

How to Turn from Language Back to Things in Themselves*

Daniel von Wachter**

Archived on 7 October, 2009

Abstract

Although many philosophers today have turned away slightly from the linguistic turn, their methods, e.g. conceptual analysis, are still linguistic. These methods lead to false results. The right method in philosophy, like in other disciplines, is to try to perceive the object and to collect and weigh evidence. We must turn back to things in themselves.

1 The linguistic turn and the ontic return

There has been a linguistic turn, and there has been an ontic return, but I shall argue that the ontic return should go much further. I shall first illustrate the kind of philosophical method which is still prevalent today and which I believe to lead to false

*This is a pre-print of an article that shall appear in: *The Ontic Return*, ed. James Ford, London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009.

**International Academy of Philosophy, Santiago de Chile, <http://von-wachter.de>, email: epost@ABC.de (replace 'ABC' by 'von-wachter')

results. This is the method of conceptual analysis, paraphrasing, or of ontological commitment. I call it the linguistic or the semantic method. To illustrate these methods I shall first present an example where they are at work and show how they lead to false results: Roderick Chisholm's theory of agent causation. Contrasting it with these methods I shall then present a non-linguistic, ontological method for philosophy. After the total rejection of metaphysics in logical positivism, there were within the movement of linguistic philosophy some turns towards metaphysics, in particular Gustav Bergmann's reconstructionism and Peter Strawson's descriptive and revisionary metaphysics. I shall criticise these for still being linguistic or conceptual. Finally, I shall consider Frank Jackson's recent defence of conceptual analysis and argue that conceptual analysis cannot fulfil the task he ascribes to it. The motto I shall defend in this article is, in the words of Edmund Husserl, '**Zurück zu den Sachen selbst!**' ('**Back to things in themselves!**'). (Husserl 1901, 7; 1913, § 19, p. 35)

2 The linguistic method, illustrated by Chisholm's theory of agent causation

We can best understand a philosophical method when we see it applied to a clear philosophical question. Let us consider Roderick Chisholm's solution of the problem of free will. What is a free action, and how is it related to the causal processes in and around the body? If an action is the result of a causal process which began before the agent even thought about the action, then we are inclined to say that the action is not free. So one might think that being the result of a (deterministic or indeterministic) causal process is not the only way how an event can come about. (As argued in Wachter 2003 and Wachter 2009*a*.) Perhaps agents

bring about some events directly, so that they do not have preceding causes. Agents can make some events pop up. I call such events *choice events*. One might say then that there are two kinds of causation: ‘event causation’ and ‘agent causation’. In agent causation a person is the cause of an event by bringing it about directly in an action so that it has no preceding cause.

Roderick Chisholm, defending the possibility and existence of free will, argued that there are two kinds of causation, event causation and agent causation. By an *undertaking* he means a mental event of the type which occurs when a man tries to do something, regardless of whether he succeeds. Having introduced the concept of someone undertaking something, Chisholm defines the concept of *someone contributing causally to something*:

- S contributes causally at t to p =Df. Either
- (a) S does something at t that contributes causally to p, or
 - (b) there is a q such that S undertakes q at t and S-undertaking-q is p, or
 - (c) there is an r such that S does something at t that contributes causally to r, and p is that state of affairs which is S doing something that contributes causally to r. (Chisholm 1976, p. 205)

So if you raise your arm, you are contributing causally to your arm’s rising. Also, if you try to raise your arm, you are contributing causally to your trying to raise your arm. Thus far Chisholm’s theory seems to be in essence identical to what I said about agent causation above. Chisholm takes undertakings, such as your trying to raise your arm, to be events. These events have the agent as cause. This suggests that Chisholm’s undertakings are what I call choice events.

However, Chisholm’s view is different. I had described a choice event as the event through which the action process in a free

action is initiated. Choice events have no event cause and are brought about by the agent directly. Chisholm says nothing like this about undertakings. He does not say that undertakings have no event cause, and he does not say that they are brought about by the agent directly. He explicitly allows for the possibility of an undertaking being the result of a deterministic process. If, and only if, an undertaking is not the result of a deterministic process, according to Chisholm, it is a free undertaking.

Consider the case where an undertaking is the result of a deterministic process. Assume your raising your arm was caused by nothing but earlier events, such as brain states. Surely, contra Chisholm, **there is no reason then to postulate an extra kind of causation.** Surely the full truth is that your arm's rising was caused by certain preceding events, such as brain events. There was only event causation involved. In this scenario every event has an event as cause; it is the result of a causal process. But Chisholm would still say that there is another kind of causation than event causation. (Likewise Swinburne 1994, 56-62.)

Chisholm's account is unsatisfying also in another respect. Consider that an undertaking is not the result of a deterministic process. Does the undertaking then deserve to be called 'free'? I do not think so. The trouble with Chisholm's account of free action is that it fails to entail that the agent has *control* over which undertaking occurs. The idea behind Chisholm's definition that an undertaking is free if and only if it is not the result of a deterministic process, may be that if the undertaking is not the result of a deterministic process then it is up to the agent. But this does not follow. **An undertaking that is not the result of a deterministic process could be a matter of chance, i.e. it could be the result of an indeterministic process. In that case the agent would not have any more control over its occurrence than in the case where it is the result of a deterministic process.** One might want to reply that an

undertaking is not the sort of thing which can occur by chance, but this reply is hardly available to Chisholm. As becomes clear in his definition of a free undertaking as one which is not the result of a deterministic process, he allows for the possibility of an undertaking which is the result of a deterministic process. And if undertakings are the sort of things which can be the result of deterministic processes, then there is no reason to think that they cannot occur by chance, i.e. be the result of an indeterministic process.

Chisholm is wrong when he postulates that unfree actions involve agent causation as a kind of causation different from event causation, and in his account of free action his account of agent causation is too weak. His characterisation of agent causation fails to entail that the agent has control over the undertaking. I am discussing this here in order to explain why Chisholm comes to such false conclusions. **He is using a linguistic method.** He writes:

The philosophical question is not – or at least it shouldn't be – the question whether or not there is 'agent causation'. The philosophical question should be, rather, the question whether 'agent causation' is reducible to 'event causation'. Thus, for example, if we have good reason for believing that Jones did kill his uncle, then the philosophical question about Jones as cause would be: **Can we express the statement 'Jones killed his uncle' without loss of meaning into a set of statements in which only events are said to be causes and in which Jones himself is not said to be the source of any activity?** And can we do this without being left with any residue of agent causation – that is, without being left with some such statement as 'Jones raised his arm' wherein Jones once again

plays the role of cause or partial cause of a certain event? (Chisholm 1978, 622f, quoted in O'Connor 2000, 64, my emph.)

Chisholm's claim that there is agent causation is not really a claim about action but about certain *statements describing actions*. It is a child of the linguistic turn. Chisholm's reason for saying that also unfree actions involve agent causation is *not* that he believes that there is a special kind of causation involved, namely bringing about by choice, and that agents can initiate causal processes. His reason is rather that the statement 'Jones killed his uncle' cannot be transformed into a statement in which 'only events are said to be causes and in which Jones himself is not said to be the source of any activity' (cf. Chisholm 1976, 199). **By saying that 'There are two kinds of causation: event causation and agent causation' or 'There is irreducible agent causation' Chisholm means that 'John killed his uncle' cannot be transformed into non-agent talk.** We shall see below that this kind of new-speak was introduced by Gustav Bergmann (1953). I see no good reason for using these sentences in this sense. They are less misleadingly used for claiming that there is besides event causation another way how an event can come about.

Moreover, investigating statements in this way is the wrong method for finding out whether there is agent causation. That the statement 'John killed his uncle' cannot be transformed into a statement of a different type does neither mean nor entail that John's action involved a kind of causation different from event causation. Chisholm's mistake is that he tries to answer a metaphysical question just by answering semantic questions.

3 The non-linguistic, non-semantic, ontological method

3.1 Existence questions

By contrast with Chisholm's method, let me sketch an alternative philosophical method, one which uses much less conceptual, linguistic, or semantic analysis. It has the aim to **produce true descriptions of what there is**, and analysing concepts is neither a method for this nor a central aim in itself. Sometimes philosophy has to address existence questions, because some existence questions are philosophical, and sometimes existence questions arise in philosophy. Examples are 'Is there agent causation?', 'Are there universals?', 'Is there a God?', 'Does the past or the future exist, or only what is present?', 'Are there objective duties?', 'Are there possible worlds?', 'Do we have a soul?', or 'Are there causal connections?' Some of these may be unclear or meaningless or may have no true answer, but there surely are some philosophical existence questions. Against the assumption that they are to be answered by some linguistic method, such as conceptual analysis, ontological commitment, or paraphrasing or reconstruction statements, I suggest that for philosophical existence questions the same method is to be used than for other existence questions: **try to perceive the thing and collect and weigh evidence for and against its existence.**

3.2 Defining the subject term of an existence question

Before we can find the answer to an existence question, we have to define, spell out, or develop the subject concept. We have to define what we are looking for. Here some kind of conceptual analysis indeed has its place in philosophy. Examine how the term, e.g. 'free action', is used usually. Define the meaning of

the term in accordance with this, or make clear that you use it differently. If the term is used with various meanings or only with an unclear meaning, define the one for which you want to pursue the existence question. If the term is a technical term and is thus not taken from ordinary language or is used differently than in ordinary language, then that meaning has to be defined.

Often we have to *construe* a concept. For example, the ordinary concept ‘free’ is not detailed and precise enough for a philosophical investigation and the word is used differently on different occasions. To investigate whether we have free will, we first have to develop a more detailed description of what free actions would be like. (Like the one I sketched above.) On the basis of this we can then spell out what would constitute evidence for the existence of free actions. Only then we can investigate properly whether there are free actions.

Often several concepts can be distinguished. The existence question then has to be addressed for each of them. For example, you can distinguish, spell out, and define (a) what compatibilists call a free action, (b) an action which is the result of an indeterministic process, and (c) an action where the agent initiates a causal process. For each of these conceptions then one question is whether the term ‘free’ is used adequately for this, and another question is whether there exists something falling under the concept.

In my view these activities involve not just the analysis of *concepts* but describing possible things and insight into modal connections, which are not somehow residing in the concept and which you do not see by looking just at the concept. The phenomenologists called this ‘Wesensschau’ (Reinach 1913). But even if that is true, answering existence questions requires defining the concept in question. So analysing or developing concepts is a part of the right method for answering existence questions in philosophy or elsewhere.

If the subject concept of an existence claim is defined properly, then we have an idea of the difference between a world with the things in question and a world without such things. If it is defined what we are looking for, then we also know whether we would find the thing by investigating language or concepts, or whether we have to look elsewhere. If ‘agent causation’ in ‘Is there agent causation?’ is defined properly, then it is defined whether we find the answer by examining whether statements of one type can be translated into sentences of a certain other type. The answer can only be found in this way if ‘agent causation’ is a kind of concept or statement. Perhaps some philosophers disagree with this because they really believe that we can find whether agents can initiate causal processes by investigating statements and concepts. At any rate, it has to be clarified whether the question is one about concepts or statements or about other things, for example the things falling under the concept. Questions must not be phrased so that they sound as if they are about things in themselves if they are meant to be only about language and concepts. If a question is about statements and concepts, then it should be phrased so that this becomes clear. If the question is whether we can express a statement like ‘Jones killed his uncle’ without loss of meaning into a set of statements in which only events are said to be causes, then it should be phrased thus, and not as ‘Is there agent causation?’ or ‘Is agent causation reducible to event causation?’. It may turn out for some questions then that there is no true answer for them or that they are uninteresting.

In my view, in ‘analytic metaphysics’ today many questions for which much ink is consumed are unclear in this respect. They have no true answer, or only one in terms of how certain words are used. They are, as Carnap (1928) called certain *other* questions, ‘Scheinprobleme’, pseudoproblems. I cannot demonstrate this here but only want to suggest the following rule. **If we raise or address a question in philosophy, we should always ask:**

**Is there a true answer to this question to be discovered?
Is the only answer to this question one about how we use
certain words?**

3.3 Trying to perceive the thing

When we have defined the subject term of the existence question, then we can start to look for the answer. What I am denying here is that existence questions in philosophy are to be answered solely through conceptual analysis or paraphrasing statements. As in other areas too, in philosophy existence questions are to be answered by trying to perceive the thing or by collecting and weighing evidence. If you are not an empiricist, then you will not exclude in principle experience or perception other than sense perception. Perhaps there is perception other than sense perception but it supports only synthetic modal claims and no existential claims. But perhaps there is non-sensual perception supporting existence claims too, for example perceptual experiences of God (Swinburne 2004, ch. 13) or intuitions about moral duties (Huemer 2006).

The assumption here is not that one can know something about the world without any experience at all, but that there are other kinds of experience – in the sense of epistemic contact with the world – than sense experience. Max Scheler therefore used the term ‘phenomenological experience’ or ‘a priori experience’. (Scheler 1916, 68-71) I suggest that one should not exclude any kind of perception at this point. If there is no perception other than sense perception, then empiricism is true. But its truth should not be presupposed when addressing an existence question.

By claiming that philosophical existence questions are to be answered, like others too, by trying to perceive the thing and by weighing evidence, I am objecting to the view that philosophy makes no claims about the world but only about language or con-

cepts and to the view that philosophy does not use evidence. An example of the latter view is Gustav Bergmann's: 'no philosophical question worthy of the name is ever settled by experimental or, for that matter, experiential evidence. Things are what they are. In some sense philosophy is, therefore, verbal or linguistic.'¹ So Bergmann postulates that philosophy cannot or must not use any experience. This is wrong if there are questions about the world which are philosophical and to whose answer philosophy can contribute. It may be that for some philosophical questions other disciplines can contribute too to answering them. Presumably neuroscience and experimental psychology can conduct some experiments which contribute to answering the question whether we have free will. But besides the task of spelling out and defining what a free action would be, philosophy has the task, for example, to evaluate our inner experience of freedom. More obvious still is that philosophy can investigate, considering also experience and evidence, whether there are objective moral duties, whether we have a soul, and whether there is a God.

3.4 Weighing evidence

By 'evidence' here I mean neither, as Edmund Husserl and Franz von Brentano meant by the German word 'Evidenz', introspection leading to absolute certainty, nor sense experience. I also do not only mean experiments, but experiments are a kind of evidence. By evidence I mean something which makes the hypothesis more probable. As Brown's fingerprints on the safe are evidence for Brown's being the thief or as the universe's having a beginning is evidence for the existence of God. To ask for evidence for

¹Bergmann 1953, § 2, p. 149. The opposite view is expressed by Donald C. Williams: 'Metaphysics is the thoroughly empirical science. Every item of experience must be an exemplar and test case for the categories of analytical ontology.' (1953, 3)

the existence of X is to ask whether things look as if there are X s. Do things look more as we should expect them to look on the assumption that there are X s than as we should expect them to look on the assumption that there are no X s? Do some of the other things we know indicate that there are X s? E is evidence for H if, and only if, E is more probable on the assumption that H than on the assumption that not- H . Presumably this is only the case if H provides an explanation for E , be it a causal one or some other kind of explanation (as discussed in Swoyer 1999). For example, the fine-tuning of the universe is evidence for the existence of God because on the assumption that there is no God the fine-tuning is very improbable and on the assumption that there is a God it is more probable because God could cause a fine-tuned Big Bang and has reason to do so. The method of weighing evidence in order to answer a metaphysical existence question has been spelled out in detail by (Swinburne 2004, chs. 1-4) discussing the question whether there is a God.

To illustrate this, let us apply this to a metaphysical question, namely ‘Are there causal connections?’. To say that there are no causal connections is to say that the universe is as David Lewis’s view of ‘Humean Supervenience’ has it: ‘all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another.’ (Lewis 1986, ix) Nothing pushes or brings about something else. One item of evidence for the existence of causal connections is the order in the universe and predictability of many events. We can predict so many events: earth quakes, the movement of a billiard ball after being pushed by another one, eclipses, and the movement of planets. On the assumption that there are no causal connections we should expect that we cannot predict anything. Anything would be equally likely to follow anything. A billiard ball would be equally likely to carry on rolling or to stop or to vanish completely. The existence of causal connections can, if combined with certain other

assumptions, explain the predictability of many events. Inbuilt into states of the universe is a tendency to carry on in a certain way so that one event may lead to a certain later event and the latter can be predicted if one knows about the former and knows what sort of tendencies there are in such situations and thus that events of this kind lead to events of the latter kind if nothing intervenes. (As I have argued in (Wachter 2009b) and (Wachter 2009a).)

Hume failed to consider whether the predictability of many events is evidence for the existence of causal connections. The Arabic philosopher Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) also denied the existence of causal connections, but he did consider it and offered an alternative explanation: God brings about every event directly, and does so in a predictable way because he likes order and because he wants the universe to be predictable for us. That it at least more plausible than the Humean view which leaves predictability entirely unexplained.

The assumption of causal connections could be supported not only by evidence but also by perceptions. When you hold an apple in you hand you feel it being drawn downwards. This one can take to be a perceptual experience of a causal connection of a certain type.

This method of investigating whether there are causal connections is very different from the methods usually used today, which are still linguistic. Following a linguistic method, causal statements are paraphrased and reductive definitions of ‘cause’ are developed which do not mention any bringing about any more and which are therefore somehow taken to support the view that there are no causal connections. Already David Hume’s developed a reductive concept of causation and then apparently took this to support the view that there are no causal connections (although Galen Strawson (1989) has argued that Hume did not really deny the existence of causal connections). The step from having de-

veloped a reductive definition of ‘cause’ (and an account of the origin of the concept) to the conclusion that there are no causal connections is wrong. Instead, the right method is to try to perceive causal connections and, after spelling out what causal connections could be like, to collect and weigh the evidence.

3.5 Describing actual and possible things and scenarios

Answering existence questions is of course not the only task of philosophy. In particular there are two further big tasks: 1. Describing actual and possible things and scenarios; 2. answering questions about synthetic modal truths, such as ‘Can one be guilty for something one did not do freely?’. Let me comment briefly on both.

That philosophy has the task of describing is not uncontroversial. Positivists, for example, would say that only the natural sciences and history describe things and that philosophy only analyses language or concepts. Against this I suggest that there are things which natural scientists are not trained to describe. Concerning causation, for example, philosophy has the task to describe causation. Not only describe the concept of causation but causation. Not only describe the content of the concept ‘cause’ but the object. Describe what is there or what is going in cases about which we truly say that one event caused another. Of course, philosophy can and needs to describe only certain aspects of this, but still the aim is to describe. For this the philosopher has to look at the things in themselves, not only at thoughts, language, concepts, or texts. A good philosopher is only one who is good at looking at and describing the things and not only sophisticated and clever in analysing and shuffling statements. Besides describing actual things, philosophy has the task to de-

scribe possible things.² For example, philosophy should not only try to describe our actions as they are but also describe what kind of actions or agents would be possible, for example perfectly free agents, agents with limited free will, and non-rational free agents. This can then be followed by an investigation about the existence of such things as described above.

3.6 Synthetic modal truths

Describing possible things leads to the task of answering modal questions. Many assume that we find the answers to modal questions by investigating concepts. This view is an inheritance from logical positivism. In its original form this doctrine claimed that synthetic statements are contingent and analytic statements are necessary and reflect only the rules for using the words. (Schlick 1930a) (Ayer 1936) I have defended elsewhere (Wachter 2009c and 2009a, ch. 3) the contrary view that modal questions are to be answered by synthetic modal statements. Therefore also with regard to this task, in the philosophical method proposed here I suggest to turn away from language back to things in themselves. Modal questions arise because with the predicates we have we can form descriptions of things arbitrarily. But some of these descriptions might not describe something possible. For every two predicates, 'A' and 'B', (which are not defined in terms of each other) the question arises whether the existence of something which is A and B is possible. There is no good reason for presuming that all properties, i.e. the objects of predicates, are combinable. 'There

² The Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden attributed to 'ontology' the task of investigating what is possible and investigating 'forms', e.g. the form of a substance and thus what it would be to be a substance, and to 'metaphysics' the task of investigating what actually exists. (Ingarden 1964, §§ 5-6) This usage of 'ontology' and 'metaphysics' is too unusual to be practical, but it illustrates well the difference between these tasks.

is something that is A and B' may be consistent, i.e. without contradiction, but describe something impossible. Then this is a synthetic modal truth: 'It is impossible that there is something which is A and B'. Even if all properties were combinable, there would be synthetic modal truths, for example 'All properties are combinable', or for example 'It is possible that there is something which is A and B'. We must distinguish clearly being *consistent* from being *possible*, and being *analytic* from being *necessary*. Whether a statement is consistent we know through investigating concepts and words, but modal truths we know through modal intuitions. As modal truths are about the world, modal intuition is a way of looking at things in themselves.

4 The linguistic turn and some attempts to turn back to things in themselves

4.1 Gustav Bergmann's reconstructionism

In the beginning, the philosophers of the linguistic turn claimed that all metaphysical questions are meaningless (Carnap 1932) and that problems of metaphysics are pseudoproblems (Carnap 1928). This includes questions about free will (Schlick 1930b), God (Carnap 1929; Ayer 1936, ch. 6), the soul, and 'all philosophy of value and normative theory' (Carnap 1932, 61). Among the logical positivists, however, there were also some who did not say that metaphysics is meaningless or impossible. The *reconstructionists*, led by Gustav Bergmann, wanted to 'reconstruct [...] the old metaphysics' 'in the new style' (1953, 147). They entirely agreed with the other positivists that the old metaphysical questions are meaningless. They too wanted to be *philosophers through language* and *philosophize by means of language*. (1953, 146) But Bergmann believed that one can 'philosophize [...]

about the world' 'by means of language'. (1960, 602) For him, philosophical discourse is 'ordinary or [...] commonsensical discourse about an ideal language' (1953, 151). An 'ideal language' is 'a schema rather than a language actually be spoken' (1950, 84). But why should discourse about this ideal language help us to find out something about the world? Because, Bergmann believes, **the categorial features of the world reflect themselves in the structural properties of the ideal language. The ideal language 'is a picture of the world'** (1960, 608).

Here is an example of such a reconstruction: 'Consider the thesis of classical nominalism that there are no universals. Given the linguistic turn it becomes the assertion that the ideal language contains no undefined descriptive signs except proper names.' (Bergmann 1953, 155) Bergmann finds the old question 'Are there universals?' meaningless but nevertheless finds it wrong 'to dismiss it out of hand, as some positivists unfortunately do' (157). He thinks that there is a real question which can also be expressed by 'Are there universals?', namely the question 'Does the ideal language contain undefined descriptive signs except proper names?'

My first comment on this is that if a question is replaced by another one, this has to be made explicit. If the question is 'Does the ideal language contain undefined descriptive signs except proper names?' it should be expressed with these words and not with 'Are there universals?'. If the question is phrased as 'Are there universals?' then 'universals' has to be defined so that it is clear whether they are, like electrons and rabbits, something that would exist even if there were no language.

Secondly, in either case, if the question is about 'the categorial features of the world' (1950, 84) or if it is about language, one has to be critical *whether there is a true answer to it*. If it is about language-independent universals, the possibility has to be considered that there is no structure of the world parallel to the

subject-predicate structure of our language. If it is about language, then it has to be examined whether there is such a thing as an ‘ideal language’ which can be investigated and about which the truth in question can be discovered.

Thirdly, is the ideal language derived from our language? If it is not derived from our language, then it has to be construed. But in order to construe it so that, as Bergmann assumes, ‘it is a *picture* of the world’ (1960, 608) and reflects ‘the categorial features of the world’ (1950, 84), one first needs knowledge about these features of the world. But then the investigation of the ideal language is no method to discover the structure of the world. If, however, the ideal language is derived from our language, then the question arises whether and why our language reflects the categorial structure of the world. **Why should the ‘structural properties’ of our language be parallel to the most basic structure of the world?** (1950, 84) We would need reasons for this assumption. In either case, contrary to Bergmann’s postulate that philosophy must not use experience or evidence, we need evidence concerning the structure of the world. Either evidence in order to discover the structure of the world in order to be able to construe an ideal language, or evidence for the assumption that the structures of our language are parallel to the most basic structure of the world.

4.2 Peter Strawson’s distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics

Peter Strawson’s book *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (1959) made it acceptable again in Oxford to confess to do metaphysics. But Strawson was still a linguistic philosopher. However, he introduced also, for a project which he himself did not want to pursue, the notion ‘revisionary metaphysics’, which many take to designate an alternative to linguistic metaphysics.

‘Descriptive metaphysics’, which Strawson himself pursued, ‘describes the structure of our thought about the world’ (1959, 9). This is a linguistic project with a certain Kantian flavour. The alternative to this, one should think, is to describe the world. But not so for Strawson. Also ‘revisionary metaphysics’, as Strawson defines it, remains within the paradigm of the linguistic turn.

Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure. (Strawson 1959, 9)

Revisionary metaphysics tries to produce a better structure of our thought about the world, so it is still concerned only with language, concepts, and thought! It is not concerned with things in themselves. This illustrates that the linguistic turn was not only widespread, but that the alternative is even forgotten. As neither ‘descriptive metaphysics’ nor ‘revisionary metaphysics’, because of Strawson’s definition, is suitable, we even do not have a handy name for it. ‘Non-linguistic philosophy’, ‘empirical metaphysics’, or ‘ontological metaphysics’ can be used, but more suitable would be to use just ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’ and to call the reconstructionist project ‘semantics’, ‘philosophical logic’, or ‘semantology’.

5 Frank Jackson’s ‘entry by entailment’ thesis

Frank Jackson has offered a clear explication and defence of a linguistic method in his book *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis* (2000). Let us consider his method to examine physicalism. He defines physicalism not simply as the claim that there is nothing non-physical, because he takes

the task of metaphysics not to be drawing up lists of what exists (p. 4). Instead he defines it in terms of a certain description of the world being in a certain sense complete.

Physicalism is rather the claim that if you duplicate our world in all physical respects and stop right there, you duplicate it in all respects; it says that [...] Any world which is a minimal physical duplicate of our world is a duplicate simpliciter of our world [...] where a minimal physical duplicate is what you get if you ‘stop right there.’ (Jackson 2000, 12)

Let us call this the fixing thesis or the supervenience thesis. It does not rule out the mere possibility of non-physical things (p. 11f), but it claims that the psychological events which exist are nothing over and above the physical. The idea behind the supervenience thesis is that if physicalism is true, then the mental, whose existence cannot be denied, is in some sense a surface phenomenon whose basis are the brain events, comparable perhaps to how liquidity is a surface phenomenon whose basis are the molecules and the forces between them, or comparable to the actions of a computer program, whose basis are the micro-physical events. In some sense it is true to say that the actions of the computer program are nothing over and above the events at the micro level. If the mental is a surface phenomenon, then whenever particles are arranged in a certain (very complicated) way, mental phenomena arise. So the physical fixes the mental. This is expressed in Jackson’s definition of physicalism. This way he can formulate an alternative to simply saying ‘There is nothing non-physical’ or ‘There is something non-physical’. He avoids saying that there is nothing mental, which is obviously false, by saying that the physical is in a certain sense more fundamental.³

³In my view, the supervenience thesis is not sufficient for physicalism. Maybe the supervenience thesis is true but wherever there are psychological

Jacksons central thesis in his defence of conceptual analysis is the ‘entry by entailment’ thesis:

The one and only way of having a place in an account told in some set of preferred terms is by being entailed by that account. (Jackson 2000, 5)

The physicalist holds that a description of the world in physical terms *entails* a description of everything psychological. Thus the description in physical terms is ‘a complete story about the nature of our world’ (9). ‘The world is entirely physical in nature, [...] it is nothing but, or nothing over and above, the physical world, [...] and a full inventory of the instantiated physical properties and relations would be a full inventory *simpliciter*.’

Jackson clarifies that by ‘A entails B’ here he does not mean that B can be derived from A by thinking alone, a priori. He means ‘the necessary truth-preserving notion – call it “necessary determination” or “fixing” if you prefer’ (25). That the physical entails the mental only means that it is impossible that there exists a perfect copy of your body which does not give rise to a mental life as you have it.

What has this to do with conceptual analysis? Jacksons claims that conceptual analysis is the method to examine physicalism because

conceptual analysis is the very business of addressing when and whether a story told in one vocabulary is

events there is some non-physical stuff involved. Maybe it is forced into being by the physical. In that case the physical would fix the psychological, but there would be non-physical things. In other areas there are yet more plausible cases where B is fixed through A but B is something over and above A. Maybe it is impossible that God would not create a universe and that, because this world is the best possible world, He would create a different universe. In that case the universe would supervene on God but nevertheless clearly would be something over and above God.

made true by one told in some allegedly more fundamental vocabulary. (Jackson 2000, 28)

Jackson defends this by pointing out that conceptual analysis uses ‘intuitions about possible cases’ (31) in order to determine when certain words are applied to something. In order to know whether Ks are nothing over and above Js, we need ‘some conception of what counts as a K, and what counts as a J’ (31). He says himself that he is attributing only a ‘modest role’ to conceptual analysis:

The role is that of addressing the question of what to say about matters described in one set of terms given a story about matters in another set of terms. Conceptual analysis is not being given a role in determining the fundamental nature of our world; it is, rather being given a central role in determining what to say in less fundamental terms given an account of the world stated in more fundamental terms. (Jackson 2000, 44)

Let me point out that according to what Jackson says this is a limited role, and that it is in fact even more limited than he thinks.

First, it is of course true that for investigating a thesis like physicalism we need to know how physical terms and how psychological terms are used. But this is a long way from finding out whether the physical necessitates the psychological. Jackson seems to assume that modal truths are known through conceptual investigations. This presupposes the positivist view that modal truths are about how words are used, about ‘what counts as a K, and what counts as a J’ (31). I agree that to find out this is a matter of what may well be called conceptual analysis. You can find

out by conceptual analysis that a married man does not count as a bachelor, that by calling something knowledge one claims that it is true but does not claim that it is infallible, and that only something which has the same micro-structure as our water counts as water. Positivism taught that modal truths are about this and that there are no other modal truths. Positivism claimed this, against the phenomenologists, because other modal truths would be about the world and perhaps would be known in other ways than through sense experience, and positivism wanted to rescue the doctrine that there is no knowledge about the world which does not come through sense experience. I have argued elsewhere that logical positivism led us to misunderstand modal claims and that modal truths are found neither by investigating ‘what counts as a K’ nor by investigating which statements are self-contradictory. (Wachter 2009a,c) Let me here just try to make plausible the claim that whether the physical necessitates the psychological cannot be found out through conceptual analysis.

In brief: even if the psychological description of the world could be derived a priori, through thinking alone, from the physical description, this would not be a matter of what counts as a K and thus it would not be know through conceptual analysis. As it in fact cannot be derived through thinking alone, it is even clearer that it cannot be known through conceptual analysis. Let me illustrate this with an example of an a priori derivation:

From (G) ‘Brown has guilt for having killed Smith’ we can derive in some sense by thinking alone (F) ‘Brown killed Smith freely’ because we have a clear modal intuition that one cannot be guilty for something one did not do freely. I believe that this modal truth is synthetic. It is not contradictory to say that ‘Brown was determined to kill Smith’ *and* ‘Brown has guilt for having killed Smith’. The concept of being free is not a part of the concept of being guilty. The concept of a bachelor, for

example, is a composed concept: it is composed of being a man and being unmarried. By contrast, the concept of being guilty is not a composed concept. If being free were a part of it, then we would have a concept which is just like the concept of being guilty except that it is neutral about being free. This would be the other component of the composed concept. We would have an idea of somebody such that the only reason why it is not true to say that he is guilty is that he was not free. But we have no such concept, because such a thing seems impossible to us. If you take away being unmarried from being a bachelor, something possible remains: a man. But from being guilty you cannot take away being free. Therefore I suggest that for deriving (F) from (G) one needs to know more than what *counts as* being guilty. It is misleading to say that the derivation can be made through conceptual analysis because this suggests that (F) and (G) are linked through a definition, as 'being unmarried' and 'being a man' is linked in the concept 'bachelor'.

Likewise, even if the psychological description of the world could be derived through thinking alone from the physical description, this would not be discovered by conceptual analysis alone. Conceptual analysis discovers the rules for applying physical and psychological terms. It discovers to what kind of objects we apply which terms, but if certain psychological terms necessarily applied to everything to which certain physical terms applied, this would be a fact over and above the rules of language. A word is linked by a rule of language to a concept, under which the things fall to which the word applies. But if 'Nothing can be A without being B' is true, then this is not a rule of language but a fact about the things over and above the rules which link 'A' and 'B' to certain concepts. It is a (synthetic) modal fact. (If 'There can be something that is A and B' were true, this would be a synthetic modal truth too.) That 'jealousy' applies to people with a certain state of mind is a rule of language. That 'brain

state so-and-so' applies to a certain kind of brain state is also a rule of language. But if it is impossible that there is a man to whom 'has brain state so-and-so' but not 'is jealous' applies, then this is not itself a rule of language and it does not follow from the rules of language. It is about the *objects* of the words. It is a modal connection. It is not a mere matter of what counts as a K, and what counts as a J, and therefore cannot be discovered by conceptual analysis alone.

As the psychological description of the world cannot be derived from the physical description by thinking alone, this is even clearer. As many have argued,⁴ from no description of you in physical terms one can derive by thinking alone what you think and feel. I agree with Jackson that this does not defeat physicalism. (Wachter 2009d) But if the physical did fix the mental, this could not be known through thinking alone and not through knowing all rules of language and thus not through 'conceptual analysis' in any adequate sense.

Jackson, however, claims that the physicalist 'is committed to the in principle deducibility of the psychological from the physical' (83). This claim becomes less surprising if we understand what he means. He considers these three statements:

(2) H₂O covers most of the Earth;

⁴For example, Richard Swinburne writes: 'No description of the public physical world entails that when you shine a certain light, I will have a blue image; or when you prick me with a needle, I will feel pain' (Swinburne 1997, 315). John Searle writes: 'No description of the third-person, objective, physiological facts would convey the subjective, first-person character of pain, simply because the first-person features are different from the third-person features' (Searle 1992, 117). David Chalmers makes the same point by arguing that there is no contradiction in the description of a zombie: there is no contradiction in the description of the situation where there is besides me 'someone or something physically identical to me (or to any other conscious being), but lacking conscious experiences altogether' (Chalmers 1996, 94).

- (2a) H₂O is the watery stuff of our acquaintance;
(3) Therefore, water covers most of the Earth. (Jackson 2000, 82)

Jackson admits that ‘the passage from (2) to (3) is a posteriori’ (82). He just means that ‘the passage from (2) together with (2a) to (3) is a priori’. That is true, but not what philosophers usually mean when they say that psychological descriptions are a priori derivable from physical descriptions. Of course, from physical descriptions *together with statements of identity between mental events and physical events* psychological descriptions would be derivable a priori, but the question is whether they are derivable without such identity statements or whether such identity statements, or statements claiming that certain physical events give rise to certain psychological events, can be derived.

Physicalism can only be defended by defending such statements. A first step towards defending physicalism would be to argue that from what we know about psychological events and what we know about physical events, we cannot rule out that such statements are true. A second step would be to provide evidence for the truth of such statements. Their truth cannot be discovered by conceptual analysis alone, i.e. by investigating ‘what counts as a K, and what counts as a J’. To discover them we would have to look at things in themselves.

I conclude that Jackson has not shown that conceptual analysis can discover the truth of supervenience claims and thus is a central method of philosophy. All conceptual analysis can reveal is ‘what counts as a K, and what counts as a J’. That is very important in philosophy. For example, it can reveal that the term ‘know’ is used in order to say about a statement, among other things, that it is true and that, as Gettier has shown, the person had some contact with the object. But for most philosophical

questions we need more or other methods. Conceptual analysis cannot discover what exists, cannot discover what is possible, and cannot produce true descriptions of the objects of philosophical research. For this we need to turn back to things in themselves.

References

- Al-Ghazali. 'The Incoherence of Philosophers (tahfut al-falasifa)'. In: *Averroes' Tahafut al-tahafut (The incoherence of the incoherence)*. Trans. by S.A. Kamali. Lahore: <http://ghazali.org>.
- Ayer, Alfred Jules (1936). *Language, Truth and Logic*. Penguin, 1990. 206 pp.
- Bergmann, Gustav (1950). 'A Note on Ontology'. In: *Collected Works Vol. I*. Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag, pp. 84–88.
- (1953). 'Logical Positivism, Language, and the Reconstruction of Metaphysics'. In: *Collected Works Vol. I*. Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag, 145–192, <http://www.hist-analytic.org/BergmannMLP.htm>.
 - (1960). 'Strawson's Ontology'. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 57, pp. 601–622.
- Carnap, Rudolf (1929). 'Von Gott und Seele. Scheinfragen in Metaphysik und Theologie'. In: *Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie und andere metaphysikkritische Schriften*. Hamburg: Meiner, pp. 49–62.
- (1932). 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language (transl. from German)'. In: *Logical Positivism*. Ed. by A.J. Ayer. The Free Press, pp. 60–81.
 - (2004). *Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie und andere metaphysikkritische Schriften*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Chalmers, David J. (1996). *The Conscious Mind*. Oxford UP.
- Chisholm, Roderick (1976). 'The Agent as Cause'. In: *Action Theory*. Ed. by M. Brand and D. Walton. Dordrecht: Reidel, pp. 199–211.
- (1978). 'Replies'. In: *Philosophia* 8, pp. 620–636.
- Huemer, Michael (2006). *Ethical Intuitionism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Husserl, Edmund (1901). *Logische Untersuchungen, Zweiter Theil, Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*. Halle: Niemeyer.
- (1913). *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie; Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phäno-*

- menologie*. Vol. 1. Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Ingarden, Roman (1964). *Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt I: Existentialontologie*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Jackson, Frank (2000). *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford UP.
- Lewis, David K. (1986). *Philosophical Papers II*. Oxford UP.
- O'Connor, Timothy (2000). *Persons and Causes*. Oxford UP.
- Reinach, Adolf (1913). 'Concerning Phenomenology (transl. from German)'. Trans. by Dallas Willard. In: *The Personalist* 50 (1969), 194–221, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/printable.asp?artid=21>.
- Scheler, Max (1916). *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Werthethik*. Bern, München: Francke Verlag.
- Schlick, Moritz (1930a). 'Gibt es ein materiales Apriori?' In: *Gesammelte Aufsätze: 1926-1936*. Wien: Gerold, 20–30, <http://von-wachter.de/texte/schlick-mat-apriori.htm>.
- (1930b). 'Wann ist der Mensch verantwortlich?' In: *Fragen der Ethik*. Frankfurt, pp. 155–166.
- Searle, John R. (1992). *The Rediscovery of the Mind*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Strawson, Galen (1989). *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Strawson, Peter F. (1959). *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Methuen.
- Swinburne, Richard (1986). *The Evolution of the Soul*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (1994). *The Christian God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (2004). *The Existence of God (Second Edition)*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Swoyer, Chris (1999). 'How Ontology Might Be Possible: Explanation and Inference in Metaphysics'. In: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 23, pp. 100–131.
- Wachter, Daniel von (2003). 'Free Agents as Cause'. In: *On Human Persons*. Ed. by K. Petrus. Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 183–194, <http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/1949/>.
- (2009a). *Die kausale Struktur der Welt: Eine philosophische Untersuchung über Verursachung, Naturgesetze, freie Handlungen, Möglichkeit und Gottes kausale Rolle in der Welt*. Freiburg: Alber.

- Wachter, Daniel von (2009*b*). 'The Tendency Theory of Causation'. In: <http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/10628/>, Preprint.
- (2009*c*). 'What is Possible?' In: <http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/10629/>, Preprint.
 - (2009*d*). 'What Kind of Modality Does the Materialist Need for His Supervenience Claim?' In: *Irreducibly Conscious: Selected Papers on Consciousness*. Ed. by A. Batthyany A. Elitzur. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, pp. 15–32.
- Williams, Donald C. (1953). 'On the Elements of Being'. In: *Review of Metaphysics* 7, 3–18 and 171–192, <http://www.hist-analytic.org/WILLIAMS3.htm>.