ‘subjective’ idealism (*esse est percipi*), (ii) can be associated with Kantian transcendental idealism and (iii) with Hegelian/Roycean objective/absolute idealism. For our concerns, (iii) is the interesting variety, and it is so for three reasons: first, it is (iii) that dominated American philosophy around 1900; second, it is (iii) that attempts to maximally exploit ECP; third, (iii) is therefore the variety Perry discussed most extensively.

To begin with, Roycean absolute idealism attempts to exploit ECP maximally insofar as it seeks to make *T* part of an internal relation. Whereas Berkeleyan subjective idealism completely dispenses with things (in favor of sense impressions) and Kantian transcendental idealism claims that only appearances (but not the things-in-themselves) are mind-dependent, the (Hegelian-inspired) Roycean variant goes as far as to imply that in any typical case of knowledge (E) R^C (T), *E* and *T* are *identical*, that is, *T* is not independent of but internal to *E* via R^C . Consequently, for absolute idealism, there are no external relations: Whenever a *T* is posited, this *T* is not supposed to exist as an independent entity constituting the knowledge relation ‘from the bottom’. Rather *T* itself is holistically constituted ‘from the top’, that is, by the complex whole (E) R^C (T), which in turn is equated with the ‘Self’ or the ‘Individual’. Perry is quoting Mary Calkins (1863–1930)—herself a student (and adherent) of Royce—in this context (see Perry 1910a: 12, fn. 4; further Calkins 1907: 378–79), and he concludes: ‘So long as the self remains obscure and unanalyzed . . ., it will doubtless afford a refuge for logical lawlessness’ (1910a: 12).

It is highly interesting to note that exactly the same sort of dispute had taken place in Great Britain just a few years before. Thus, it was Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) who, in his *Principles of Mathematics* (1903), sharply and momentarily attacked F. H. Bradley’s (1846–1924) Hegelian-inspired doctrine of internal relations (see Hylton 1990 and Candlish 2006). Just as with Calkins and Royce, Bradley defended the idealistic point of view (see Bradley 1893). Russell, on the other hand, argued for the externality of relations and thus *against* the idealistic point of view. In doing so he repeatedly pointed out that the idealist violates the laws of logic (see, for example, Russell 1903: § 215).

Coming back to Perry, his distinctive complaint concerning the 'logical lawlessness' of the idealistic identity theory reads in its fully spelled out form as follows:

The T of the complex $(E) R^C (T)$ does, as a matter of fact, stand in the relation R^C to E . This can not be denied, albeit it is a redundant proposition when affirmed. It is only necessary to proceed, loosely as may suit one's convenience, to substitute $(E) R^C (T)$ for T , or *thing qua known* for thing, and one has accomplished the miracle of identifying a complex with one of its own elements. . . . But the whole question of the extent to which $(E) R^C (T)$ can be substituted for T , depends on a very precise knowledge of the bearing of this relationship on T . The original problem, *What does $(E) R^C (T)$ mean to T ?* has, in all this elaborate dialectic, only been prejudged and confused. And the solution offered is not only without a shred of evidence, but is charged with the support of a logical abortion. (1910a: 13–14)

Two things should be noted here. First, Perry proceeds like a typical analytic philosopher by condemning obscurity and confusion for the sake of clarity. Second, in doing so he relies on logic as the decisive judge. This, again, brings him close to the analytic movement, at least to its ideal language wing (on which more later).

Toward the end of his essay, Perry, as it were, completes the impression of his being a proto-analytic philosopher by explicitly invoking 'the method of analysis'. He writes:

We can not employ a method which in other cases proves a convenient preliminary step, the empirical, denotative method of agreement and difference. There remains, however, the method which must eventually be employed in any exact investigation, the method of analysis. . . . We may still have recourse to that analysis of all the elements of the complex, of T , E , and R^C , which would be required in any case before our conclusion could assume any high degree of exactness. Having discovered just what an ego is, just what a thing is, and just what it means for an ego to know a thing, we may hope to define precisely what transpires when a thing is known by an ego. (1910a: 14)

To be specific, it is the method of *decompositional* analysis that Perry is proposing here (for the details of this method, see Beaney 2014). As is well known, it was this very variant of analysis that Russell applied in his 1905 classic 'On Denoting' (see Griffin 2008). Admittedly, the Russellian range of application—sentences containing definite descriptions like 'the present King of France'—differs from Perry's. However, the latter's demand for a decomposition of $(E) R^C (T)$ is, just like the Russellian maneuver, connected with the objective of preventing fundamental logical errors and at the same time attaining the highest possible

degree of exactness. Again, Perry's essay approximates the analytic tradition. Driven by the quest for clarity and exactness, it employs the method of analysis, thereby striving for an elucidation—and eventual dissolution—of putative ontological issues. Whether Perry arrived at his general conception of analysis independently of Russell, or whether it was actually influenced by the Russellian view, may remain a matter for conjecture here. However, in section 4, we will come back to the interesting and somewhat complicated relationship between the two thinkers.

3. Some Reactions

It is interesting to realize that 'The Ego-Centric Predicament' met with rather tremendous response. For example, Wendell T. Bush (1866–1941), himself an advocate of realism, quite enthusiastically declared that Perry's critical reflection is 'one of the best things that have been said in recent epistemological criticism' (Bush 1911: 438). Calkins, although being one of Perry's targets, conceded that 'Perry's "ego-centric predicament" is the cleverest and most unblushing instance which I know' (Calkins 1911: 450). And John Dewey, who himself had started off as a Hegelian in the 1880s (see Misak 2013: 108–109), commented that 'Professor Perry rendered philosophical discussion a real service when he coined the phrase "ego-centric predicament"' (Dewey 1911: 547).

However, at the same time Dewey recognized a systematic problem in Perry's approach. He pointed out:

If the knowledge relation of things to a self is the exhaustive and inclusive relation, there is no intelligible point between idealism and realism; the differences between them are either verbal or else due to a failure on the part of one or other to stick to their *common* premise. (1911: 547)

Remember that ECP, for Perry, is a thoroughly *methodological* issue. His central objection is that ontological idealism unjustifiably makes use of it in a material manner. In his contribution to the 1912 *New Realism* volume, Perry therefore responds to Dewey's assessment of the ultimate indistinguishability of realism and idealism, quite coherently, as follows:

Realism does not argue from the 'ego-centric predicament', *i.e.* from the bare presence of the knowledge-relation in all cases of knowledge. On the contrary, it denies the possibility of *arguing from that predicament at all*. Its use of the predicament is polemical and negative merely. (Perry 1912a: 115)

Dewey's relation to contemporary realism was a special and rather intricate one (see Shook 1995). However, there also came critical assessments from the realist corner itself. Thus, James Bissett Pratt (1875–1944), one of the later self-named critical realists, ironically stated that ECP is 'somewhat of a boomerang' because it 'puts the realistic "thing" beyond your grasp' (Pratt 1912: 577). Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873–1962), another of the later critical realists, frankly declared that ECP is a

'bad' argument because it is 'obviously misapplied when regarded as a demonstration of idealism' (Lovejoy 1912: 673–74). Yet, Lovejoy continued, ECP is 'not without force when regarded as a challenge to the realist to demonstrate the truth of *his* affirmations' (674). Just as Pratt, Lovejoy employed the boomerang (or *tu quoque*) style of objection. And just as Royce, he focused on the notion of independence. Thus he explicitly embraced the idealists' material use of ECP and made independence the center of his argument against Perry. Lovejoy—'the finest critical mind in twentieth-century American philosophy' (Kuklick 1977: 362, fn.)—astutely pointed out:

What the predicament tends to show . . . is not that realism is false, but that it is problematical, and that the situation in which . . . our thinking is entangled renders direct proof of the independence of things—by the actual *exhibition* of a thing outside of 'the cognitive relationship'—impossible. (1912: 673–74)

In point of fact, Lovejoy is doing here what Perry is warning of: hypostasizing ECP. Yet, Lovejoy's move is indeed challenging. To be sure, it was not the aim of Perry's essay to 'prove' realism. But one might indeed wonder whether and, if so, how ECP and the realist's notion of independence can be reconciled with each other. It is this question to which we turn next.

4. New Realism, Independence, and the Method of Analysis

First of all, some context. In 1910, *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* (nowadays *The Journal of Philosophy*) published a contribution titled 'The Program and First Platform of Six Realists' (Holt et al. 1910). These six realists were: Perry, Montague, Edwin B. Holt (1873–1946), Walter T. Marvin (1872–1944), Walter B. Pitkin (1878–1953), and Edward Gleason Spaulding (1873–1940). Two years later, the very same collective of authors published a volume of almost 500 pages titled *The New Realism: Coöperative Studies in Philosophy* (Holt et al. 1912). According to Werkmeister, 'the book can be regarded as the definitive statement of the neo-realistic thesis' (1949: 407). In a nutshell, this neorealist thesis amounted to a naturalistic, presentational, and insofar *direct* form of realism. It was new because it significantly contrasted with the old—representational—form of realism to be found, for example, in Descartes and Locke (see Montague 1912). Being deeply informed by the findings of modern logic, experimental psychology, and evolutionary biology, the American neorealists partook in the 'new spirit of science' (Werkmeister 1949: 370). In other words, they defended a *scientific philosophy*.

Perry's role in the neorealist movement was a special one. According to Schneider, he was the 'leader of this group' (1969: 17; for similar assessments, see Brodbeck 1950: 49; Kuklick 1977: 340; Misak 2013:122; Soames 2014: 5). Among other things, this becomes obvious by comparing the introduction to the 1912 *New Realism* (Holt et al. 1912) volume with Perry's 1910 article 'Realism as a Polemic

and Program of Reform' (1910b). Both texts partly agree word-for-word with each other. This also applies to the following passage, which in the introduction to the *New Realism* volume marks the beginning of section 3 titled 'The Realistic Program of Reform' (to be compared with Perry 1910c: 371):

There is good ground for asserting that there has never before been so great opportunity of reform. Logic and mathematics, the traditional models of procedure, are themselves being submitted to a searching revision that has already thrown a new light on the general principles of exact thinking; and there is promise of more light to come, for science has for all time become reflectively conscious of its own method. The era of quarrelsome misunderstanding between criticism and positive knowledge is giving way to an era of united and complementary endeavor. It must not be forgotten that philosophy is peculiarly dependent on logic. . . . The very objects of philosophy are the fruit of analysis. Its task is the correction of the categories of common sense, and all hope of a profitable and valid result must be based on an expert critical judgment. The present situation, then, affords philosophy an opportunity of adopting a more rigorous procedure and assuming a more systematic form. (Holt et al. 1912: 21)

One feels immediately reminded of the Vienna Circle's manifesto 'Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis' (Carnap, Neurath, and Hahn 1929): A new era of philosophical enterprise is announced; logic, mathematics, and the sciences are put in the center. Moreover, the cooperative and interdisciplinary impetus of the new way of doing philosophy is emphasized. In terms of method, analysis is considered the royal road.

All of this is apt to qualify as being preparatory regarding later, institutionalized analytic philosophy (at least in its idealized form). However, our present question is how ECP and the neorealist account of independence could possibly be reconciled. Here, it is mandatory to consult Perry's particular contribution to the *New Realism* volume. It is titled 'A Realistic Theory of Independence' (1912a), and we will see that the method of analysis also plays an important role here.

Somewhat tellingly, Perry opens his contribution by citing a passage from James's *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, which (not without irony) diagnoses that 'natural realism, so long decently buried, raises its head above the turf, and finds glad hands outstretched from the most unlikely quarters to help it to its feet again' (James 1912: 39–49). Perry retorts by contending that 'This reanimated corpse is now fairly on its feet, and able to protest with Mark Twain that the reports of its death were 'greatly exaggerated' (Perry 1912a: 99). Perry further remarks that the notion of independence is of 'crucial importance' for the identification and adequate understanding of this brand of 'realism *redivivus*—or of what may now conveniently be designated neo-realism' (1912a: 99). Given Royce's initial attack as well as the critique brought forward by Lovejoy, it appears all too plausible that in his attempt to bolster the case for realism Perry focuses on independence.

The first aspect to which Perry refers in his discussion of the concept of independence is its demarcation from the concept of substance. Thus neorealism is not to be confused with 'substantialism' (1912a: 103). Perry elaborates:

Realism must purify the notion of independence of all suggestions of otherness, remoteness, or inaccessibility, not only for the sake of a full and forcible presentation of its case, but even to avoid being confused with a whole alien and objectionable tendency of thought. (104)

This tendency of thought would be substantialism, that is, the view that all phenomena are reducible to an 'underlying', unalterable substance not accessible by means of direct perception. Apparently, Perry is rejecting any form of *speculative metaphysics* here—a further point that brings him close to the analytic tradition, or at least to the Vienna Circle again.

Perry's alternative to substantialist metaphysics is what might be called *empirical relationalism*. As he points out: 'All exact or analytical thinking, as at present carried out, is dependent on the conception of relation; and the empirical testimony in its favor is so overwhelming as to justify its acceptance without further ado' (1912a: 107). Accordingly, the neorealist approach includes empirical relationalism as its genuine ontology. We will come back to this point in a moment. First, however, it is important to realize that independence, for Perry, 'is not non-relation' (113, emphasis in the original). Otherwise, he maintains, we would end up with 'agnosticism' (114). That is, *E* and *T* must be related in some way, since otherwise *T* could not be known by *E*. Consequently, from the neorealist point of view *E* and *T* might be cognitively related, albeit in such a way that *T* is not dependent on *E*, for example, by being altered or even caused by it. Perry therefore urges us to distinguish between independence and *dependence* by the respective kinds of relatedness. In his view, 'it behooves realism to define a species of relation in which the terms, although related, are nevertheless independent; or to show that dependence is something over and above mere relation' (114). Knowledge, particularly perceptual knowledge, is for Perry (and the other neorealists) a case of 'mere' relation. It is neither mediated by any representational media (such as ideas) nor is it an issue of altering or causing the object known (see in this regard also Holt's rather fitting characterization of the nervous system as a 'search-light' [Holt 1912: 353]). Hence realism, according to Perry, 'defines dependence as a *peculiar kind of relation*; so that the mere presence of knowledge as a relation cannot be used to argue dependence' (115, emphasis in the original).

Accordingly, *T*—or what is perceptually known—is related to but independent of the knowing subject *E*. But what exactly is that *T*? In Perry's view, a *simple* in the first place and thus the endpoint of analysis. He writes: 'Knowledge escapes subjectivity in proportion as it carries analysis through to the end. The ultimate *terms* of experience are at any rate independent, whatever may turn out to be the case with certain complexes of these terms' (128, emphasis in the original). The 'ultimate terms of experience', in turn, are for Perry paradigmatically instantiated by *sensory qualities* as present in the perceptual situation. Again, in his own words:

If the knower desires to eliminate the personal equation and seize on things-in-themselves, his safest course is to sift experience to its elements and thus obtain a sure footing in the independent world. Such elements, whether sensory qualities or logical indefinables, will afford him a nucleus of independence to which he may add such complexes as will satisfy his criterion. (128)

Notice: sensory qualities (such as red or hard) are equated with—knowable—things-in-themselves or, in short, with *T*. This implies that Perry's empirical relationalist ontology is built on these sensory qualities as its *ultimate relata*. Hence no transcendence is involved in Perry's ontological account. In other words, it is supposed to be free from metaphysics. Or, as Perry puts it in his 1912 book *Present Philosophical Tendencies*: 'the cardinal principle of neo-realism is *the independence of the immanent*' (1912b: 313, emphasis in the original)

It is difficult not to see the parallels with Russell's early philosophical project here. To be more precise, Russell in his 1910 seminal paper 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description' characterized what he called 'acquaintance' as a 'direct cognitive relation' and thereby contrasted 'presentation' with 'judgment' (see Russell 1910–11: 108). As to the former, he focused on sense data and explained: 'When I see a colour or hear a noise, I have direct acquaintance with the colour or the noise' (109). From this Russell derived the following 'principle in the analysis containing descriptions': '*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted*' (117, emphasis in the original). Just as Perry, Russell argues in terms of immanence: the entities we are acquainted with are directly given through the senses and are therefore neither transcendent nor inferred (or, in Russell's later terms, logically constructed).² At the same time, Russell relies on the logic of relations in order to prevent an idealistic interpretation of his specific point of view. This becomes particularly obvious by his 1911 comment on the American neorealists' 1910 manifesto. There, Russell declares: 'I find myself in almost complete agreement with the "six realists"' (Russell 1911: 158). Regarding the issue of idealism, he then points out: 'What is plain is that all arguments based on the contention that knowing makes a difference to what is known, or implies a community of interaction between knower and known, rest upon the internal view

² For an extended (critical) contemporary discussion of Russell's view as a form of *radical* 'immanentism', see Schlick (1918: ch. 25). For a rejection of this sort of interpretation, see Stubenberg (2016: sect. 4.3.3) who contends that Russell's plea for—Jamesian-inspired—'neutral monism' was less 'mentalistic' (and, consequently, more realistic) than assumed by Schlick. Indeed, Russell (like Perry) was driven by the idea that sensory objects are essentially non-mental, albeit they exist only while they are present to the mind (see, for example, Russell 1914: lect. 3). Thus independence and immanence are thought together. Or, as one of Russell's commentators explains: 'Sensory experience involves a relation between a subject and sense data that are logically independent of this experience. Sense data may not exist for long, but they are not mental for Russell in the sense of being essentially tied to a subject' (Pincok 2007: 112). The neorealists, for their part, dispensed with sense-data as an autonomous class of entities and, in consequence of this, confined themselves to the given sensory aspects of *an independent thing* as the object of perception. For further details of this intricate and somewhat tricky relation between Russell's, James's and the neorealist's account of the object of perception, see Passmore (1966: 262–64) and Hatfield (2002).

of relations, and therefore fail when this view is rejected' (160). Consequently, Russell pleads for an externalist account of relations and thus endorses realism. Moreover, he draws on Perry's ECP, remarking:

It is true there is another argument for idealism, namely, the argument which Professor Perry calls the 'egocentric predicament'. This argument is, in brief, that everything must be known, because we can not know of anything else. This is a foolish fallacy, which would equally prove that I must be acquainted with everybody whose name is Smith. . . . This instance, like many others, illustrates the elementary blunders which philosophers have made owing to their neglect of logic. (160–61)

More precisely, Russell agrees with Perry's assessment that ECP leads to the redundant inference that all known things are known or to the invalid inference that all things are known. Trivial logical blunders like these disqualify the idealistic point of view according to both Perry and Russell.

Interestingly, Roy Wood Sellars (1880–1973), another of the later critical realists, commented in his 1927 'Current Realism in Great Britain and United States' that the new realists around Perry relied on the Russellian 'logic of analysis' as giving 'their epistemology its foundation' (Sellars 1927: 513). And he added: 'It may be that they were deceived in this belief, but it cannot be denied that it helped to bring about that efflorescence of mathematical logic so characteristic of Harvard, as it is of Cambridge' (513).

Indeed, for example (and foremost), Henry M. Sheffer (1882–1964) taught logic courses at Harvard since 1907 and was later to become one of the leading logicians in the United States. Together with Perry he published a book titled *Logic Cases for Philosophy C* in 1919–20 (Perry and Sheffer 1919–20). Perry himself had been corresponding with Russell since 1910. In a letter to Russell dated April 4, 1910, he praised Sheffer as 'one of the best trained men in this country in the philosophical kind of mathematics and in the mathematical kind of philosophy' and pointed out that Sheffer will be sent by Harvard 'next year abroad studying symbolic logic', particularly being eager to discuss respective issues with Russell face to face (I am grateful to Sander Verhaegh for pointing out the existence of that letter). In a letter dated May 17, 1911, Perry invited Russell to visit Harvard and lecture there during the academic year 1912–13. Perry emphasized: 'The younger men on this side of the Atlantic are everywhere inclining to realism and you are one of its most august prophets' (I am grateful to Sander Verhaegh for pointing out the existence of that letter). In fact, Russell spent the three-month spring term of 1914 at Harvard offering two courses, an introductory one named 'The Theory of Knowledge' and an advanced one entitled 'Logic' (see Willis 1989: 9). On the whole, what can be seen from these connections is that Perry also acted on the institutional level in the sense of a rapprochement with the British-European analytic movement.

Coming back to the issue of independence, the nature of the knowing subject *E* needs—eventually—to be clarified. Remember that Perry categorically

distinguishes between relation and dependence. Regarding the object of knowledge, this has the far-reaching consequence that the latter can be conceptualized as being related to but *not* being dependent on the conscious mind. In Perry's own words: 'The object of consciousness is related to consciousness, but it does not follow that it is dependent on consciousness' (Perry 1912a: 151). Going one step further, consciousness itself might now be regarded as one of the independent terms of an entirely *external* relation. Thus, the conscious mind is just one among other objects, being contingently equipped with a nervous system. In *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, Perry puts this point as follows:

The procedure of logic and mathematics—any procedure, in fact, which employs the method of analysis—is necessarily committed to the acceptance of the externality of relations. The method of analysis presupposes that nature and arrangement of the part supplies the character of the whole. . . . It shows, in the first place, that the *content* of things is in no case made up of relations beyond themselves. So the content of thing cannot be made up of its relations to consciousness. . . . If *a* is in relation to consciousness, then *consciousness-of-a* is constituted in part of *a*, but *a* itself is not constituted of consciousness. (1912b: 319–20)

Thus the method of (decompositional) analysis and the doctrine of the externality of relations are brought together to elucidate the nature of cognition. Compared to the idealistic conception, consciousness is thereby downgraded to a rather passive 'registering device' or, as Holt characterized it in his seminal neorealist *The Concept of Consciousness* (1914), a 'mechanism of response' (Holt 1914:172). What is more, the knowledge relation is bound to the concept of environment. Thus, it is things in such an environment that are considered being independent. The knowing subject *E* as well forms part of this independent environment. Accordingly, it is pointed out in the introduction to the *New Realism* volume:

For realists, knowledge plays its part within an independent environment. When that environment is known it is brought into direct relations with some variety of agency or process, which is the knower. The knower, however, is homogeneous with the environment, belonging to one cosmos with it, as does an attracting mass, or physical organism, and may itself be known as are the things it knows. (Holt et al. 1912: 35)

With these considerations on the table, the neorealist is in a position to postulate independence without employing ECP in a material manner: by entirely externalizing and at the same time naturalizing the cognitive relation with the help of the concept of environment, the knower and the known can now be analyzed as likewise independent terms. ECP, of course, plays its role at the purely methodological level. It conditions, as it were, the thusly analyzing philosophical individual. But, as Perry correctly observed, this is all but fatal to the realist. For according to the latter, what ultimately counts is the *outcome* of analysis and not its presuppositions.

5. Was Perry an Analytic Philosopher After All?

To sum up our whole discussion: Starting from the predominance of idealism in early twentieth-century American philosophy, it has been shown that Perry's 'The Ego-Centric Predicament' was to play a preparatory, though not directly causally efficacious, role for the later rise of the analytic movement in the United States. Furthermore, the various manifest parallels with the early Russell's philosophical project have been elucidated. All in all, it has turned out that Perry (and the other American neorealists) at least approximated the analytic 'paradigm'. (It was particularly Spaulding who, next to Perry, came pretty close to the ideal language version of that paradigm. Thus his contribution to the *New Realism* volume has the programmatic title 'A Defense of Analysis'[1912] and is interspersed with references to Russell, especially to the latter's logico-mathematical writings. Moreover, in his book *The New Rationalism*, published in 1918, Spaulding develops an externalist account of relations being pretty close to Russell's theory as well.)

However, it may be asked, is this not too defensive an assessment regarding Perry's (and American neorealism's) historical significance, after all? Why not characterize Perry as an analytic philosopher all the way down? Here the problematic aspects of the term 'analytic philosophy' come into play. For one thing, the term as such is rather vague. To be sure, there is some sort of minimal consensus regarding the term's most general meaning. For example, Beaney states:

If anything characterizes 'analytic' philosophy, then it is presumably the emphasis placed on analysis. . . . Analytic philosophy should be seen as a set of interlocking subtraditions held together by a shared repertoire of conceptions of analysis upon which individual philosophers draw in different ways. (2014: sect. 6)

There cannot be any doubt that Perry's overall account definitely meets this minimal criterion of being (a version of) analytic philosophy. Apart from the various relevant statements quoted before, the following one from Perry's 'Realism as a Polemic and Program of Reform' is particularly pertinent:

I am using the term 'analysis', to refer not to the special method of any branch of knowledge, but to what I take to be the method of exact knowledge in general. I mean simply that method of procedure in which the problematic is discovered to be a complex of simples. Such procedure may lead to the discovery of fine identities in the place of gross differences, or fine differences in the place of gross identities. Analysis in this sense means only the careful, systematic, and exhaustive examination of any topic of discourse.' (1910c: 373)

Yet, as Glock has convincingly argued, the emphasis on analysis alone does not suffice to make a philosopher analytic. Glock writes: 'The only gloss of analysis which would capture all commonly recognized analytic philosophers is so general,

it includes any sustained philosophical investigation of a specific subject matter' (2008: 54). This is surely correct. But, as we have seen, Perry's account provides more than that. His neorealist critique of the form of idealism dominant in the United States at the time not only revolved around the notion of analysis, but also introduced further ingredients into American philosophy that were crucial for the subsequent rise of the analytic movement in the United States. These ingredients were the following:

- A focus on modern, relational logic
- A methodological perspective modeled on the exact sciences
- An emphasis on precision and clarity in arguments
- A mistrust of speculative metaphysics
- A preference for rational knowledge over any form of speculation or intuition

This bundle of features together with the emphasis placed on analysis—though not a set of necessary and sufficient conditions—at least corresponds to the core conception of the ideal language wing of analytic philosophy as it is primarily represented by the writings of Russell, Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), and the early Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Nevertheless, I hesitate to count Perry among the 'hard-boiled' analytic philosophers and this for several reasons.

First of all, it should be noted that the neorealist movement dissolved again already in the 1910s. Thus Perry, in his obituary for Montague, retrospectively reports that 'the divergence of interests, and the ambition of each of us to write his own book, soon divided us' (Perry 1954b: 606). However, there were also more content-related reasons for the neorealist movement's dissolution. For example, Montague in his 'The Story of American Realism' (1937) explained that the neorealists' failure to cope with the problem of perceptual error contributed to their disintegration and at the same time justified 'the coming of *Critical Realism*' (1937: 152, emphasis added).³ Furthermore, World War I played an essential role in the given context, at least where Perry is concerned. For the latter became

³ Interestingly, the critical realists—particularly Sellars, Lovejoy, and George Santayana (1863–1952)—advocated a more traditionalist ('continental') conception of philosophy with epistemology (rather than logic) as its center and with the concept of representation as its unquestioned key concept. Most tellingly, perhaps, Sellars in his retrospective *Reflections on American Philosophy from Within* (1969) reported that 'so-called *analytic philosophy* . . . did not seem to me very creative in either epistemology or ontology. American addiction to it and disregard of its momentum struck me as a form of neo-colonialism' (1969: 5). With respect to the problem of perceptual error in particular, the critical realists, because of their focus on representation and, more specifically, misrepresentation, were apparently better prepared to deal with it and to account for its dominant role, especially in the context of Royce's absolute idealism, which, for its part, hailed itself as the only convincing solution to that problem (see Royce 1885: ch. 11 and the discussion in Kuklick 1977: 150–57). Somewhat ironically, however, various forms of 'direct', 'naïve', or 'relational' realism (Travis, Brewer, Campbell, and others) have enjoyed a renaissance in recent years. More to the point, some authors today would view the neorealist position as having resources that the neorealists themselves were perhaps not able to envision (e.g., the path to disjunctivism) and furthermore point out that the critical realist outlook is arguably *not* in a better position with respect to the problem of perceptual error. In this connection, see the instructive overview in Locatelli and Wilson (2017).

seriously involved in the war. He served as major and as executive secretary of the War Department Committee of Education and Special Training, which definitely motivated him to take a 'practical turn' in his philosophical writings as well. He turned away from essentially theoretical issues, such as those associated with ECP, and focused instead on questions related to values, war, democracy, and education. Moreover, Perry and Russell became embroiled in a controversy on the subject of pacifism (see Ryan 2014). As already indicated in section 1, it was Perry's writings on these topics that, in point of fact, made him widely renowned.

That said, one final, albeit decisive, point ought not to be overlooked. It is abundantly clear that the new realists' and, above all, Perry's invocation of modern logic remained rather superficial and a kind of mathematical window dressing; at least their writings revealed no detailed use of logical techniques (see, in this connection, also Brodbeck 1950: 50 and Kuklick 1977: 350). Thus, as Russell remarked in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell dated May 26, 1914: 'I have persuaded Perry, and he has persuaded the other 'six realists', that logic is *the* important thing, and they are all going to try and learn it. That is one of the things I hoped to achieve here [i.e., Harvard], so I am glad it has happened' (emphasis in the original; I am grateful to James Levine for pointing out the existence of that letter). That Perry and the neorealists were yet to be persuaded of the central importance of logic as late as 1914 suggests that in contrast to the advances made by the British-European analytic movement, their philosophical approach remained somewhat wanting. At any rate, their contributions left no significant traces; indeed, Perry's involvement in the Great War and his subsequent 'practical turn' significantly reinforced this outcome, a circumstance that eventually contributed to his achievements as a proto-analytic philosopher being consigned to oblivion. Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that Perry anticipated much of what was to be so vigorously developed in post-Second World War American analytic philosophy. His 'The Ego-Centric Predicament' was precisely of the sort considered characteristic of contributions in the analytic tradition—a sharp, focused (and quasi-technical) argument that elicits similar responses. (Somewhat astonishingly, Perry had hardly any doctoral students. However, apart from Stevenson, there is another interesting exception, namely, Donald Cary Williams (1899–1983) who, in 1928, finished his dissertation entitled 'A Metaphysical Interpretation of Behaviorism' under Perry's supervision and later on became a notable proponent of the established analytic movement in the United States.)

MATTHIAS NEUBER

JOHANNES GUTENBERG UNIVERSITY MAINZ

maneuber@uni-mainz.de

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