

## Conceptual Analysis: between the ‘A Priori Cart and the Empirical Horse’

### ABSTRACT

For logical positivism, philosophy could be only a priori and its only subject matter could therefore be the « concepts », or the logical relations among the “principles” employed in the sciences. Its only task could be “analysis”. This means that philosophy could not pronounce professionally on the actual acquisition and development of science, but only on what it called its “logic”. But it became quickly obvious that this way of seeing things confined philosophers to the ‘loneliness’ of the logical realm of analyticity. For all the fun was on the side of empirical investigations. Now the question is: how are we supposed to connect one to another, that is to say, the “logical/a priori” side with the “empirical/physical” side in order to obtain the alchemical compound: “logical-empiricism” or “a priori-physicalism”?

My aim in this paper is to suggest an analogy between the early “semantic physicalism”, as Stoljar (2010) calls it, on the one hand, and a priori physicalism (Jackson, 1998) on the other hand. Both have in common, I shall claim, a very acrobatic attempt to connect the precariousness of the “unhappy” subjective truths, as Blackburn (2009: 24) puts it, to the apriority of the “happy” objective truths.

Recently, S. Blackburn (2009:24) pointed out that a striking feature of philosophy is what we may call the “link” problem between facts or properties or stuff at an *unhappy* level, and facts or properties or stuff at a *happy* level. The unhappy level gives us discomfort because the facts or properties of this unhappy kind seem not to fit well with what we take ourselves to know about our natural or physical world. To avoid this discomfort, we need to place them in a world we like, which means relating them *happily*, to facts or properties at a happy level. According to Blackburn, a curious thing happens then: despite the fact that nowadays we have some very sophisticated conceptual tools like: the contingent a priori, a posteriori necessities, Ramsey sentences, counterparts, de se properties, higher-order properties, and two-dimensional modal logic, etc., yet, curiously enough, when the machinery grinds to a halt, the options seem to be left surprisingly close to where our great predecessors left them. That is to say: either we have God’s good pleasure to link them, which amounts to mysterianism, or we must find a priori or ‘analytic’ relations between the difficult stuff we

want to understand, such as the mind, and the familiar stuff we suppose we do understand here, the physical. Now, it is clear that for a logical empiricist as Carnap and a priori physicalist as Jackson (1998) the link between the unhappy to the happy level is not only orderly, but necessary, and it can be rationally grasped. It is a priori. In what follows, my strategy will be to argue that even the “analytic” method inevitably bears on a conceptual leap, i.e. a mysterious connecting link between the “happy” and the “unhappy” levels.

According to Carnap, the physical language is universal and inter-subjective. Of course, physicalism ought not to be understood as requiring psychology to concern itself only with physically describable situations. Rather, the thesis is that psychology may formulate its sentences as it pleases, these sentences will be translatable into physical language. How could that be? Very simple, argues Carnap: by replacing the material mode of speech (“P and Q describe the same state of affairs”.) with a formal one (“Q is deducible from P and P from Q.”). Now, suppose one wants to know how the passage from the ‘material’ to the ‘formal’ mode works. Imagine an anti-physicalist objecting: "My perception of red is presented only to me but not to my neighbors. However, in physicalism all sentences are intersubjective. Where do we locate the fact about the immutable separation of subjects from each other?" Here is Carnap’s ‘hocus pocus’ answer: The sentence "S is hungry" is synonymous with the sentence "The nervous system of S is in a hunger state". (Carnap 1932e/ 1987:468)

On the other hand, Jackson recently held that physicalists are committed to the a priori passage principle, the “view that for each true statement concerning our world, there is a statement in physical terms that *a priori* entails that statement.” (F. Jackson, 2003:155) According to him, conceptual analysis is the very business of addressing when and whether a story told in one vocabulary is made true by one told in some allegedly more fundamental vocabulary.

So what Jackson wants to do? He wants to relate (d) (an “unhappy truth”) to (a), a happy physical truth:

(d) 60 per cent of the earth is covered by water.

(a) 60 per cent of the earth is covered by H<sub>2</sub>O.

We will identify two conceptual leaps: the first one (Carnap’s leap) represents the passage from the unhappy material mode of speech to the happy formal one. The second one

(Jackson's leap) aims to connect the unhappy empirical fact (d) to the happy analytical truth (a) via the allegedly a priori (b) "Water is the stuff that plays the watery role".

We will argue that "semantic physicalism" and "a priori physicalism" have similar ambitions and that these ambitions fail.

## REFERENCES

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