

## A Defense of Conceptual Analysis

### 1. Serious Metaphysics and the Placement Problem

Jackson's slogan: "Serious metaphysics requires conceptual analysis."

Although metaphysics is concerned with *what there is in the world* and *what it is like*, in order to do metaphysics we must study the contours of our shared concepts. (Or so Jackson claims.)

A serious metaphysic has two key features, according to Jackson:

1. It is *putatively complete*: it seeks a comprehensive account of some subject matter.
2. It is *discriminatory*: it tries to provide such an account in terms of a limited number of basic notions.

Examples of serious metaphysics: *physicalism*, *Cartesian dualism*, *Berkeleyan idealism*.

Jackson's best attempt at formulating the basic commitments of *physicalism*:

- (C) Any possible world which is a minimal physical duplicate of our world is a duplicate *simpliciter* of our world.

A *minimal physical duplicate* of the actual world @ = a world that contains all the physical natures found in @ (all the same physical objects, properties, relations, laws, etc.), and nothing more (i.e. nothing beyond what is needed for the existence of those physical natures).

Jackson's argument that *physicalism is true iff (C) is true*:

Suppose (C) is false.

Then there exists a world *w* such that *w* is a minimal physical duplicate of @, and such that either

- (i) @ contains a nature that *w* does not, or
- (ii) *w* contains a nature that @ does not.

Since @ and *w* are *physical* duplicates, this entails that either

- (i') @ contains a *non-physical* nature that *w* does not, or
- (ii') *w* contains a *non-physical* nature that @ does not.

But (ii') is false, since *w* is a *minimal* physical duplicate of @.

So, (i') is true.

So, physicalism is false.

Suppose physicalism is false.

Then @ contains a non-physical nature *n*.

Suppose *w* is a minimal physical duplicate of @.

Then *w* doesn't contain *n* (for otherwise *w* wouldn't be a minimal physical duplicate of @).

So, @ and *w* are not duplicates *simpliciter*.

So, (C) is false.

What puzzles me about this argument:

Jackson seems to be assuming that *physicalism is true iff every nature contained in the actual world is a physical nature*. But then isn't *that* the central contention of physicalism, not (C)?

Once we have a serious metaphysics like physicalism on the table, this leads to the following problem for every putative feature of the world which is not expressed in that serious metaphysics' favored terms:

*the placement problem*: Either we must find a *location* for those putative features in the story of the world as told by that serious metaphysics, or we must go *eliminativist* about those putative features and deem them not to exist.

## 2. Entry by Entailment

According to Jackson, there is one and only solution to the placement problem: *entry by entailment*.

For the special case of finding a place for *the psychological* in the picture of the world presented by *physicalism*, Jackson's claim runs as follows:

*the entry-by-entailment doctrine (for physicalism and the psychological):* If physicalism is true, then any psychological fact about our world is entailed by the physical facts about our world.

(Jackson is assuming here that *entailment* is defined in terms of *necessary truth-preservation*.)

Jackson's proof of this claim:

Suppose physicalism is true.

Let  $\Phi$  be a statement of the complete physical story of the world (i.e. a statement which is true at the actual world and all minimal physical duplicates of it, and false at all other worlds).

Let  $\Psi$  be any true sentence about the psychological nature of our world (and nothing more).

So, every world in which  $\Psi$  is false differs psychologically from our world in some way.

Since physicalism is true, (C) is true.

Since (C) is true, any world in which  $\Phi$  is true is a duplicate *simpliciter* of our world.

So, any world in which  $\Phi$  is true is a psychological duplicate of our world.

So, any world in which  $\Phi$  is true is a world in which  $\Psi$  is true.

So,  $\Phi$  entails  $\Psi$ .

A similar result holds for any serious metaphysics (not just physicalism) and any putative feature for which we are trying to find a place in the world (not just the psychological).

## 3. The Need for Conceptual Analysis

Suppose Jackson is right that, in order to solve the placement problem, we need to establish various entailment theses. Why think that we need to establish these theses by means of *conceptual analysis*?

Let us call the preferred vocabulary of our serious metaphysic the *privileged vocabulary*, and let us call the vocabulary used to talk about some kind *K* which is not (obviously) describable in the privileged vocabulary the *problematic vocabulary*.

*Jackson's argument for the indispensability of conceptual analysis:*

1. If we are not eliminativists about *K*'s, in order to avoid acts of faith we must provide an account of how things as told in the *privileged vocabulary* make true things as told in the *problematic vocabulary*. [*premise*]
2. In order to provide an account of how things as told in the *privileged vocabulary* make true things as told in the *problematic vocabulary*, we need to define the subject. [*premise*]
3. In order to define the subject, we must engage in conceptual analysis. [*premise*]
4. So, if we are not eliminativists about *K*'s, we must engage in conceptual analysis. [*from 1-3*]

Why believe premise 1?

Given Jackson's entry-by-entailment doctrine, it follows that, if *K*'s exist, then things as told in the privileged vocabulary necessarily make true things as told in the problematic vocabulary.

So in order for our belief that *K*'s exist to be rational, we must provide an account of *how* things as told in the privileged vocabulary necessarily make true things as told in the problematic vocabulary.

[At the very least, it would be *worrisome* if we believe that *K*'s exist, but have no story to tell about how matters as described in the one vocabulary could make true matters as described in the other.]

Why believe premise 2?

Unless we have some conception of what counts as a **K** and what counts as a **J**, we won't get very far asking questions like "Are **K**'s nothing over and above **J**'s?"

*The handbill analogy:* "When bounty hunters go searching, they are searching for a person and not a handbill. But they will not get very far if they fail to attend to the representational properties of the handbill on the wanted person" (*FMTE*, p. 30).

[At most this shows that we *at least* need to define our subject, not that we *only* need to define our subject.]

Why believe premise 3?

If I am only concerned with what the expression "**K**" picks out in my mouth, then I will not have much of an audience when I philosophize about the existence of **K**'s.

So, I should be concerned with what the expression "**K**" picks out in the mouths of the folk.

So, I should be concerned with the ordinary conception (i.e. the folk theory) of **K**-hood.

So, I need to gather intuitions from the folk about the contours of their concept of a **K**.

Moreover, insofar as I have good reason to think that my intuitions are indicative of the intuitions of the folk in general, I can consult my own personal intuitions about what makes something a **K**.

[Actually, Jackson's approach is a little more subtle than this line of reasoning suggests: as he sees it, we should recognize various reasons for discounting a person's first-up response as to whether something counts as a **K**, and in general we apply the *hypothetico-deductive method* to the folk's responses in order to find the hypothesis that makes best sense of their responses when all of the evidence is taken into account.]

Two common worries:

- *Couldn't the folk be wrong?*

Why do folk opinions get the final say? Couldn't the tacit theory of **K**-hood held by the folk be wrong about what counts as a **K**, or wrong about what properties are central to **K**-hood?

Consider the handbill analogy: the handbill might *misrepresent* the features of the wanted man, so studying the handbill might *mislead* us in our search for whom we are after.

Jackson's reply: give up too many of the commonsense folk platitudes about what it is to be a **K**, and you've changed the subject.

However, we can distinguish the view that the folk theory of **K**-hood *constrains* what it is to be a **K** (deviate too far from the folk theory, and you're no longer talking about **K**'s), from the view that the folk theory of **K**-hood *defines* what it is to be a **K**.

Jackson writes, "There is nothing sacrosanct about folk theory. It has served well but not so well that it would be irrational to make changes to it in the light of reflection on exactly what it involves, or in the light of one or another empirical discovery" (*FMTE*, p. 44).

For example, we might discover through conceptual analysis that free action as understood by the folk is incompatible with determinism, and in light of that replace "free action" with another notion near enough to that of the folk's which does the theoretical job we give it.

But this isn't a way of *revising* folk theory (of deeming folk theory to have been wrong); it's a way of introducing a *new expression* that happens to be a homonym of an old expression.

- *Why is the bulk of the work done by conceptual analysis?*

Jackson seems to assume that most (though not all: see §4 below) of the work establishing a given entailment thesis will be done by conceptual analysis. In “Armchair Metaphysics” he even implicitly identifies “questions of conceptual analysis” with “questions of . . . what entails or fails to entail what” (p. 23).

But Jackson’s argument, on its own, gives us no reason to rule out the possibility that establishing entailment theses might involve a significant amount of empirical investigation, or might involve a significant amount of armchair reasoning that doesn’t proceed via conceptual analysis.

Consider the handbill analogy: even once we’ve scrutinized the handbill, we still have to go out there and find the wanted person. Moreover, we still have to figure out how best to capture him once we do find him.

During Jackson’s discussion of *modest* and *immodest* uses of conceptual analysis, he claims that conceptual analysis in its proper, modest use doesn’t tell us “what the world is like” (*FMTE*, p. 43).

For example, it would be an *immodest* use of conceptual analysis to conclude that *since* things change, 4-dimensionalism is false; a *modest* use only claims that *if* things change, 4-dimensionalism is false.

But it still follows that even on Jackson’s (so-called) modest use of conceptual analysis, we can derive all kinds of claims about the world, *when we combine them with claims about the how the world is as specified by our serious metaphysics*.

*Example 1:* If conceptual analysis yields the result that *knowledge = reliably produced true belief*, then from knowledge of the claim “S has a reliably produced true belief that *p*,” we can come to know the truth of “S knows that *p*” (skeptics be damned).

*Example 2:* If (as Jackson suspects) conceptual analysis yields the result that *right action = action which maximizes expected hedonic value*, then from knowledge of the claim “S’s action maximized expected hedonic value,” we can come to know the truth of “What S did was right” (nihilists be damned).

A way of combining the two worries: in order to really, truly establish a given entailment thesis, we not only need our folk theory of K’s, but we also need a way of *certifying* that our folk theory is correct. Moreover, in order to do that, we need something more than additional conceptual analysis. (An analogy: in addition to the argument “from common cognition” in *Groundwork* I-II, we need the argument from *Groundwork* III.)

#### **4. An Objection from the Existence of Necessary *A Posteriori* Truths**

*Objection:* “H<sub>2</sub>O covers most of the Earth” entails (in the sense of necessarily determines) “Water covers most of the Earth.” But since “Water is H<sub>2</sub>O” is a necessary *a posteriori* truth, we can’t discover this entailment thesis merely by doing conceptual analysis from an armchair: it requires empirical investigation. Thus if some philosophical entailments are, in a similar way, *a posteriori*, it will take more than conceptual analysis to account for them.

*Jackson’s reply (in a nutshell):* Although we can’t discover from the armchair that “H<sub>2</sub>O covers most of the Earth” entails “Water covers most of the Earth,” we can discover from the armchair that the following is true:

If H<sub>2</sub>O is the watery stuff with which we are acquainted, then “Water covers most of the Earth” expresses a proposition that is true iff H<sub>2</sub>O covers most of the Earth.

Moreover, the above conditional goes a long way toward establishing the relevant entailment.

The full story of how Jackson replies to this worry requires the formal machinery of 2-dimensional modal logic: see ch. 3 of *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (and the voluminous secondary literature that has ensued).