

The Proper Province of Philosophy: Conceptual Analysis and Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

The practice of conceptual analysis has undergone a revival in recent years. Although the extent of its role in philosophy is controversial, many now accept that conceptual analysis has at least some role to play. Granting this, I consider the relevance of empirical investigation to conceptual analysis. I do so by contrasting an extreme position (anti-empirical conceptual analysis) with a more moderate position (non-empirical conceptual analysis). I argue that anti-empirical conceptual analysis is not a viable position because it has no means for resolving conceptual disputes that arise between seemingly competent speakers of the language. This is illustrated by considering one such dispute that has been pressed by a prominent advocate of anti-empirical conceptual analysis: Bennett and Hacker (2003) assert that psychological predicates only logically apply to whole living animals, but many scientists and philosophers use the terms more broadly. I argue that to resolve such disputes we need to empirically investigate the common understanding of the terms at issue. I then show how this can be done by presenting the results of three studies concerning the application of "calculates" to computers.

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