Chapter Ten

Descriptions, Prescriptions and the Limits of Knowledge

Abstract: The limits of human knowledge are summarized. Prescriptions, which are not knowable, include: (1) stipulative definitions, (2) the axioms, vocabulary, syntax, and inference rules in formal deductive systems, (3) 'sufficient evidence' assertions, and (4) ethical assertions. In contrast, descriptions that are knowable include (1) empirical statements, (2) true-in-a-language sentences and applied mathematical-deductive entailments, (3) reportive definitions, (4) theoretic definitions, (5) aesthetic assertions, and (6) social science theories. J.L. Austin's (1975) notion of a 'performative' utterance and the 'declarative-interrogative-imperative' distinction are discussed. Twenty-eight (28) philosophical questions are posed.

In this chapter, I summarize the limits of human knowledge. The definitions of 'description' and 'prescription' are repeated below:

> 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.

These definitions are intended to be objectively *true* theoretic definitions. A theoretic definition is correct (i.e., true) only if its definiens accurately describes the phenomena (e.g., object, entity) being defined. The descriptive-prescriptive distinction represents an *objective epistemic-semantic feature* of the world about what persons can *know* and *mean*. The major conclusion in this book is that empirical assertions are knowable (chapters one through four), while moral assertions are not knowable (chapter five).[1] The other chapters have focused on the role of prescriptions in other areas of discourse.

---

[1] To briefly summarize the first five chapters: Chapter one theorizes a predominately externalist (PE) definition of 'knowledge' that states the conditions for *when* knowledge is obtained (and when it is not obtained). Chapter two addresses radical skepticism and (the fact) that I cannot know that I-am-not-a-disembodied-brain-in-a-chemical-vat. Chapter three solves the skeptical regress-of-reasons problem, claiming that assertions of what constitutes 'sufficient evidence' to know **p**, terminates in a person-dependent *prescriptive* mode, but that this fact doesn't harm our ability to possess the necessary and sufficient conditions for having knowledge. Chapter four addresses Hume's problem of induction and concludes that persons can be 'personally justified' in believing that 'the past will resemble the future,' but cannot have a truth-connecting 'justified belief' about this proposition because there are no non-circular arguments to defend this belief. Chapter five introduces metaethical prescriptivism that maintains ethical assertions may be approved (or disapproved) by humans, but that they are neither true nor false.

In conjunction with the theoretical definitions of 'description' and 'prescription,' I suggest that the following definitions of 'objectivity' are stipulations that are consistent with the descriptive-prescriptive distinction, the correspondence theory of truth, and ordinary linguistic usage and belief:

> A description is **objectively true** if it expresses a correspondence (or a representation) of some state of affairs that is independent of its acceptance (or acknowledgment) by particular persons.
>
> A description is **objectively false** if it doesn't correspond to; or represent a state of affairs.

I contend that these stipulated formalized definitions are the best precise characterizations (i.e., explication) of our normal conception of 'objectivity.'

Prescriptions are Not Knowable

I. Stipulative Definitions Are Prescriptions

> A *'stipulative definition'* introduces a specialized definiens for a definiendum. This occurs in one of the following three contexts: (a) the initial naming of an entity where the entity is newly-discovered, newly-introduced, newly-created, or newly-renamed, or (b) in the notational abbreviation of one linguistic expression for another (meaningful) linguistic expression, or (c) in a precise formalization where a reportive definiendum-to-definiens relation is generally affirmed but a definiens alteration (or explication) is proposed for pragmatic, technical, or personal reasons. [2]

The tripartite theory of definition is a hypothesis about how persons can specify (or assert) the use of a linguistic symbol. In chapter six, it was concluded that stipulative definitions are *prescriptions*, and not descriptions as are ‘reportive’ and ‘theoretic’:

> A *'reportive definition'* (or 'lexical definition,' 'nominal definition') reports or describes the generally accepted or community equivalence between a definiendum and a definiens.
>
> A *'theoretic definition'* (or 'real definition,' 'natural definition') affirms the standard equivalence between a definiendum and a definiens, but represents an attempt to analyze the 'nature' or 'associated material conditions' of the entity being discussed.

---

[2] When discussing formal deductive models, some philosophers have stated that a model's *stipulative definitions* are *'true by convention'*. This locution can lead to a *serious misconception*. To believe that a 'stipulative definition' can be either *true* or *false* is a major epistemic error.

II. The Axioms and Definitions of Measurement Systems are Prescriptions

In chapter seven it was argued that the primitive symbols, definitions, axioms, grammar, and rules of inference, found in formal deductive systems are introduced as *prescriptions*. In chapters seven and nine (one and three, vol. 2), important metaphysical and semantic axioms (e.g., law of identity, law of bivalence, and compositionality) were interpreted as prescriptions. Deductive systems are often introduced with the purpose of measurement (e.g., physical space is measured in geometry, quantity in arithmetic, valid arguments in deductive logic). Whether one measurement system is better than others depend upon whether it helps us better understand or quantify the domain involved. [3]

The Role of Axioms and Definitions in Economics as Prescriptions

In chapter seven, a 'game formalism' theory of mathematics was proposed where the following definition of 'axiom' was proposed:

> An **'axiom'** is an independent foundational prescriptive assertion that underlies a set of stipulative definitions; including the vocabulary, grammar-syntax, and inference rules that measure a specified domain. Axioms cannot be deduced from other sentences in a formal system. An axiom is typically (but not always) adopted if it helps map (or represent) the physical world (or linguistic discourse) in a fruitful way.

With respect to the pragmatic purpose of measurement, it should also be observed that within the discipline of Economics, that semi-descriptive assumptions (viz. stipulations, postulates) also play a prominent role in theory construction. In responding to the question in the title of his essay "Are General Equilibrium Theories Explanatory?" (1984) Daniel M. Hausman presents eight 'lawlike' assertions behind general equilibrium theories, based upon the following definition of 'economic equilibrium':

---

[3] Evidence supporting the proposition that measurement systems are constructed by persons (and not discovered as objectively true) include the fact of alternative systems of measurement for identical domains. Three examples come to mind. That there evolved a 'metric system' using centimeters, decimeters, meters, and kilometers, and (at the same time) a 'weights and measurement system' using inches, feet, yards, and miles as standard units indicates that these systems have different (prescriptive) axioms and definitions. Similarly, that there is a Fahrenheit and Celsius scale for measuring temperature is evidence that the axioms that underlie these two systems are neither true nor false, nor contradict each other. In contemporary physics, assertions (within quantum mechanics) can be equally-well stated with an ontology of either 'particles' or 'waves.'

'Economic equilibrium' is a state of affairs where there is no excess demand: a state of affairs in which at the going prices nobody wants to go on exchanging.

From this stipulated fixed definiens concept, eight statements of an 'equilibrium theory' are described as the basis of neo-classical economics (p. 345):

(1) For any individual **S** and any two options **x** and **y**, one and only one of the following is true: **S** prefers **x** to **y**, A prefers **y** to **x**, **S** is indifferent between **y** and **x**.

(2) **S**'s preferences among options are transitive.

(3) **S** seeks to maximize his or her utility where the utility of an option **x** is greater than the utility of an option **y** for **S** and if and only if **S** prefers **x** to **y**. The utilities of options are equal just in case the agent is indifferent between them.

(4) If option **x** is acquiring commodity bundle **x'** and option **y** is acquiring commodity bundle **y'** and **y'** contains at least as much of the commodity as **x'** and more of at least one commodity, then all agents prefer **y** to **x**.

(5) The marginal utility of a commodity **c** to an agent **S** is a decreasing function of the quantity **c** that **S** has.

(6) When we increase any input into production, other things being equal, output increases, but, after a certain point, at a decreasing rate.

(7) Increasing all the inputs into production in the same proportion increases output by that proportion. The production set is weakly convex and additive.

(8) Entrepreneurs or firms attempt to maximize their profits.

Replacing any one of (1) – (8) with a non-equivalent generalization would count itself as a theory change. Most economists would concede (1) – (8) are not literally true (p. 356), and that these statements don't exhaust the 'laws' of microeconomics, but the above eight lawlike statements express the fundamentals of neo-classical economics (p. 346).[4]

[4] Hausman says that many people would say that (1) - (3) assert that people are rational and (1) - (4) assert that people are economically rational. He admits that this equilibrium theory is rough and incomplete, and states that "(7) and (8) are the most likely to be dropped or replaced by contrary generalizations, while revealed preference theory is supposed to supplant (1) – (5) … These characterizations of prevailing circumstances are not regarded by economists as discovered by or as asserted by their theory. They provide a sketch of the circumstances to which the theory is applied and are therefore crucial to the derivation of important theorems, but they are not themselves assertions of the theory. The term *'assumption,'* of which economists are perhaps overly fond, fits these *stipulations* well" (p. 346, italic add).

The lawlike assumptions found in an economic equilibrium theory are stipulated or *prescribed* as a set. Theories about rationality and consumer choice are the means for the measurement of certain economic and social phenomena. They are the means for making microeconomic policy decisions. Economists base their empirical research and 'welfare recommendations' upon these propositions of a general 'equilibrium theory.'[5]

III. 'Adequate Evidence' Assertions Are Prescriptions

A third kind of prescription are assertions of 'justification,' 'sufficiency,' or 'adequacy' of evidence in a person's claim to have knowledge. Personal justifications terminate on a person-dependent mode in the activity of justifying a belief. When **S** appeals to the background premises for believing a particular premise as part of a longer argument, a regress of reasons is terminated by *persons* who accept a given premise to be true without further questions or doubt. There are no objective criteria for determining when a regress should end. There are no objective weighing mechanisms to describe when given evidence is 'sufficient' for **S** to be 'justified' in believing **p**. Assertions that '**S** has presented sufficient premises for believing **p**' *prescribes* that there is no further need for inquiry about the truth of **p**. In these situations, it is believed that there is a negligible possibility that there is unconsidered evidence that might lead to genuine doubt that **p**.

IV. Normative Ethical and Value Assertions Are Prescriptions

Prescriptivism maintains that ethical assertions may be approved (or disapproved) by humans, but that they are neither true nor false. Any argument with an ethical 'ought' conclusion is always derived from a set of premises that includes at least one prescriptive (ought) assertion. A moral argument includes prescribed value(s) or ethical principle(s) in its premises, in addition to purported facts, to support a moral conclusion. Prescriptivists speak of normative conduct as being 'right' or 'wrong' without the pretense that there is something 'morally objective' that is 'beyond' the values endorsed by persons.

---

[5] 'Welfare' is a normative group resemblance concept. Is it best for governments to artificially stimulate an economy in order to obtain full employment? Should automation be feared as a job killer? Should a negative income tax be implemented to partially standardize transfer payments and help stabilize economic business cycles? Philosophers' failure to ascertain the nature of ethical assertions has hindered economists and policy makers from making innovative suggestions on how best to manage a free market economy.

The Limits of the Knowable

Given that there are several kinds of prescriptive assertions, a conclusion pertaining to the limits of knowledge, is that *prescriptive assertions are not true nor false, nor knowable*. In contrast, *a descriptive assertion is actually correct (i.e., true) and potentially knowable* only if its content corresponds to (or reflects) a state of affairs. The definition of knowledge and descriptive-prescriptive thesis do *not* endorse 'empiricism' (roughly, the theory that all knowledge is obtained by the five senses). Instead, a substantial amount of knowledge comes from understanding the intentions motivating natural and artificial languages, and not directly from sense experience.

Descriptions are Knowable

I. Empirical Assertions Are Descriptions

Statements about material affairs are the most common form of description. Sentences about empirical matters (e.g., 'I see a table,' 'Australia is located in the Southern Hemisphere,' or 'My knee hurts') are mundane and there is no question that they are descriptive in meaning and have an objective truth or falsity value in a context. Theories in the physical sciences involve some stipulations and prescriptive assertions, but the content of scientific empirical theories are mostly descriptive.

II. Mathematical True-in-a-Language Entailments Are Descriptions

True propositions of mathematics and symbolic logic are derived relative to the stipulated foundations (axioms, definitions, inference rules, grammar, and vocabulary) of a deductive system. The propositions that 'three is prime,' '7+5=12,' 'the sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180 degrees,' and 'Abraham Lincoln is Abraham Lincoln' are *true-in-a-language* necessities. Thus, when *applying* standard measurement systems, the truth of deduced statement (e.g., '141678 + 639465 = 781143') expresses a propositional statement that has a correctness *independent* of its acceptance (or non-acceptance) by particular persons. Mathematical propositions when applied to practical matters can be objectively true: If Sam has 1 marble and Suzie has 8 marbles, then they have 9 marbles in total.

III. & IV. Reportive and Theoretic Definitions Are Descriptions

These two categories of assertion have a linguistic entity (i.e., a definiendum) as their subject. Reportive definitions (truly or falsely) describe linguistic practice. A definiendum in a reportive definition is claimed to have a standard definiens in a given language or language community. Theoretic definitions purport to describe the nature of an entity or phenomena represented by a definiendum, with the intent to make the definiendum-to-definiens relationship a true one.

V. Aesthetic Assertions Are Descriptions

It may seem a little surprising, but in chapter eight, it was argued that another kind of descriptive assertion is that of aesthetic judgment. When a person states that 'Ariana Grande is the best contemporary female vocalist' or that 'the painting is ugly' or that *'The Addams Family* was a bad movie,' that person attributes a relation between her preferences (or values) as an existing mental state to an aesthetic item. A person is *describing* what she likes and dislikes about x. In most cases, we grant that persons can know what aesthetic experiences (truly) please them. Because there is some inter-subjective commonality of aesthetic value, prescriptive recommendations often follow from an aesthetic experience, e.g., whether a movie is worth seeing, or whether a kind of ice cream tastes good, and so on.

VI. Social Science Theories Are Descriptions

The social sciences include Anthropology, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Linguistics, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology, among others. Social sciences draw upon empirical methods and attempt to be objective, and to emulate the practices of the physical sciences. In the social sciences, scholars seek to describe expectations of how persons will behave on the basis of the beliefs and desires attributed to them. Social science theories often explain beliefs and behavior by rendering them intelligible. Models and theories attempt to simulate a world that explains human intentions. Empirical theses are additionally researched.

A 'Prescription' Exceeds the Explanatory Power of a 'Performative'

A 'prescription' supplants J.L. Austin's (1975) notion of a 'performative' utterance. Austin introduced the performative as a kind of assertion that isn't true or false, but is used to do something (to ask, to warn, to bequeath, to promise, to bet, to request, etc.). Austin's examples can be subsumed in terms of descriptions and prescriptions:

1) An 'interrogative' (e.g., 'Do you know where a gas station is?') is interpreted as the conjunction of a description and prescription: 'I do not know **x**' (*description)* and 'please tell me **x**' (*prescription)*.

2) With a 'warning' (e.g., 'Watch out!') a *prescription* is asserted, often accompanied by a *description* ('You'll get hit') about probable consequences of not heeding a warning.

3) In 'bequeathing' to assert 'I give and bequeath my wristwatch to my brother, after I die' is to *describe* one's wishes and *prescribe* to executors to abide by one's will.

4) The concept of a 'promise' is to sincerely *describe* one's intention to do something, and to *prescribe* to oneself to perform appropriate follow-up actions.

5) The 'solicitation of a bet' (e.g., 'I'll bet you $25 that the Green Bay Packers will win') *describes* a bettor's willingness to bet money on his belief (prediction) about the outcome of a sporting event and *prescribes* to the listener to accept the wager.

6) A 'request' (e.g., 'Would you please close the door?') is a *prescription* that a person should aid the speaker and implicitly *describes* that the speaker desires (or has value) in having the door closed.

7) Whether a sentence is being used to describe or prescribe (or both) is relative to a social context. For example, a cashier at a restaurant may assert to a patron that 'Your sandwich is ready' which *describes* the fact of the completion of the order and *prescribes* patron pick-up.

8) The assertion 'In order to turn off the lights you must flip the switch' is ambiguous without context. The speaker may be informing the listener about how to turn off the lights in a room (i.e., *describing*) or the speaker may be requesting the listener to turn off the lights (i.e., *prescribing*).

A Comparison with the Declarative-Interrogative-Imperative Distinction

The descriptive-prescriptive distinction about speaker meaning can be contrasted with what Sadock and Zwicky (1985) describe as the three basic *sentence types* that have similar functions (of speaker meaning) in most natural languages:

> These are the declarative, interrogative, and imperative. At first approximation, these three types can be described as follows: The *declarative* is used for making announcements, stating conclusions, making claims, relating stories and so on. The *interrogative* elicits a verbal response from the addressee. It is used principally to gain information. The *imperative* indicates the speaker's desire to influence future events. It is of service in making requests, giving orders, making suggestions and the like (p. 160, italics added).

One obvious problem with this functional classification of speaker 'sentence' meaning is that 'imperatives' are often asserted as 'declaratives' (e.g., 'It is wrong to do x'). These two types of sentences don't seem mutually exclusive.[6]

Making Philosophy Relevant

Many people believe that philosophy is irrelevant to ordinary persons. On the contrary, it is suggested here that analytic conceptual analysis about core topics can indeed be of interest and relevance to non-specialists. In this book, I suggest a focus on these philosophical questions:

(1) What is knowledge? Can 'knowledge' be defined?

(2) What is 'relevance'? Can this term be defined? Does this term have more than one sense?

(3) What is 'justification'? Can this term be defined? Does this term have more than one sense?

---

[6] Baggini and Fosl in *The Philosopher's Toolkit* (2003, p. 4) assert that for a *sentence* to serve as a *premise* in a deductive argument, it must make a claim that is either *true or false*. In critical response, this restriction on what counts as a 'premise' *falsely* prohibits the use of a prescriptive premise in a valid (but not sound) deductive argument. See chapter five for details. (Note: Baggini and Fosl add 'exclamation' as a fourth kind of sentence to Sadock & Zwicky's 'declarative-interrogative-imperative' distinction).

(4) If I know **p**, do I know that all counter-possibilities are false? If I know **p**, do I *know* that I know **p**? Can I know that I'm not a brain-in-a-vat? Can I know that there exists an external world?

(5) Is it possible to generally define what counts as 'positive,' 'undermining,' and 'defeating' evidence, by stipulating a technically formalized definiens?[7]

(6) With a single lottery ticket, can I *know* that I won't win the lottery?

(7) What is it to have 'sufficiently strong evidence' to believe (or know) **p**?

(8) How is an epistemic regress stopped, where an inquisitor continually questions (in a regress) the evidence one offers to support a given belief?

(9) Is it known that the method of induction is a reliable mode of reasoning? Are there relevant reasons for knowing that induction will remain a reliable mode of reasoning? (This is Hume's Problem of Induction).

---

[7] 'Evidence' for p is based upon:

1) (a) S's background beliefs and S's interpretation of p: The extent to which e is evidence for/against p depends on S's background beliefs and knowledge. E.g. to be able to see spots on a person's face as evidence of measles depends on background knowledge (e.g. a physician, or mother, or someone completely unfamiliar with skin rashes). (b) Two individuals who hold different background beliefs/theories might disagree about how strong e1 confirms a given theory, or about whether e1 is evidence for confirming the theory at all. (c) A person's world-view intuitions (including linguistic) can limit agreement to what e supports p.
2) Strength of evidence helps determine S's degree of belief. The quality and quantity of evidence warrant S's personal justification for a belief p. S's personal (and normative) standards of caution/risk in a context, determine what evidence is sufficient.
3) S's psychological status has some influence upon S's evaluation of evidence. For example, S's self-confidence for assessing a given p, depends upon S's background beliefs and psychological temperament. S's natural intelligence, capacities, dispositions, and concern for self-consistency also contribute to what propositions are accepted as evidence for p.

Stipulated axioms:

If e is evidence *for* p, then e makes it more likely that p is true.
If e is evidence *against* p, then e makes it less likely that p is true.

(10) With respect to human values, are these values 'objective' or 'subjective'? Are there 'objective intrinsic goods?' Are there 'moral properties?' Can 'goodness' be identified in terms of non-moral properties or intrinsic objective properties? Are there 'moral truths?' Is there an objective and true morality?

(11) What is the difference between an assertion that is expressed as a 'description' and an assertion expressed as a 'prescription'? Can these terms be theoretically defined?

(12) Is the theory of 'cultural relativism' correct? Should we always act in conformity with our society's norms? Should we just act according to our own value system? Should we be tolerant of existing (or new) practices?

(13) Are there sound deductive arguments (involving exclusively true premises) that can prove that a given conduct is right or wrong?

(14) What is a 'definition'? Are there different kinds of definitions?

(15) What is a 'concept'? Are there different kinds of concepts?

(16) What are the relations between a 'definition' and a 'concept'?

(17) What is the structure of mathematics? What is the *epistemic status* of 'axioms,' 'definitions,' and 'inference rules' in mathematics? Can we *know* that certain axioms, definitions, and inference rules are *true*? Do mathematical entities (e.g., squares, numbers, and ratios) *exist*? And if so, in what sense (and how) do they exist? What is the source of mathematical truth? Is it based on a set of 'precise formal stipulations' or is it based upon an '*a priori* real and objective order of abstract mind-independent entities?' How can mathematical propositions (e.g., 2+2 = 4) be 'objectively true'?

(18) When **S** says, 'this painting is beautiful,' what is this sentence about? Is the speaker reporting that the *painting* is beautiful? Or does the speaker report her *subjective experience* when viewing the painting?

(19) Can aesthetic judgments be true or false? Or are aesthetic judgments entirely subjective, and not true nor false? Are some persons' aesthetic tastes better than others? If aesthetic judgments are subjective, how can we assert something beyond our own personal points of view? What is 'art'?

(20) What is the proper methodology for analytic philosophy? The search for metaphysical *a priori* truths? The formulation of deductive arguments? Should philosophy be mathematized? What is deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning? Should philosophy rely on ‘intuitions’ and ‘conceptual analysis?’

(21) What is an ‘intuition?’ What is the difference between ‘worldview intuitions’ and ‘linguistic intuitions?’

(22) What is ‘conceptual analysis?’

(23) Do linguistic entities literally ‘refer’ to entities (i.e., to things, extensions)? To understand the meaning of a sentence does one need to understand the compositional structure of the sentence, and know under what conditions the sentence would be true? Is the principle of compositionality empirically true?

(24) What is the nature of ‘speaker reference’? Does a speaker’s referent depend on a speaker’s intentions?

(25) What is a ‘proposition’? Do we have ‘attitudes’ towards propositions? Can propositions be either ‘descriptive’ or ‘prescriptive’ in intent with a speaker’s meaning?

(26) Can ‘philosophical metaphysics’ really investigate the nature of reality? Can metaphysicians identify the nature, constitution, and structure of *all that there is?* Are there *a priori* conceptual truths? Does a discourse that develops a conceptual framework involving the notions of ‘object,’ ‘existence,’ ‘identity,’ ‘property,’ ‘universals,’ ‘particulars,’ ‘relations,’ ‘necessity,’ ‘similarity,’ ‘dissimilarity,’ ‘possible worlds,’ ‘temporality,’ ‘persistence,’ and ‘causation,’ really viable? Are ‘possible worlds’ models formulated in metaphysics and semantics informative?

(27) What does the concept of ‘necessity’ involve? Metaphysicians claim that it is a feature of ‘propositions,’ and that propositions can be said to be possible, necessary, impossible, or contingent. Metaphysicians seek to understand the nature of ‘metaphysical necessity.’ But doesn’t the term ‘necessity’ have different senses? For example, what are differences between ‘causal necessity,’ ‘deductive necessity,’ and ‘conceptual necessity?’ Is there really such a thing as ‘metaphysical necessity? Is metaphysics *really* the ‘science of the possible’?

(28) What exists? Three recognized answers:

(1) The question 'what exists' is asked relative to specialized disciplines: The astronomer asks whether there exist 'black holes?' The biologist asks what kinds of 'anti-bodies' exist? Archaeologists ask whether the lost city of El Dorado exists? The ordinary sense of 'existence' is context-relative according to an inquirer's interests. What 'exists' is postulated by the different physical sciences (e.g., electrons, galaxies), mathematics (e.g., numbers, points), social sciences (e.g., equilibrium, inflation), fiction (e.g., Superman), and pragmatic stipulations (e.g., tall students). There is *no true metaphysics* about what *'really' exists.*

(2) With regard to what is the *'fundamental existent'*, it might be that *physical (or material) entities* are the primary existent from which all other entities are composed of. *Physicalism* is the doctrine that *only material entities exist*, and that any other entities are constituted or emanate from physical entities. One definition of 'existence' is that '**x** exists if and only if **x** belongs to the space-time-causal system that is our world' (Bruce Aune, 1985, p. 35). When applied to

the physiology of humans, 'physicalism' can be *adopted* as the view that mental states (e.g., different kinds of concepts, beliefs, desires, values, and intentions) are *located* as physical states.

(3) With regard to what is the *'fundamental existent'*, it is *God* that is the primary (supernatural) existent from which all other entities are created and closely watches over us. This is *'theism'* and it is a view that is very widely held.

This final question about 'existence' with respect to 'physicalism' and 'theism' is important. Theists maintain that the prophets that they follow are infallible purveyors of moral law. The moral views of theists are typically strong and rigidly held. For example, the abortion debate is strongly fueled by the side maintaining the objective existence of moral truth, and that as followers of God (or other deity) that their beliefs are true. Stephen Prothero (2010) surveys eight rival religions that are the glue to certain societies and cultures. Organized religions clearly have many more followers than does secular analytic philosophy. Should analytic philosophy strive to have more impact on society?

Conclusion

In this book, a physicalist ontology and a social scientific methodology have been advocated. In the overview, basic questions of philosophy have been answered with (1) a theoretical definition of 'knowledge,' (2) a conceptual analysis of the nature of human language (both 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 relevant applications.

Philosophers, if they wish to become relevant (and employable) should be able to discuss the 28 questions outlined above and teach these debates to students (e.g., in universities, community colleges). A less specialized practice of analytic philosophy is needed within the university setting. Like Economics courses, which are regarded as practical and beneficial, philosophers should likewise seek to have the same relevant informative impact. Philosophers should give up the search for philosophical 'progress' (emulating physical science) and instead strive to get the *right answers* to the most basic questions, as economists have successfully done with their social scientific theories.