



From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis

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Jackson, Frank. *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. ix+174. \$35.00 (cloth).

Philosophers of science have long noted disparities between scientists' reflections on methodology (a product of "nocturnal" contemplation) and their actual scientific techniques (their "diurnal" practices). One moral of Jackson's remarkable book is that philosophers are also quite susceptible to misconstruing their own procedures, despite the fact that reflecting on methodology is, for them, a daytime activity. Specifically, the method of conceptual analysis, frequently derided in contemporary metaphilosophical discussion, rightfully continues to shape philosophical practice. Jackson does a superb job of showing that conceptual analysis is indispensable in philosophical argumentation and that it has more practitioners than a survey of philosophers' recent remarks on methodology would lead one to suspect.

It is precisely the cogency of Jackson's reasoning about the indispensability and pervasiveness of conceptual analysis which raises the two issues—the first major, the second minor—which my critical remarks will address. First, his argument to demonstrate the indispensability of conceptual analysis appears to warrant a conclusion which is stronger than his, and which he explicitly disavows. Second, given the pervasiveness of conceptual analysis, his conclusions about physicalism, color, and ethics would benefit from more specific methodological theses about conceptual analysis than he provides. These questions do not challenge Jackson's primary conclusions; rather, they are a testament to his success in establishing the importance of conceptual analysis.

The book is itself divided between methodological theory and practice. In its first half, Jackson defends his analytic functionalist version of conceptual analysis, using physicalism about the psychological as an ongoing example. The second half displays the analytic functionalist methodology in action, advancing the views that color is a primary quality and that ethical properties are reducible to descriptive properties.

I begin with a sketch of Jackson's central methodological position. Jackson's chief argument for the indispensability of conceptual analysis is disarmingly simple: an account devoid of conceptual analysis has no claim to be an account of the property (or phenomenon) at issue. Conceptual analysis unearths those tenets of folk theory which effectively define the analysandum; abandoning such tenets amounts to changing the subject. Still, Jackson acknowledges that some elements of folk theory are revisable. He endorses a broadly Rawlsian picture, according to which the strength of rival intuitions, at varying levels of abstractness, influences competition among them. This philosophical phenomenon mirrors, and is perhaps justified by, a folk phenomenon. "Folk morality is currently under negotiation: its basic principles, and even many of its derived ones, are a matter of debate and are evolving as we argue about what to do" (p. 132).

Jackson's analytic functionalism takes philosophical analysis to consist in two steps. First, conceptual analysis reveals the folk theory of, say, moral rightness. This theory assigns the analysandum a definitive role in a functional economy. Ethical properties are conceptually related to other ethical properties, and to nonethical properties, such as descriptive features of situations and psychological motivations for behavior. (The distinctive role for some nonethical properties, including psychological properties, is causal.)

The second step in philosophical analysis is to determine what actually plays the role identified in the first step. According to Jackson, descriptive properties play the role constitutive of—that is, they *realize*—ethical properties. (This claim exhibits Jackson's cognitivism; he rejects noncognitivism as a “last resort.”) Since identifying such realizers requires empirical investigation, this step is a posteriori. Conceptual analysis, while necessary and sufficient for identifying the role properties of *analysanda*, cannot determine which properties realize these roles.

Interestingly, because these steps involve different epistemic modalities, Jackson's “network approach” to moral properties allows that a coherent moral theory may incorporate aspects of ethical views usually thought to be in opposition. Suppose that the role property of *rightness* fits virtue theory—that is, a priori reflection reveals that rightness is defined by a relation to personal virtues. At the same time, empirical investigation may show that acts which possess the relation to virtues sufficient for rightness are those which, in fact, maximize expected utility. (Whether this entails that, in all possible worlds, rightness consists in maximizing expected utility depends on whether “right” is a rigid designator. Jackson remains uncommitted on this issue.) The analytic functionalist method is thereby compatible with a range of substantive ethical views. This is not to say that the role property is on a par with the realizer property, however. If virtue is the role property of rightness and utility its realizer property, then it is utility which *makes* right acts right. For it is utility which explains a right act's characteristic relation to virtue.

Jackson improves on others' explication of this process by carefully noting the extent of the a priori in it. It is widely agreed that the first (role property) step is a priori but the a priori nature of the relationship between the results of these two steps, which Jackson emphasizes, is standardly overlooked. For instance, purely conceptual reflection shows that these two steps converge in the case of concepts like “square,” and that they substantially differ for concepts like “water.” This is because the folk concepts “square” and “water” implicitly entail that while definitive conditions for squareness are independent of empirical facts, empirical investigation is required to discover that the causal role of water is realized by H₂O. Jackson uses the complexity of this a priori process to deflect “open question argument” objections. Exhaustive descriptive facts conceptually entail the totality of ethical facts, but since this conceptual entailment isn't obvious, it may appear that questions about ethical facts remain open. (Jackson dismisses any still lingering sense of openness as “a hangover from the platonic conception” of properties.)

For all its importance, however, conceptual analysis plays only a “modest role” in philosophical theorizing, according to Jackson. Specifically, conceptual analysis does not illuminate “what the world is like.” But the indispensability of conceptual analysis may undermine Jackson's claim that its effects are restricted in this way.

Confining conceptual analysis to a modest role marks a turnabout from Jackson's well-known 1982 “knowledge argument” for dualism. Although he admits that his current physicalism about phenomenal properties of experience owes a great deal to conceptual analysis, Jackson may not accord conceptual analysis its full due here. Broadly speaking, his physicalist conclusion rests on construing phenomenal concepts as more similar to “water” than to “square.” The grounds for maintaining that phenomenal concepts are more like “water” than like

“square” are familiar: there are no worlds in which squares have different essential properties, while there are worlds in which the watery stuff is not H₂O but, say, XYZ. Jackson claims that the ontology of phenomenal features can also vary across worlds and that even Cartesian dualism holds at some worlds (though not, of course, our own).

Even if it doesn't yield an exhaustive ontological story, conceptual analysis nevertheless constrains the ontological possibilities in a way that yields substantive information about “what the world is like.” A simpler case will add clarity here. Perhaps there are no worlds in which cats are robots. That is, perhaps our concept “cat” is such that, were we to discover that apparent cats are actually robots, we would be driven to eliminativism about cats. Jackson is neutral about this particular example, but he allows that there are some conditions under which eliminativism is required. (One sort of case he discusses is where the property which realizes a definitive causal role is excessively disjunctive and hence unfit to be a true *cause*.) Dualists, including Jackson in 1982, exploit this constraining power of conceptual analysis to argue that there are *no* worlds in which phenomenal experiences are purely physical. A purely physical phenomenal experience is, on this view, like a robotic cat: it is excluded by conceptual facts, in particular, facts about phenomenal knowledge. So long as conceptual analysis restricts the possibilities, as Jackson is even now committed to saying that it does, defending physicalism about the phenomenal requires demonstrating that our concept of phenomenal experiences doesn't rule out physicalism. Such a demonstration is necessary to steer a course between eliminativism and changing the topic. But a device which is absolutely necessary to evaluating the possibility that the world is *purely physical* surely tells us something important about “what the world is like.”

In the second half of the book, Jackson employs his analytic functionalism to argue for a primary quality view of color; to defend the claim that ethical properties are reducible to descriptive properties; and to outline a schema for matching particular ethical properties with descriptive reducing properties. He covers an impressive amount of ground here with characteristic rigor. In addition to their independent interest, these topical chapters strengthen his foregoing methodological claims. Highlighting the central role of conceptual analysis in arguments that proceed in an otherwise standard philosophical style, Jackson lends credence to his claim that conceptual analysis is pervasive in philosophy. Further, these discussions underscore how useful it is to lay out one's methodology explicitly, for the ongoing methodological commentary reveals the precise cost of rejecting Jackson's conclusions. This is surely a dialectical virtue and hence grounds for not only accuracy but also candor regarding methodology.

As in the argument for indispensability, Jackson's very success in establishing the pervasiveness of conceptual analysis provokes a question. If his opponents are practicing conceptual analysis, albeit clandestinely in some cases, what explains their differing results? One possible answer favorable to Jackson's project is this: insofar as they remain unaware that they are employing conceptual analysis, they risk applying it inconsistently or being disloyal to its results. This diagnosis surely applies to some of the arguments Jackson targets. But another diagnosis also seems apt: that Jackson and his opponents disagree in their assignments of relative weight to particular intuitions. The issue of how to assess the importance of particular intuitions, for comparative purposes, is complicated and murky; Jackson can hardly be faulted for choosing not to take it on in a book

of this scope. And it is evidence of his achievement that the questions it makes pressing are such difficult ones. Still, a gesture toward how we might approach this problem seems in order here.

This work is certain to be influential for years to come. Its contributions to philosophy are significant and wide ranging: it puts a heavy burden on those who would discount conceptual analysis; it presents a philosophically powerful methodology based on conceptual analysis; and it employs this methodology to advance particular stances regarding psychological properties, color, and ethical properties. Most important, in its eloquence and persuasiveness, Jackson's book promises to direct philosophers' attention to much-neglected metaphilosophical issues. Philosophy can only profit from Jackson's challenge—to achieve harmony between its methodological claims and its true practices.

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James, Susan. *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. Pp. 318. \$49.95 (cloth).

The operation of the emotions is an inescapable part of our human nature and its flourishing, a fact embraced by moral philosophers as diverse as Aristotle and Hume, but arguably resisted, or at least not well accommodated, in Kantian ethics and in the more demanding versions of consequentialism. Perhaps no philosophical epoch has been more preoccupied with the workings of the passions than the early-modern period, and, given the resurgence of interest in the emotions in recent moral philosophy, Susan James's scholarly and wide-ranging study of this comparatively underresearched area of seventeenth-century thought is most timely. Somewhat disappointingly for readers of *Ethics*, however, the book avoids a direct inquiry into the ethical character of emotion or its part in the good life (a topic James has surveyed elsewhere in her contribution to the recently published *Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998]). The present volume does nonetheless offer much of interest to those interested in what one might call the metaphysical and psychological background to such an ethical inquiry: we are taken carefully through the place of the passions in seventeenth-century interpretations of body and mind and given a detailed account of the kinds of role the passions were thought to play in reasoning and action.

James opens by stressing the curiously ambiguous character of the passions as perceived in the seventeenth century. On the one hand, they have a clear functionality, one consistent with their being part of our divinely bestowed nature: they conduce to our survival and basic comfort, and, on top of this, foster the attachments and aspirations that, as James aptly puts it "give texture" to our human lives (p. 10). But on the other hand, they are a sign of our fallen nature, "perturbations" (to use the Ciceronian term) which constantly threaten to disrupt the governance of reason and plunge us into folly and self-destruction. The paradox, couched in the predominantly theological mode that still conditioned most seventeenth-century thought on the topic, is that "God's benevolence in