Analysis and explication – traditional and contemporary approaches

Abstracts

Invited Talk

Why reduction is underrated

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The key idea behind reduction is a simple and familiar one: it's that there's more to things than meets the eye. Surprisingly, this simple idea provides the resources to block a number of notable anti-reductionist arguments: Mackie's argument from queerness against objective moral values, Kripke's Humphrey objection and its recent variants, and Jubien's objection from irrelevance against Lewisian modal realism.

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Quine and Carnap on explication

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Much fruitful metametaphysical work has proceeded by discussing the merits of different views' theoretical backdrops, especially by examining the methods that different approaches sanction. It is in this spirit that I will examine explication. This term is often applied without a specific intention, but I will be interested in two philosophers – Rudolf Carnap and W. V. Quine – for whom 'explication' means something with definite connotations.

Explication, according to Carnap, involves 'making more exact a vague or not quite exact concept used in everyday life or in an earlier stage of scientific or logical development' (Meaning & Necessity, §2). In his mature work Carnap sees this as a central philosophical method: faced with problematic

concepts, we seek ways to modify those concepts or, equivalently as far as Carnap is concerned, we introduce new concepts that resemble the old ones without their failings. Quine cites Carnap approvingly but makes informative observations of his own, e.g., about what explication is *not*:

> We do not claim to make clear and explicit what the users of the unclear expression had unconsciously in mind all along. We do not expose hidden meanings, as the words 'analysis' and 'explication' would suggest; we supply lacks. (*Word & Object*, §53)

This suggests that explication may compete with projects of analysis, reduction, elimination, and perhaps even grounding. One especially important feature of the method is that explication *need not assume uniqueness*; this reveals its potential for steering a course between metaphysical realism and anti-realism. This is historically interesting because both philosophers make statements suggesting such a position, and is philosophically interesting because renewed interest in Quine and Carnap has been inspired by concerns about the realism/anti-realism debate. Explication might be the locus of the problem with the popular view that Quine is the flagbearer of realism and Carnap of anti-realism.

Notwithstanding their commonalities, the two have important differences. Under the influence of his Principle of Tolerance, Carnap claims that 'the question whether [an explication] is right or wrong makes no good sense because there is no clear-cut answer' (*Logical Foundations of Probability*, 4). Taken with other remarks, this suggests that for Carnap an explication is dependent on one's purposes, which may change with the context. In contrast Quine stresses that 'when explication banishes a problem it does so by showing it to be... proceeding only from needless usages' (*Word & Object*, §53). This suggests a *unifying* role for Quinean explication, of arriving at a single theory that avoids unnecessary problems. Locating the key difference between Quine and Carnap in this contrast makes the debate between the two more subtle and interesting.

§1 of the paper explains the role explication takes in Carnap's work, identifying its features and some of his paradigm cases of explication, such as probability. §2 explores the same for Quine, exploring examples like the case of 'ordered pair'. §3 compares the features of explication in the two philosophers' work. Finally, §4 uses previous sections to identify how far the theoretical background is shared between Quine's and Carnap's explicative projects.

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Analysis, explication, and the nature of concepts

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Explication as introduced by Carnap has recently been rediscovered and advocated as a viable method for clarifying – or rather revising – philosophically interesting concepts. Some of the motivation for this seems to stem from criticism of traditional conceptual analysis – pertaining to issues like the reliability and significance of linguistic intuitions or the structure of mental representation. Curiously, a somewhat neglected question both in the debates about analysis and in the recently revived discussion of explication concerns the ontological status of concepts. The fact that this question is sometimes outright ignored and often bracketed or declared irrelevant is surprising, since we would, in principle, expect proposed methods of clarification to provide insights into what it is that is being clarified.

This paper addresses the ontological question about concepts as relating to methodological debates. I will discuss some of the implications of a subjectivist account of concepts for conceptual analysis and show what kind of framework a pragmatist (or 'cognitivist') alternative can provide for our analytic and explicatory practices. A pragmatist account of concepts is ontologically parsimonious, congenial to the normative character of explication, and offers a useful perspective on the problem of the 'shareability' of concepts.

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To what extent does Carnapian explication serve to clarify concepts?

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Carnapian explication (henceforth 'explication') is a method of replacing imprecise concepts ('explicanda') with more precise, fruitful ones ('explicata'), to facilitate theoretical inquiry. Explication is not *per se* a method of conceptual *clarification*, but conceptual *replacement*. This led Strawson to object that explication cannot clarify concepts, in the sense that:

> […] philosophical problems about the concepts used in non-scientific discourse cannot be solved by laying down the rules of use of exact and fruitful concepts in science. To do this last is not to solve the typical philosophical problem, but to change the subject. (1963: 506)

That is: a philosophical problem 'about' C cannot be solved by explicating C. In some cases, this looks right. If I demonstrate that RELIABILIST-KNOWLEDGE is more precise/fruitful than our everyday understanding of knowledge, I have not thereby solved scepticism. In other cases, things are not so obvious. For example, the IAU's explication of PLANET *does* plausibly solve the broadly philosophical problem of how we ought to taxonomise such celestial objects as Pluto. So: to what extent does explication serve to clarify concepts?

Maher (2007) and Schupbach (forthcoming) suggest that explications allow us to *argue by analogy*. Suppose there is some philosophical problem 'about' C. We explicate C, replacing it with C′, and show that the parallel problem 'about' C′ has solution S. Then, if relevant conditions hold (such as sufficient similarity between C and C′), we conclude that S holds for the original problem too. This sounds plausible, but cannot be the whole story: such arguments seem inappropriate in both the knowledge and planet cases above. Let us look in turn at kinds of cases where…

1. …the philosophical problem concerns our *ordinary judgements*. E.g. 'why do our ordinary knowledge-judgements allow us to ascribe knowledge on the street while leading to scepticism in the classroom?' In this case, explication can help us solve the problem in at least one sense: it can tell us how we ought to tidy up our judgements. But it leaves many other issues untouched, such as: What is the cause of the inconsistency?; Are some of our judgements false?; Does this show us to be irrational?; etc.

2. …the philosophical problem concerns that-to-which-C-refers. E.g. 'there is something we call knowledge; do we have any of it?' In this case, explication can help if we have good reason for thinking that reference is preserved. Maher and Schupbach's work fits in here, if we construe the 'relevant conditions holding' as reasons to think that reference is preserved. Additionally: explications may help determine what C refers to; explications may give reason to think we are in fact not referring to anything.

3. …the philosophical problem concerns how we ought to think about some phenomena. E.g. 'how should we taxonomise epistemic mental states, and are any taxa appropriately called "knowledge"?' In this case, explication seems exactly the right tool.

Depending on the case at hand, explication can clarify concepts to different extents or not at all. Keeping this clear will help us use explication to its strengths going forward.

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Invited Talk

The Problems of Philosophical Analysis

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Philosophical analysis was the central preoccupation of 20th-century analytic philosophy. In contemporary metaphilosophy, however, it faces a number of pressing problems. A problem that has received insufficient attention is that most extant accounts of philosophical analysis fail to accommodate various plausible constraints on what makes a philosophical analysis successful. As a remedy, I propose the concept grounding view of philosophical analysis. According to this view, successful philosophical analyses, e.g., of knowledge or free will, consist in necessary biconditionals that are constrained by grounding relations among the concepts involved.

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Invited Talk

Interpretive analysis and conceptual creativity

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Creativity is not a virtue that is often associated with analytic philosophy, especially where the conception of analysis that is assumed to be in play here is the decompositional one, according to which 'analysis' simply means breaking something down into its components. But this is not the only conception of analysis, nor indeed the conception that is most characteristic of analytic philosophy. What especially characterizes analytic philosophy, at least in the central strand that originates in the work of Frege and Russell, is interpretive analysis. Here creativity, and more specifically, conceptual

creativity, lies at the heart of what is going on, as I shall illustrate by reference to Cantor's introduction of the concept of a transfinite number, Frege's construal of concepts as functions, Russell's theory of descriptions, and Carnap's conception of explication.

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Explanation and analysis in the Philosophical Investigations

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In Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, we can find a number of remarks that could be seen as antithetical with classical philosophical analysis. There are passages seemingly rejecting the ideas of concept decomposition, regression to first principles, and semantic substitution. The criticism, I argue, is aimed at some idealizations that typically go hand in hand with the use of these methods in philosophical practice. This picture can be contrasted with Wittgenstein's pragmatist vision of semantic explanation (i.e. clarification of meaning). Explanations are portrayed as conversational tools situated in a context of use; they are successful in so far as they fulfill their purpose. There are, thus, no objective a priori criteria to judge their value. Whether an explanation is good or not in a given context depends on whether it works, and this depends on what it is used for by the agents involved, and how the agents judge its success for achieving that purpose. This notion of explanation, I argue, can inform a different attitude towards philosophical analysis. If we adopt a picture of philosophy as conversation, I argue, we can think of different philosophical methods as different types of explanations that can coexist insofar as they are useful, and as long as we can avoid the urge to sublimate them beyond our practices.

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Explication, elimination, or modelling: what to do with folk concepts?

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Scientific inquiry begins, in one way or another, by making use of pre-theoretical or folk concepts. Before we can formulate a proper scientific theory, we must first phrase questions about the world in terms of the concepts we have at hand. As science advances, however, these concepts become less adequate to systematize and classify the objects of our study.

One alternative is to replace old, unclear and ambiguous concepts by new, clearly defined concepts. This is what philosophers call *explication*. Ideally, the new concept (the *explicatum*) will have the same extension as the older one (the *explicandum*); in normal cases, however, it suffices that they apply to roughly the same objects (Carnap, 1947/1956). There are nevertheless concepts that, instead of being explicated, are eliminated. Elimination consists in banning the old concepts from science altogether, replacing them by other concepts that, even if they don't apply to the same objects, do a better job in our scientific theorizing. Famous examples of elimination are the cases of

phlogiston, caloric, and supralunar objects. In current debates, many concepts are at risk of elimination. For instance, in the realm of psychological concepts, these include the concept of concept (Machery, 2009), emotions (Griffiths, 1997), and even propositional attitudes in general (Churchland, 1981).

Arguments for explication or elimination of folk concepts claim that explicata or new concepts in general are necessary because they do not share important virtues that other scientific concepts have, such as projectibility and precision. Nevertheless, these arguments assume that folk concepts ought to do the work scientific concepts do in science, an assumption that I take to be misguided. Folk concepts, on their own, are constructed for very different purposes, and they do their work successfully outside of science.

As a consequence, I will argue, in order to understand the relation between folk concepts that arise before we construct scientific theories and the concepts scientific theories deploy, a new alternative is required. In my view, the relation can be formulated as one of *modelling*. Scientific concepts work as models based on folk concepts, without the latter being either unclear (thus leading to explication) or eliminable. This understanding of the transition from folk views to scientific theories has the advantage of not supposing that folk concepts are in need of clarification (i.e. explication) or that they should be eliminated because they fail in aims that they did not have in the first place. I draw on the case of emotions in particular to clarify how this understanding of folk concepts yields better research programmes than the strategies of explication and elimination.

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Explication and Conceptual Engineering:
Their role in philosophical methodology

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I outline a theory of what conceptual engineering is and how it relates to the rest of philosophy. One the view proposed, conceptual engineering should be considered one of the central fields of philosophy (on par with say epistemology, philosophy of mind, metaphysics and ethics), and is central to all philosophical theorising.