Dictionary vs. Encyclopedia, Then and Now

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ABSTRACT

The *New English Dictionary* was originally distinguished from an encyclopedia in reach and function by its proponent Richard Chenevix Trench and its principal editor James A. H. Murray as differing in responsibilities: a dictionary described the meanings of words, an encyclopedia described the nature of things. The distinction had philosophical and lexicographical precedents but proved difficult to honor in practice. Recent disputes within linguistics and philosophy of language contest a similar division without resolving the issue. Structural

differences between Wikipedia and Wiktionary might be expected to shed light on the matter, but these new projects perpetuate some old features of print encyclopedias and dictionaries, leaving the distinction blurred. Pragmatic analysis after Grice may identify if not remedy some of the constraints and difficulties faced by definers in print or online.

Keywords: dictionaries, encyclopedias, *New English Dictionary*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, Richard Chenevix Trench, James A. H. Murray, definition, necessary and sufficient conditions, Wikipedia, Wiktionary, Paul Grice

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