

Introduction: *Eight Essays in Conceptual Analysis*

Abstract: This set of essays is a companion to the two volumes of *Descriptions Prescriptions, and the Limits of Knowledge*. The essays are valuable for synthesizing relationships among the chapters in the lead volumes.

Introduction

In *Descriptions Prescriptions, and the Limits of Knowledge* (DPLK), I define the concepts of 'description' and 'prescription' and argue that a 'description' can be knowable, while a 'prescription' is not knowable:

A '**description**' is an assertion that purports to express a *correspondence* (or a representation) of some state of affairs, where its correctness (or incorrectness) is independent of its acceptance (or non-acceptance) by particular persons.

A '**prescription**' is an assertion that purports to express a *stipulation* (or rule) upon a practice, where its correctness (or incorrectness) is dependent upon its acceptance (or non-acceptance) by particular persons.

The method of 'conceptual analysis' is used to investigate important philosophical concepts and incorporates 'the method of cases' as the practice of analyzing terms and concepts (e.g., 'knowledge,' 'justification,' 'truth,' 'existence,' 'necessity,' 'definition,' 'concept,' 'axiom,' 'art,' 'goodness') by examining and describing their normal use and the intentions behind them. The purpose of case studies is to defend a worldview theory (e.g., realism, anti-realism) with an explanation of the linguistic intuitions that support the theory. Case studies are similar to experiments in science. Just as experiments test scientific hypotheses, case studies are designed to test philosophical hypotheses.

Essay 1: A Predominately Externalist Definition of Knowledge

Most contemporary philosophers believe that a necessary and sufficient conditions definition of "knowledge" cannot be fruitful. This strong worldview makes this essay a tough sell. Despite this, I believe that a definition can be true, if it isn't assumed that knowledge (necessarily) exists. Instead, in response to the radical skeptic, the 'skeptical hypothesis' is conceded, epistemic closure is rejected, and it is *possible* that I have *no* knowledge whatsoever. But the PE definition shows how knowledge is *possible* and refutes the skeptic's claim that human knowledge is *impossible*.

Essay 2: The Methodology of Analytic Philosophy: Intuitions, Concepts, and Conceptual Analysis

This essay mirrors chapter nine in DPLK. It recognizes a distinction between ‘worldview intuitions’ and ‘linguistic intuitions’ as beliefs that motivate conceptual analyses. Since a theory cannot be constructed solely out of unbiased and neutral worldview intuitions, the analytic philosopher must provide a theory with hypotheses and examples that provide reasons to believe that a worldview is true (in a given domain).

Essay 3: A Theory of Metaethical Prescriptivism

Metaethical prescriptivism challenges expressivism as a non-cognitive theory. Expressivism assumes a ‘linguistic theory of reference’ while prescriptivism assumes a ‘speaker theory of reference.’ The descriptive-prescriptive distinction is new.

Essay 4: A Tripartite Theory of Definition

I hypothesize the following disjunctive definition for the concept of ‘definition’ as a natural kind entity. The definition is a ‘theoretic’ definition:

x is a **‘definition’** in a definiendum-to-definiens relationship if and only if it is (1) reportive, or (2) theoretic, or (3) stipulative; (3a) an initial naming assertion, or (3b) an abbreviation, or (3c) a precise formalization for practical, technical, or personal reasons.

Similar in content to that of P.T. Geach (1976), this definition is either *true* or *false* as a description of the nature of ‘definition.’ The challenge to anyone skeptical about this definition is to provide a single counter example.

Essay 5: Ambiguities in Speaker Reference

The overall claim made in DPLK is that analytic philosophy needs to reconsider the influence of mathematician Gottlob Frege upon the philosophy of language. Many principles of contemporary formal semantics are *false* (or should be used with caution). This essay makes the claim that ‘semantic reference’ doesn’t really exist unless it is stipulated by a formal model. A theory of ‘speaker reference’ is explained in some detail in the context of various case studies.

Essay 6 What are Propositions? Do We Have 'Attitudes' Toward Them?

Metaphysicians now have firm control of this important concept. Any thought that this concept is relevant and useful to ordinary persons will be strongly resisted. This essay is a portion from chapter two in DPLK (vol. 2) with the same title.

Essay 7 Questions for Experimental Philosophers: What is 'Art?'

This chapter is based on portions of chapter 8 (vol. 1) which is entitled 'How Can Aesthetic Judgments Be True or False?' I introduce a 'hybrid' definition of 'art' and suggest eight case studies (with questions) to experimental philosophers; and invite them to survey willing participants. This essay defends the methodology of conceptual analysis, and introduces a tentative definition of 'art.'

Essay 8 A Short History of Definition

Discussion largely involves a distinction between 'real' and 'nominal' definitions.

Analytic Philosophy as a Social Science

In the two volumes, a physicalist ontology and a 'social scientific' methodology are advocated. Topics: (1) a theoretical definition of 'knowledge,' (2) a conceptual analysis of the nature of language (natural and artificial), including a theory of 'definition,' (3) an examination of the nature of 'concepts' as physically instantiated kinds within our brains, and (4) the nature of the descriptive-prescriptive distinction and its applications. Philosophy should seek to be relevant to ordinary people, and moving to that goal, we should conceive of analytic philosophy as a social science.

This social scientific worldview implies that analytic philosophy should be withdrawn as a discipline among the Humanities. The Humanities are the disciplines that study aspects of human society and culture, including (1) foreign languages, (2) history, (3) language arts (literature, writing, oratory, rhetoric, poetry) and (4) the arts (painting, sculpture, photography, filmmaking, theater, music, dance). Analytic philosophy should *not* be included among these.

Conclusion

The concept of 'definition' needs greater attention. Since the writings of Frege and Russell, *logic* has been prioritized, and *definition* has been ignored. The absence of a theory of definition has allowed in philosophy an excess of artificial distinctions, stipulative definitions, and oftentimes *ad hoc* and obscure philosophical questions. Philosophers should cease writing complex papers attaining philosophical 'progress' (emulating physical science) and instead strive to get the *right answers* to the most basic questions, as economists have successfully done. Similar to how undergraduate courses in Economics are widely respected as practical and intellectually beneficial, philosophers should likewise seek to have the same relevant informative impact. A social scientific analytic philosophy is preferable to speculative metaphysics. Specialized technical interests should be given less attention. Greater attention should be placed upon core questions about knowledge, language, metaethics, mathematics, and aesthetics.