A Solution to the Paradox of Analysis

MARK BALAGUER AND TERRY HORGAN

When one does conceptual analysis, one asks questions like 'What is knowledge?', 'What is free will?', 'What is a person?' and so on. When one answers these questions, one says things like 'Knowledge is true justified belief'; or 'A person is a thinking, conscious being with a memory of itself existing over time'; or to give a trivial example,

(B) A bachelor is an unmarried man.

The paradox of analysis asks how the answer to a conceptual-analysis question – i.e., a conceptual analysis, or a sentence like (B) – could be simultaneously true and informative. If a conceptual analysis is true, then it should capture the *meaning* of the term in question and so it should be analytic. But if it's analytic, how could it be informative?

In this article, we will propose a solution to this paradox. The solution will be based on the idea that when a conceptual analysis is true, there is an important sense in which it is both *analytic* and *empirical*. Now, lest you think us mad, we hasten to add that there is also an important sense in which such sentences are a priori. But the sense in which they are empirical will be enough to provide a solution to the paradox of analysis.

The first point we want to make here is that conceptual-analysis questions (i.e., questions like 'What is free will?', 'What is a person?' and so on) are *semantic* questions, in particular, questions about *meaning*. The question 'What is free will?' is essentially equivalent to the question 'What concept is expressed by the expression 'free will'?', or more simply (taking concepts to be meanings), 'What is the meaning of 'free will'?' If you like, you can think of it this way: in platonic heaven, all the different concepts of freedom exist side by side; e.g., there's *Hume-freedom*, *libertarian-freedom*, *Frankfurt-freedom* and so on. When one asks 'What is free will?', one is asking *which* of these concepts is the concept of free will. But that is just to ask which of them is picked out by the expression 'free will'. And, again, taking concepts to be meanings, this is just to ask what the meaning of 'free will' is.

(These remarks hold even if the term in question is a rigid designator, like 'water'. The answer to the conceptual-analysis question about water is not that water is H_2O; it's that 'water' is a rigid designator that picks out a certain substance of our acquaintance, namely, the watery stuff of our acquaintance. More precisely, following Chalmers (1996) and Jackson (1998), the answer to the conceptual-analysis question about water is that 'water' expresses the concept *the actual watery stuff of our acquaintance*. Thus, even

Analysis Vol 76 | Number 1 | January 2016 | pp. 3–7 doi:10.1093/analys/anw001
© The Authors 2016. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of *The Analysis Trust*.
All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oup.com

Downloaded from http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/ at Boston University Libraries on October 13, 2016

when the term is rigid, the conceptual-analysis question can be thought of as a question about meaning.)

There is also an important distinction to be made between two senses of the term 'concept'. We will disambiguate by using the expressions 'platonistic concept' and 'psychological concept'. The platonistic concept associated with an expression is an abstract entity – in particular, a meaning. (This is the sense in which we used the expression above.) The psychological concept associated with an expression is a psychological entity that figures as a constituent of intentional mental states. In general, the psychological concept associated with a word expresses the same platonistic concept that the word expresses – as long as the person in question is competent in using the expression, and uses it like the other members of the linguistic community do. The appropriate way to individuate psychological concepts (for present purposes, at least) is in terms of the platonistic concepts that they express – i.e., the platonistic concepts that are the meanings of the corresponding words. So a psychological concept possessed by one person counts as the same (or of the same kind) as one possessed by another person just in case both psychological concepts express the same platonistic concept. (Hereafter, we will adopt the convention of using capital letters to denote psychological concepts and italics to denote platonistic concepts – as in 'the psychological concept BACHELOR and the platonistic concept *bachelor*'.)

Given all this, we can say that when one does conceptual analysis, one is trying to ascertain which platonistic concept is expressed by the given psychological concept and the associated linguistic expression. So an analysis is correct if and only if it captures the right platonistic concept. For instance, suppose one is trying to analyse the concept of a bachelor, and suppose one proposes the following answer:

(B) A bachelor is an unmarried man.

The question whether this analysis is correct depends on whether the following is true:

(B*) The psychological concept BACHELOR and the English word 'bachelor' express the platonistic concept *unmarried man*. (Or equivalently: the platonistic concept *bachelor* is numerically identical to the platonistic concept *unmarried man*.)

You might wonder whether, when one does conceptual analysis, one is analysing the psychological concept or the platonistic concept. You can think about it either way. The part of (B*) that's not in parentheses gives the sense in which one is analysing the psychological concept, whereas the part in parentheses gives the sense in which one is analysing the platonistic concept.

Now to the business at hand. We need to explain why it is that some conceptual analyses are obvious and some are not. Compare (B) with the

Downloaded from http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/ at Boston University Libraries on October 13, 2016

following libertarian analysis of free will:

(L) A person P has free will iff (a) at least some of P's decisions are simultaneously undetermined and non-random and (b) the indeterminacy in question generates or increases the non-randomness. (This analysis comes from Balaguer (2010).)

Suppose that (L) and (B) are both correct. Why is (B) obvious and (L) non-obvious? The reason, we suggest, is that for some psychological concepts and expressions (e.g., the psychological concept BACHELOR and the expression 'bachelor'), ordinary competent speakers have *explicit* knowledge of their meanings, whereas for other psychological concepts and expressions (e.g., FREE WILL and 'free will'), ordinary competent speakers have merely *implicit* knowledge of their meanings. It is simply a fact about competent speakers of natural languages that they can be very proficient with a term – i.e., they can know when the term applies and does not apply – even if they can't define the term. In such cases, the speakers in question have merely *implicit* knowledge of the meaning of the term.

There is a corresponding distinction to be drawn between two kinds of competence regarding a given psychological concept and the associated expression. What we will call *platonistic competence* is explicit knowledge of which platonistic concept is expressed by the psychological concept and the expression. In contrast, what we will call *application competence* is the ability to correctly apply the psychological concept, and the expression, in particular cases (modulo one's available evidence) – i.e., the ability to know what things are instances of the concept and what things are not – in a suitably wide range of cases. Given this distinction, the point of the preceding paragraph can be put in the following way: ordinary conceptual and linguistic competence – i.e., ordinary 'knowledge of the meaning' of a psychological concept and associated expression – requires only application competence, not platonistic competence. In other words, ordinary competence requires only implicit knowledge of meaning, not explicit knowledge. This explains why an analysis can be informative and thereby explains away the putative paradox of analysis.

There is another side to this story that drives our point home even more – namely, that there is an important sense in which a correct conceptual analysis is both analytic and empirical. To appreciate this, consider the following, roughly Humean, analysis of the concept of free will:

(H) Free will is the ability to act in accordance with your desires.

If (H) is true, then it is analytic. But whether (H) is true depends upon whether the following claims are true:

(H1) The psychological concept FREE WILL expresses the platonistic concept *the ability to act in accordance with your desires*.

Downloaded from http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/ at Boston University Libraries on October 13, 2016

(H2) The English expression 'free will' expresses the platonistic concept *the ability to act in accordance with your desires*.

But now notice that while (H) is analytic if it is true, (H2) is clearly empirical. The expression 'free will' could have meant almost anything in English; it could have expressed the platonistic concept *yellow flower* (or no concept at all).

In addition, we claim that (H1) is empirical too. One argument for this is that one can use the same empirical methodology to discover the truth of both (H1) and (H2) – viz., the methodology of conceptual analysis! Here is why conceptual analysis is properly understood as empirical: since (as a competent speaker) one is good at knowing when the psychological concept and corresponding expression apply and when they do not, one can use one's intuitions (about when they do and don't apply) as data points, and one can use these data points to confirm or falsify empirical hypotheses about what the psychological concept and the expression mean.

Thus, we have the result that whether (H) provides a correct analysis of free will depends on whether the empirical claims (H1) and (H2) are true. Moreover, this point can be generalized. For any attempted conceptual analysis (CA), the question whether CA is correct turns on the question whether the corresponding empirical claims about the meanings of the psychological concept and the associated expression are true. And this provides a second way of appreciating why conceptual analyses can be informative – viz., because claims about the meanings of one's psychological concepts and expressions are *empirical*. When we combine this with the fact that our knowledge of these meanings can be merely implicit, it is no wonder that claims about meaning can be informative.

We will end by responding to two worries. First, why does conceptual analysis *seem* a priori, if it is really empirical? The reason is that when one does conceptual analysis, one has first-person epistemic access to important data points – namely, one's intuitions – and this is why conceptual analysis can be carried out in the proverbial armchair. (Henderson and Horgan (2000, 2002, 2011: Ch. 2) classify such empirically informed inquiry and knowledge as 'low grade a priori'.)

Second, as emphasized already, if (H) is true then it is analytic. But if it is analytic, then it is presumably a priori. How then could it depend for its truth on the empirical claims (H1) and (H2)?

This puzzle can be solved by clarifying what it means to say that a sentence is a priori. Here are three different ways to define a priority for sentences:

> A sentence S is *strong-a-priori* iff one can know a priori that S is true *without prior knowledge of what S means*; S is *medium-a-priori* iff one can know a priori that S is true, *given only implicit knowledge of what the words in S mean*; and S is *weak-a-priori* iff one can know a priori that S is true, *given explicit knowledge of what the words in S mean*.

Downloaded from http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/ at Boston University Libraries on October 13, 2016

It should be obvious that (i) *no* sentences are strong-a-priori and (ii) ordinarily, when philosophers say that some sentence is a priori, they do not mean that it is strong-a-priori. Now, we admit that if (H) is true and hence analytic, then it is a priori in *some* sense. But, given our discussion above, the right thing to say about (H) is that it is only *weak*-a-priori, not medium-a-priori or strong-a-priori. And this is entirely consistent with its depending for its truth on the empirical claims (H1) and (H2).

California State University, Los Angeles
mbalagu@exchange.calstatela.edu

University of Arizona
thorgan@email.arizona.edu

References

Balaguer, M. 2010. *Free Will as an Open Scientific Problem*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chalmers, D. 1996. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Henderson, T. and Horgan T. 2000. What is a priori and what is it good for? *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 38: 51–86.

Henderson, T. and Horgan T. 2002. The a priori isn't all that it's cracked up to be, but it is something. *Philosophical Topics* 29: 219–50.

Henderson, T. and Horgan T. 2011. *The Epistemological Spectrum: At the Interface of Cognitive Science and Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jackson, J. 1998. *From Metaphysics to Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Knot and Tonk: Nasty Connectives on Many-Valued Truth-Tables for Classical Sentential Logic

TIM BUTTON

1. Preliminaries

Some connectives cause havoc when added to a language. One such connective is Prior's (1960) Tonk, defined via these inference rules:

$$\frac{\phi}{\phi \,\mathtt{t}\, \psi}\,\mathtt{tI} \qquad\qquad \frac{\phi \,\mathtt{t}\, \psi}{\psi}\,\mathtt{tE}$$

If you add Tonk to a language, then triviality ensues. Of course, languages containing Tonk are perfectly good objects of formal study. However,

Analysis Vol 76 | Number 1 | January 2016 | pp. 7–19 doi:10.1093/analys/anv106
© The Author 2016. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of *The Analysis Trust*.
All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oup.com

Downloaded from http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/ at Boston University Libraries on October 13, 2016