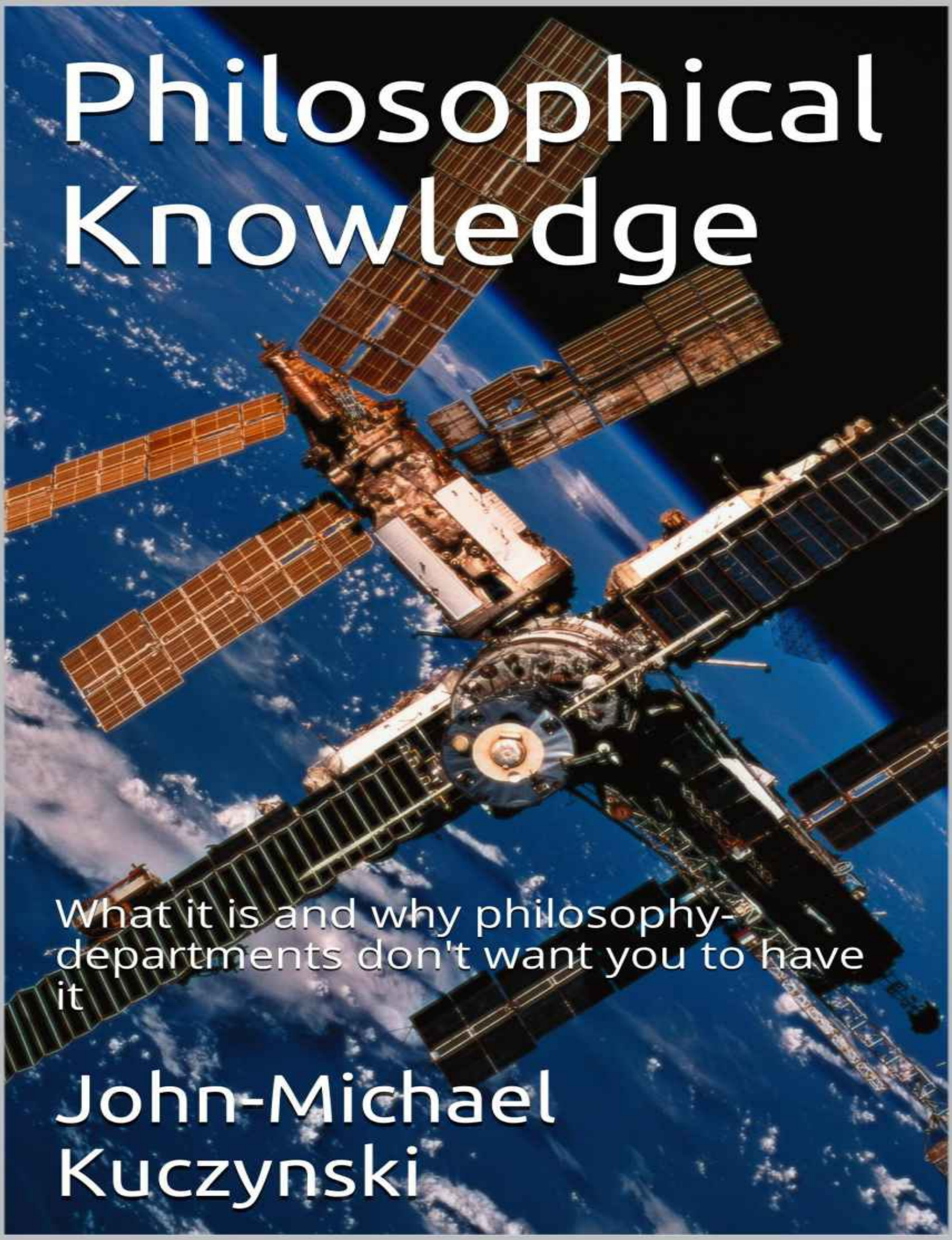
Philosophical Knowledge



What it is and why philosophy-departments don't want you to have it

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1.0 Philosophy as providing the justification for the empirically unjustifiable assumptions on which empirical science depends

2.0 The main confusion underlying empiricism

3.0 That it is self-defeating to deny the existence of philosophical truth (or truth in general)

4.0 How Psychological and Sociological Factors Thwart Philosophical Progress

1.0 Philosophy as providing the justification for the empirically unjustifiable assumptions on which empirical science depends

An *empirical*[1] discipline is one whose findings, when justified, are justified by their consistency with *sensory observation*. Biology is an empirical discipline; so is physics.

Any given empirical discipline makes assumptions that cannot be justified *by* that discipline or, indeed, by *any* empirical discipline. For example, when investigating the external world, and thus when doing physics or biology, one must assume that one's senses give one accurate information about it. For if our sensory experiences turned out to be hallucinations, then any hypotheses based thereupon would be spurious.

But this assumption cannot *itself* be given an empirical justification. More plainly, observation cannot tell you that it itself is a source of accurate information. Witnesses cannot self-corroborate. Thus, a physicist could not coherently attempt to provide experimental support for his belief that his senses are accurate. For it is only *through* his senses that he can know whether those experiments were even conducted, as opposed to merely dreamt, or what their outcomes were, supposing that they were in fact conducted.

Of course, *to the extent* that we are able to determine to what degree, if any, this or that particular sensory experience is veridical, we do so on the basis of other sensory experiences. But when judging that, last night at 4:00 am (sleep-time), I wasn't really in the presence of a talking cow, I am assuming the veridicality of the experiences with which my cow-experiences fail to cohere. In general our sensory experiences can provide only a *relative* justification for the judgments we make about this or that specific perception: *relative* to the assumption that those experiences are typically accurate, inferences can be made as to the degree of accuracy of this or that particular perception. But we cannot legitimately assume that our sense perceptions are

accurate when trying to show that sense-perception is a legitimate source of information about the external world.

So, since the hypotheses generated by physics are based on sensory experiences, and therefore presuppose that such experiences are typically accurate, physics cannot possibly justify that presupposition, and neither, for the very same reason, can any other empirical discipline. Therefore, unless that presupposition can be justified, we know nothing about the external world, and, as a result, all of the empirical sciences crumble. It is the task, not of the scientist, but of the *meta*-scientist---of the philosopher, in other words---to provide that justification.

The assumption that our senses are a viable source of information about the external world is but one of many assumptions on which empirical knowledge rests but for which no empirical justification can be provided and for which, therefore, a philosophical justification must be provided. It is the purpose of this book to identify the most important of these assumptions and to provide the requisite philosophical justifications for them.

2.0 The main confusion underlying empiricism

Philosophy is regarded with more suspicion than most other disciplines. One reason for this is that it is a non-empirical discipline. But that is not the only reason. Mathematics is a non-empirical discipline. But it isn't regarded with suspicion. Why this double standard?

First of all, because of the close connections of mathematics to empirical disciplines such as physics, people often assume that, like physics,

mathematics must be empirical. Also, the importance of some branches of mathematics to scientific and technological innovation makes it clear that, even if mathematics *is* non-empirical, it's unwise to question its methods. Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth.

But there is another reason why, despite it's being quite as non-empirical as philosophy, mathematics is erroneously seen as empirical and why, as a result, it isn't the object of the same overt hostility and suspicion as philosophy, which, unlike mathematics, *is* seen for the non-empirical discipline that it is.

For obvious reasons, people tend to think that it is through visual observation of figures on chalk-boards (or some such) that one learns geometry and that, given any branch of mathematics, the same thing *mutatis mutandis* is true of the way in which one learns the truths belonging to it.

This reasoning embodies a confusion that has stymied intellectual progress for centuries. The message borne by a perception, or any other mental representation, is known as its "content." One way in which sense-perceptions can add to what we know is by transmitting their contents to us. I see a dog running towards me, and I know on that basis that, indeed, there is a dog running towards me. Here what I learned from my sense perception coincided with the content of that very perception.

But there is a very different way in which sense perception can add, or at least help to add, to what one knows. A sense perception may *trigger* ratiocinative processes that yield knowledge of truths that were not part of that perception's content.[2] Many truths learned in this way couldn't *possibly* be any part of any perception's content. An illustration is in order.

You see figures on a blackboard that vaguely resemble circles,

triangles, etc. These sense perceptions help you learn that:

> (BH)[3] The area of Euclidean triangle is ½ *bh*.

Those visual perceptions directly apprise you of various *non*-mathematical facts (e.g., that there is a blackboard nearby on which there are various markings). Those perceptions do not themselves *transmit* BH to you. So how do they help you become aware of that principle? The answer: By precipitating thought-processes that in their turn lead to your seeing that BH is correct.

You can see specific markings on specific surfaces; you can see specific rocks and specific people; you can see specific objects. (Given that there are no *non*-specific objects, "specific object" is a pleonasm, and we might as well have just said: "you can see *objects.*") But you cannot see (or otherwise sense-perceive) *principles*. (The parenthetical qualification will henceforth be left unstated.) There are two reasons for this:

> Reason #1: Principles are *general.* BH says that, for any *x*, *x*'s being a triangle has the consequence that *x*'s area is ½ its base times its height. One cannot *see* general truths. One sees particulars: particular rocks, trees, people, events, and so forth. One can see instances of general truths, but not general truths *per se*.

> Reason #2: Principles express dependence-relations. In other words, they are to the effect that, given *P*, *Q* must be the case, or at least is disposed to be the case, this being equivalent to: *P*'s being the case depends on (or is disposed to depend on) *Q*'s being the case. BH says that *x*'s being a triangle depends on *x*'s being such that its area is ½ its base times its height.
>
> So far as one's senses apprise one of anything, they apprise one of what is the case, not of what *must* be the case. There are several reasons for this. One of them is that *P*'s *having* to be the case is equivalent to its being impossible that *P* should fail to be the case; and one cannot sense-perceive the non-existent, let along the impossible. [4]

Thus, our senses have two quite distinct roles in the acquisition of knowledge: an *information-transmitting* role and a *thought-triggering* role.

Here is one way of making it clear how these two roles differ. You have a visual perception that is experientially just like that of seeing of a dog running towards you; and on that basis you believe that, indeed, there is a dog running towards you. But it turns out that you weren't really seeing a dog; you were having a hallucination. Question: did your sensory experience give you *knowledge* to the effect that there was a dog running towards you? No. It may have been that there *was* a dog running towards you. But your sense perceptions didn't provide you with knowledge of any such fact.

Bearing these points in mind, consider the following, very different

scenario. You have visual experiences that are experientially just like the visual experiences you'd ordinarily have of drawings of figures on a chalkboard. Those experiences precipitate a long train of mathematically impeccable reasoning that results in your accepting BH. It turns out that your visual perceptions of the chalkboard were hallucinatory. Does it follow that you don't know that a triangle's area is ½ its base times its height?

No. Those visual experiences merely *prompted* the thought-process that led to your accepting BH. Since that thought-process was itself impeccable, even though it was initiated by hallucinations, the result was indeed knowledge of BH. Those hallucinations no more *constituted* your justification for believing BH than your turning the key in the ignition of your car *constitutes* the road-trip that you subsequently make.

But in the first scenario, any justification you had for believing that there was a dog running towards you vanished when it turned out that the experiences on which your belief was based were hallucinatory. So far as you had any justification for believing that a dog was running towards you, that justification lay in your visual experiences. So, given that those experiences were hallucinations, it follows that you had *no* justification for believing that a dog was running towards you and, therefore, that you didn't know it. In the other scenario, your visual experiences weren't themselves constitutive of your justification for accepting BH. They were merely precursors to the thought-processes that *did* provide you with such a justification. So the fact that those visual experiences were hallucinations in no way undermines your justification for accepting BH.

A story will help put these points into focus. A coconut lands on Newton's head. This causes him to conduct various investigations, which bear rich mathematical and scientific fruit. The blow to Newton's head

wasn't constitutive of Newton's subsequent ratiocinative activity, which was impeccable; it merely initiated it. It is along these lines that one must understand the relationship between, on the one hand, your grasp of the fact that a Euclidean triangle's area is ½ its base times its height, and, on the other hand, the visual perceptions (of chalk figures, or whatnot) that, in due course, led to your grasping this fact.

One last scenario will make it clear just how much the reason-triggering role of sense perception differs from its information-transmitting role. Smith reads a proof of some mathematical theorem. Smith understands what he is reading and duly becomes aware of the proof in question. It is, of course, through *visual* perceptions that he becomes aware of that visual theorem. Brown hears a lecture in which that same proof is set forth. That lecture is simply a reading of the article that Smith read. (So the words Brown hears are the very words that Smith read.) Brown understands what he is hearing and duly becomes aware of the proof in question.

Smith's sense-perceptions bear no resemblance, even of the most abstract kind, to Brown's perceptions. And yet Smith and Brown come away from their respective experiences with the same mathematical knowledge. There is no way to reconcile this last fact with the supposition that it is through sense-perception that one becomes aware of mathematical truths; and it must be supposed that, in the situation just described, the visual and auditory experiences in question merely *occasioned* ratiocinative processes that, unlike those sense-perceptions, endowed in whom they occurred knowledge of the relevant theorem. Given *any* mathematical principle---or, indeed, any logical or philosophical principle----an exact analogue shows that, so far as sense-perception had a hand in a given person's acquiring knowledge of that principle it was merely by functioning as a trigger for ratiocinations that,

unlike any sense-perception, were capable of awakening the relevant ratiocinative faculties.

The fact that the senses sometimes function in this way undermines the facile the claim that all knowledge is empirical and therefore delegitimizes any conceivable attempt to delegitimize the discipline of philosophy.

Let us end by making a point that will make it clear what is meant by the (already defined, but, even when properly defined, oft-misunderstood) word “empirical.” When our senses *transmit* knowledge to us, the resulting knowledge is empirical. (Also, inferential and theoretical knowledge *based* on knowledge thus transmitted to us is empirical. So our knowledge of the truths described by Relativity Theory, though obviously not acquired directly from sense-perception, is empirical.) Knowledge is *not* empirical if it results from purely ratiocinative processes, regardless of whether those processes were occasioned by sense-perceptions. Non-empirical knowledge is purely conceptual: it is knowledge, not of the structures or interrelations of denizens of the spatiotemporal world, but of the structures and interrelations of concepts. Non-empirical knowledge is typically (though probably not always) obtained by *analyzing* concepts. For this reason, it is often described as *analytic*.[5]

3.0 Why the claim that there is no such thing as philosophical truth is self-defeating

I've heard it said that, in philosophy, "there is no right or wrong." First of all, this is itself a philosophical statement. So if it's true, then it's false, and if it's false, then it's true. Therefore it's false, given that no true statement is

inconsistent with itself. (P is inconsistent with Q if the one must be false if the other is true. ‹x is a triangle›[6] is inconsistent with ‹x has four sides› because the one must be false if the other is true.)

The position that there is no philosophical truth is a common one. Every semester, at least ten students of mine openly advocate it. When such a student is asked why he holds that view, he always take one of three views:

> (i) All legitimate knowledge is empirical knowledge;
> therefore, philosophy, being a non-empirical discipline, is no source of knowledge,

> (ii) All legitimate knowledge is scientific knowledge
> therefore, philosophy, being a non-science, is no source of knowledge,

and

> (iii) There is no truth where there is disagreement.

(i) is straightforwardly false, given that mathematics yields knowledge and that it isn't an empirical discipline. Also, as we've seen, any given empirical discipline makes assumptions that it cannot justify and that it, unless they're justified, that discipline fails to yield knowledge. So,

supposing that, in (ii), the term “scientific knowledge” refers to the results generated by empirical sciences, it follows that (ii) is false. And supposing that, in (ii), that term refers, not just to empirical disciplines, but also to *non*-empirical disciplines (e.g. mathematics, philosophy), then what it says in no way implies that philosophy fails to yield knowledge.

(iii) is easily shown to be false. If one person disagrees with another, *at least* one of those people must be wrong. If Smith thinks that 2+2=5 and Jones disagrees, his position being that 2+2=6, then, even though each has the wrong arithmetical belief, each is right to think that the other is wrong. If Smith thinks that 2+2=5 and Jones disagrees, his position being that 2+2=4, then, in addition to having the right arithmetical belief, Jones is right to think that Smith is wrong. So where there is disagreement, there *is* truth. Consequently, the alleged fact that there is more disagreement in philosophy than in other disciplines doesn't warrant the conclusion that there isn't such a thing as philosophical truth.

3.1 What philosophers agree about

There probably is more disagreement within the discipline of philosophy than there is within most other disciplines. But in philosophical disagreements have nothing to do with the logical structure of discipline of philosophy and instead have to do with egos of the people involved in this disagreements. . The problem isn't that there aren't agreed-upon methods of resolving disputes. Nor is the problem that people disagree as to how those methods are to be applied. The problem is that, for whatever reason, philosophers practically never admit that they're wrong. They are *proven*

wrong---and, when this happens, they usually know it. But, when proven wrong, they respond, not by admitting that they’re wrong or even privately changing their views, but rather by coercing people over whom they power into towing their line. Since people don't depend for their well-being on how philosophical disputes are settled, market forces don't weed out bad philosophers the way they weed out bad doctors and engineers. That said, there is nothing inherent in the discipline of philosophy that prevents disputes from being resolved: one must distinguish the discipline itself from the personalities of its practitioners.

Also, despite everything just said, there *is* considerable agreement among analytic philosophers, and this agreement often concerns foundational issues. For example, analytic philosophers, setting aside completely incompetent ones, are unlikely to disagree as to whether a given *proposition* expresses a legitimate rule of inference, and, given a pair of propositions, they're unlikely to disagree as to whether the one *entails* the other . P entails Q if P cannot possibly be true if Q is false. (Thus, ‹*x* is triangle› entails ‹*x* has three sides. ›) A proposition is what is affirmed by an utterance of a declarative sentence. [7]

Further, given two propositions, philosophers are likely to agree as to whether the one *confirms* the other. (P *confirms* Q if, other things being equal, Q is less likely to be true if P is false than if P is true. Given that Smith clearly isn’t a butler or chauffeur, Smith's living in a big house and driving a Rolls Royce confirms, but does not entail, that Smith is wealthy. Why doesn’t it entail it? Because Smith might have stolen the car and he might not be able to afford the house.) So, granting that there is more disagreement in philosophy than there is botany or astronomy, there is also a great deal of agreement in philosophy.

3.2 What philosophers don't agree about

That said, after ego-driven fakery is set aside, there is at least as much disagreement in philosophy as there is agreement; and even though, as we've seen, philosophers agree about some foundational issues, they disagree about others. For example, even though, when asked whether one proposition entails another, different philosophers tend to give the same answer, there is no consensus among philosophers as to *what it is* for one proposition to entail another. Indeed, there is no agreed upon answer to the question "what *are* propositions?." Nor, consequently, is there any agreed upon answer to the question "to what extent, and in what way, are the structures of propositions reflected in those sentences that we use to express them?" This last question, though seemingly arcane and technical is profoundly important, the reason being that, in the answer to it, lies the answer, or a large part of the answer, to the question “in what respects does a person’s knowing a language enhance his cognitive abilities?”

In the pages to come, we'll encounter dozens of other equally important philosophical questions that have yet to be resolved. We'll also find that, when supplemented with a modicum of technical rigor, a willingness to listen to one's intuitions, however heterodox they may be, often yields plausible answers to questions that, despite centuries of trying, philosophers have failed to answer with anything other than brazen falsehoods .—

4.0 How Psychological and Sociological Factors Thwart Philosophical Progress

I suspect, on average, students of biology at first-tier institutions are way ahead of their counterparts at counterparts at bottom-tier universities in respect of their likelihood to discover biological truths. But philosophical discoveries are only marginally more likely to be made by students at top-tier institutions than at bottom-tier ones. I made this claim in the last section, but didn't defend it. Now I will defend it. My reason for discussing this topic is that, by doing so, we'll have the chance the discuss philosophical disputes that we won't have occasion to discuss in the pages following this preface.

There are two facts that, once clearly stated, are likely to be accepted, since they are consistent with generally accepted truths about human psychology, and that make it clear that this hypothesis of mine is at least approximately correct. The second fact is by far the more important one.

Fact #1: Whereas what passes for mathematical/musical ability in institutional contexts *really* is mathematical/musical ability, what passes for philosophical ability in such contexts is more likely than not to be a mere mimicry of it. Why is this? Two reasons. First, even though an interest in philosophy is extremely widespread, genuine ability at it is extremely uncommon. Second, whereas the difference between somebody who has musical talent and somebody who lacks it is brazenly obvious to almost everyone, the only exceptions being those who are tone-deaf or otherwise severely cognitively defective, the difference between somebody who has philosophical talent and somebody who lacks it is invisible to people who do not themselves have it. Given these two facts, it becomes inevitable that the people in charge of institutions whose very purpose is to cultivate philosophical insight haven't a shred of it themselves and are therefore can't judge who has philosophical talent and who doesn't. When judging whether a

given person is philosophically gifted, such a person is forced to rely on some belief of his to the effect that people who have philosophical ability are likely to have other characteristics whose presence, unlike that of philosophical ability itself, are easy to detect. Those characteristics are typically ones that conduce to institution-internal success (e.g. orderliness, discipline in regards to following instructions, complacency in regards to forming views of one's own views) but are seldom ones that have anything to do with a person's degree of philosophical acumen. As a result, philosophy professors are likely to be people who should have become bureaucrats, not philosophers. would have made good bureaucrats but don't make good philosophers.

Fact #2: 99 times out of a 100, a brilliant student of philosophy at Cambridge or Princeton will use every ounce of intellect that he has to defend the views of his professors, since his professional future is in their hands; and he will make every effort to smear a position, however plausible, that isn't in lockstep with those of his professors. He'll find ways to defend behaviorism, functionalism, modal realism, or whatever happens at the time to be the line one must toe if one is to move forward in the philosophical world. 99% of the time, people gifted with philosophical intelligence use it to rationalize philosophical views that, although clearly broken, happen to be held by the people who give out philosophy-professorships. I will now give several examples of this.

Boris Kment, a contemporary of mine who received his degrees from Oxford and Princeton and must therefore surely be extremely intelligent, takes it for granted that, given some true claim about what *would* have been the case hold in virtue of the things that happen alternative universes that exist as concretely as our own. For example, suppose that Smith has exactly two cars; and, with that assumption in mind, consider the statement:

> (1) If Smith had three cars, he would have an odd number cars.

According to Kment, the meaning of (1) is:

> (2) There exists an alternative universe that is just likes ours except that, in it, Smith has three cars; and in that universe, Smith has an odd number of cars.[8]

I disagree with Kment. In my view, the meaning of (1) is:

> (3) The statement that Smith has an odd number of cars follows from the statement that Smith has three cars. In other words, one is guilty of holding a self-contradictory view if one holds that Smith holds three cars but not an odd number of cars.

Is my view right? I don't know. But here's what I do know. It isn't by going to other universes that we know that (1) is correct. It is by considering whether it makes sense. To be sure, there are no alternate universes where Smith has three cars but where he doesn't have an odd number of cars. But that's because it makes no sense to deny (1). So, while I don't know whether

my view is right, I do know Kment's view isn't exactly self-evidently correct. [9]

Question: Why does somebody of Kment's level of intelligence not bother to consider alternatives to his view or even to consider questions that, although presupposing the correctness of his view, concern anything other than minor technicalities?

Answer: Kment's adviser at Princeton was David Lewis (1940-2000). Like Kment, Lewis held that (2) is the correct analysis of (1) and that all statements of its kind are to be analyzed along the same lines.[10] In fact, this view, which is known as "modal realism," is the cornerstone of Lewis's work. Lewis was a philosophical genius and, in most philosophical contexts, was unusually flexible. But he wouldn't budge when it came to modal realism. For him, that was a line in the sand: accept it or get lost. Kment accepted it. And, ten years after receiving his doctorate, he still does. In that time, everything he's published has been simply repeated or elaborated on points that he made in his dissertation. That said, Kment is tenured at one of the top ten departments in the country and I've been told more than once that he's one of the two or three finest philosophical minds of his generation.

But, when one looks at the philosophical legacy of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), one finds even starker examples of the principle that philosophers use their intelligence, not to find the truth, but to defend orthodoxies and to discredit any truth that should happen to conflict with those orthodoxies.

Wittgenstein was the most highly ranked professor at Trinity College Cambridge, then the most prestigious philosophy department in the world, and his views became orthodoxies. Unfortunately, those views were not only

false but idiotic. His major work is titled *Philosophical Investigations.* The main thesis of that work is, I quote, that “thinking is not a mental process.” His position was that to think is to engage in overt behaviors that need not have mental accompaniments. And he held that, should such behaviors have mental accompaniments, they are in no way enriched by them---those mental accompaniments do not add, or help, to add a cognitive dimension to those behaviors. Whatever is going on in the relevant person's head is, to use Wittgenstein's term, a "free wheel."

Thus, Wittgenstein denied that what a person says is to any degree determined by what his beliefs are. For, according to Wittgenstein, what a person says *is* what a person thinks; so there can’t be thought *behind* the speech. There is just the speech. The speaker’s psychology is irrelevant. In fact, Wittgenstein went so far as to deny that there was *anything* to the mind other than what that person’s body did.

So according to Wittgenstein, what determines what a person is thinking is not what that person is thinking. (It's not hard not to state this contention of Wittgenstein's in a way that doesn't make it sound like a joke.) Whether one is thinking this as opposed to that is determined by how one's body is moving, what noises one is making, and where (in the cultural, not the geographical sense of "where") those noises and body-movements are occurring. Wittgenstein’s view was that you are the mask that you wear.[11]

Wittgenstein thus held that cannot experience pain without *acting* as though one is pain and, more generally, that what we refer to as “experiences” partly or entirely *consist of* the behaviors to which they tend to give rise. In his view, it isn't just what we think that is determined by how our bodies interact with those of others in our culture: what we *feel* is also so determined.

In denying that thoughts had any existence apart from their overt manifestations, Wittgenstein was obliterating the distinction between voluntary and involuntary behavior. A voluntary movement is one that is caused by an intention on the part of the agent. But intentions are thoughts, or at least involve them; so, since Wittgenstein held that there is nothing to a person's thoughts other than his body movements, he was effectively denying that there is any difference between involuntary movements (such as those involved in an epileptic fit) and voluntary ones (such as those involved in my typing this sentence).

Wittgenstein's view was that we're zombies who don't think or feel anything unless we wiggle and jiggle in culturally accepted ways. This is not a *summary* of his position. It *is* his position. If it sounds as though I'm ridiculing it, that's only because I'm stating it clearly.

To anyone who is not a hollowed out pseudo-person, these claims are brazenly absurd. I suspect that, in his attempt to describe the psyche, Wittgenstein was describing himself. For hundreds of pages, Wittgenstein insists that

> (i) Thought has no existence independently of overt bodily behavior,
>
> (ii) Thought has no existence outside of a cultural context: to think is to act (or, in any case, for one's body to move) in ways that are in keeping with the mores (or, to use Wittgenstein's term, "forms of life") constitutive of one's culture

and

> (iii) Although some noises (e.g. an utterance of "it's raining") are meaningful, there are no such things as meanings: meaningfulness is a characteristic of certain behaviors and ink-marks and noises. But meanings *per se* are non-entities.

(i) and (ii) are self-evidently false. (iii) isn't self-evidently false, but it is false. A logical consequence of

> (a) Smith and Jones are both tall

is

> (b) There exists some property---namely, tallness---that Smith and Jones share.

Given the existence of properties, the existence of meanings is readily established. Given any statement S, there are properties $p_1 \ldots p_n$ such that S is true if $p_1 \ldots p_n$ are jointly instantiated and S is false otherwise. For example,

(c) John is tall

is true if the each of the following properties is instantiated, and otherwise false: the property of being identical with John, the property of being tall, and the property of a being a thing x such that x is tall and x is identical with John. (Of course, if the last of these properties is instantiated, so are the other two. But given the (c) contains discrete parts corresponding to "John" and "tall," the corresponding proposition cannot possibly consist of just one property, and the decomposition of that proposition is therefore to be identified with the membership of the set containing all three of the just-mentioned properties.)

Of course, it is by no means obvious what properties are, and it is by no means clear that a deflationary conception of them is the wrong one. But that is neither here nor there: what matters is that they do exist and therefore that (iii) is false.

Stated as directly as possible, Wittgenstein's three main views are:

(a) We're empty shells. There's nothing on the inside.

(b) We are the masks we wear.

(c) Nothing means anything.

Speaking from a psychiatric, as opposed to a philosophical standpoint, (a), (b), and (c) perfectly articulate the outlook of the *psychopath.* A psychopath is not an insane person. Nor is a psychopath necessarily an evil person. A psychopath is an empty fraudster whose personality-architecture is far too rudimentary for him to even grasp what a value is, let alone have one. Psychopaths are weak, underdeveloped con-artists; they aren't "cool" super-villains.

That Wittgenstein believed (a)-(c) to describe the human condition suggests that he himself was an empty shell who valued nothing and saw no meaning in anything. It suggests, in other words, that he was a psychopath. In Chapter 27, it will be argued that he was in fact a psychopath. [12]

Let us relate these points to our thesis that philosophers are more likely to rationalize existing orthodoxies, no matter how obviously false, than to look for philosophical truths. During Wittgenstein's 25 years at Cambridge and for several decades after his death, many of the brightest philosophers in Britain treated Wittgenstein's views as simple truths. And most of those who didn't agree with *all* of Wittgenstein's contentions didn't dare concede that, on the whole, his thinking was basically sound. As a result, some capable philosophers advocated some views that obviously no merit.

For example, Norman Malcolm (1911), a hardcore Wittgensteinian, denied that people dream.[13] His argument: Dreams, supposing them to exist, are mental processes; and we know from Wittgenstein that we don't have mental processes.

Another hardcore Wittgensteinian, Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976), said that the difference between voluntary and involuntary actions isn't that the former

result from certain kinds of mental states that the latter do not result from; the difference, he said, is that voluntary motions are culturally more acceptable, and tend to look more elegant, than involuntary ones.[14] According to Ryle, what makes a ballerina's movements voluntary is that they look good (or we like them or they're culturally approved of, or some such); and what makes a person's projectile vomiting involuntary is that it doesn't look so good. (I don't know what Ryle would say about the odd person who voluntarily projectile vomits.)

Ryle also held that, if I can see how your body is moving, I know what's going on in your mind at least as well as you do. So if somebody wants to know whether you are having a migraine, they should ask me, not you, unless you happen to be looking at yourself in a mirror.

Ryle was not stupid. He graduated with a double first class degree from Oxford. And, even though most of what he said is Wittgensteinian, and therefore false, one can tell from the way he said it that his was a subtle and penetrating mind---or would have been, had he not matriculated in a culture of Wittgenstein-worship.

Ryle was not a great philosopher; he was merely a potentially great philosopher. But his colleague at Oxford, Peter Strawson (1919-2006), *was* a great philosopher. Unfortunately, like other British philosophers of his generation, Strawson was very reluctant to question The Master. As a result, he committed several hideous gaffes. One example is his "ascriptivist" analysis of moral responsibility. Another is his "expressivist" analysis of the concept of truth.

Strawson's ascriptivism: Give or take some irrelevant nuances, Strawson held that, if it's correct, the statement"

(a) “X should be praised for doing Y”

holds in virtue of the fact that:

(a*) X deviates from the way in which people usually behave, and it does so in a way that pleases us.

And he held the same thing *mutatis mutandis* to hold of any other ascription of moral responsibility. So held that, if they are true, the statements:

(b) “X should be blamed for doing Y,"

and

(c) “X is responsible for doing Y, but does not on that account deserve either praise or blame”

hold in virtue of, respectively, the fact that

(b*) Y is counterstatistical in a way that we don’t like

and the fact that

(c*) Y is not counterstatistical.

If Strawson is right, X doesn’t even have to have intentions for any of these statements to be true. Strawson's position thus entails that intentions either don’t exist or don’t do anything and therefore might as well not exist.

Strawson's analysis of ascriptions of moral responsibility is obviously false. Inanimate objects don’t have intentions; so we can’t be held responsible for anything. And it's only a person's behavior is the result of an intention of his that we hold him responsible for it. We don’t hold somebody with Parkinson’s responsible for his tremors.

If Strawson were right, a corpse that fell on Smith could appropriately be blamed for Smith's subsequent death. But we don't blame the corpse; we blame the prankster who threw the corpse off a nearby rooftop.

Strawson is saying that whether a given person has a given intention depends on whether we ascribe an intention to him. So he's advocating the antithesis of the traditional view, which I regard as self-evidently correct, that whether that ascription is correct depends on whether that person has that intention. Strawson's view turns the living into the dead and the dead into the living. Sad about grandma's death? No problem! Just ascribe an intention to her---that'll bring her back. Don't like your boss? No need to worry! Just stop

ascribing intentions to him---that'll zombify him.

Strawson was a brilliant man. So why did he advocate this grotesquely mistaken view? Because Wittgenstein advocated it. But whereas Wittgenstein said obscurely and he provided no argument for it, Strawson said it clearly and provided a semblance of an argument for it. So Strawson's article wasn't redundant.

Strawson's expressivism: According to Strawson, the expression "true" means nothing. "It is true that snow is white" has the same meaning as "snow is white." In prefacing the words "snow is white" with the words "it is true that", one is doing in a polite way what one would be doing in an impolite way by shouting "snow is white" while banging one's fist on a table: one is showing one's collocutor how convinced one is that snow is white. So the term "true" helps one *express* one's feelings about a claim: they give one a civil way of express one's certainty as to its truth. But that's all that word does.

Strawson's expressivism is no less misguided than his acriptivism. First of all, the word "true" is not redundant. There is no sentence that means that same thing as "everything Plato said was true" that doesn't contain the word "true" or some synonym thereof. Suppose that $S_1 \ldots S_n$ is a complete list of everything every said by Plato. The sentence "everything Plato said was true" would not have the same meaning as "S_1 is true and S_2 is true and…S_n is true." Supposing that S_{37} is the proposition that there are infinitely many prime numbers, the statement "everything Plato said is true, but Plato never said that there are infinitely many prime numbers", though false, would be coherent. (That's why one would have to know about Plato's life to know whether that statement was true or not.) But statement "Plato said that there

are infinitely many prime numbers and Plato never said that there are infinitely many prime numbers" would contradict itself. (That's why one *wouldn't* have to know anything about Plato's life to know whether that statement was true or not.)[15]

"What about Strawson's claim that "snow is white" and "it is true that snow is white" are synonymous? Surely that's got to be right."

It is not. The first attributes a color to a substance. The second attributes a truth-value to a proposition; so the second, unlike the first, is only indirectly about snow. Consider the sentence: "it is probable that snow is white." That sentence *clearly* concerns a proposition. Snow is either white or it isn't. When you say that snow is probably white, you're not saying that it's vaguely white or that it's whiteness is only semi-existent. You are saying that, in saying that snow is white one, what one is saying is more likely than not to be correct.

So "it is probable that snow is white" is about the sort of thing that people can affirm. Snow cannot be affirmed. Neither can whiteness. Nor can sentences. Sentence-*meanings* are what can be affirmed. (Actually, we'll see in Chapter 4 that one affirms the meanings of *occurrences* of sentences (particular utterances or inscriptions of them), not of sentences *per se*. We'll also see that the meaning of any given sentence-occurrence is different from the meaning of the sentence thereby occurring. Strawson was the first person to make these claims, and his argument for them are solid. The arguments presented in Chapter 4 are based on them.)

The meaning had by the expression "that snow is white" in "it is probable that snow is white" coincides with counterpart in "it is true that snow is white." So the latter, though *equivalent* with "snow is white", is about

a proposition about snow, and therefore isn‘t in any direct sense about snow. “Snow is white“, on the other hand, clearly does directly concern snow. Two statements are equivalent if neither can possibly be true if the other is false.

Strawson had precisely the sort of intelligence one needs to see that, for these reasons, “true” *is* meaningful. So why did Strawson say otherwise? Because Wittgenstein said otherwise.

Why did Wittgenstein say otherwise? An integral part of Wittgenstein’s philosophical system is that meanings don’t exist. Wittgenstein granted that some noises were meaningful and that others weren’t; but he denied that there are such things as meanings.

Why did Wittgenstein hold *this*? It's a corollary of his rejection of the presumption that a least part of what distinguishes my saying “it’s raining,” which is a genuinely linguistic act, from a coffee machine's accidentally making those the same noises, which is not a linguistic act, is that, in the first case but not the second, those noises resulted from intentions embodying certain beliefs (e.g. my belief that it's raining). A belief is necessarily a belief *that* such and such is the case: the object of a belief is always a *proposition*. A proposition is what one affirms when one makes a statement (e.g. when one sincerely says "it's raining"). Since Wittgenstein didn’t believe in beliefs, he didn’t believe in meanings; and since he didn’t believe in meanings, he didn’t think that “true”, which denotes a property of meanings, can possibly have a meaning.

Of course, it isn't just propositions that can be described as "true." Occurrences of sentences can also be so described. But, in saying “Jimmy’s words are the truth," one is saying in an abbreviated that the thing Jimmy affirmed is true. And propositions are, by definition, things that are affirmed

(and denied and questioned, etc.).

Wittgenstein dedicated the second half of his professional career to establishing the non-existence of beliefs and everything else that exist only if meanings do as well. This led him to make a number of demonstrably false claims.

One of such claim is that, if a person says “I am in pain”, he is no more *stating* anything about his mind than he would be by writhing in agony. Saying "I am in pain," according to Wittgenstein, is merely a way of *showing* that one is in pain. So it's meaningless, except in the same non-linguistic sense as a baby's sobbing.

Here’s one way of showing that this position is false. Suppose that, in response to your saying that I am in pain but am trying to conceal it, I say:

> (A) If I am in pain, then certain neurons in my brain are firing that wouldn’t otherwise be firing; since, with the help of modern technology, I can demonstrate to you that those neurons are not firing, it is *not* the case that I am in pain.

If Wittgenstein were right to say that “I am in pain” was as devoid of meaning (in the linguistic sense) as the pain-driven howling of an injured animal, then (A) would have the same meaning, or lack thereof, as:

> (B) If *aaargh!*, then certain neurons in my brain are firing

> that wouldn’t otherwise be firing; since, with the help of modern technology, it is *not* the case that *ouch!*[16]

But B is meaningless and A is meaningful. So they don't have the same meaning, and Wittgenstein is wrong.

This blunder of Wittgenstein’s led John Austin (1911-1960), a faithful follower of his to make a similar, albeit subtler, mistake. Here is Austin's reasoning[17]:

> (AA)[18] Let *S* be a case of my saying to a friend: "I promise to give you a ride to the airport" S is not affirmation of some pre-existing fact. The promised referred to in *S* is *S* itself. But S doesn't describe itself. No utterance describes itself (with a few contrived exceptions, e.g. "this statement is false"). But, supposing for argument's sake that *S does* describe itself, *S*'s function isn't to describe itself, but rather to oblige the person who uttered it to perform a certain act.
>
> For exactly similar reasons, if a preacher says: "I now pronounce you man and wife," he's not describing some pre-existing fact. In uttering those words, the preacher was *performing* a social function. His wasn't a descriptive, but *performative* utterance, as was *S*.
>
> Performative utterances are meaningful. *S isn't like* " glarbojibjibjabber." Therefore, it isn't in virtue of affirming

propositions that performative utterances are meaningful. To this extent, Wittgenstein was right to deny that meanings must exist in order for statements to be meaningful.

Austin's contention is false. If I say, "grass is green," what I am saying is either true or false. There is some truth or falsehood that I'm affirming---some *proposition*, in other words. And if I say "if grass is green, then grass isn't colorless," I am saying of that proposition that some other proposition follows from it. If, when occurring on its own, "grass is green" didn't affirm anything, then "if grass is green, then grass isn't colorless" would be as meaningless as:

(i) "if glarbojibjibjabber, then grass isn't colorless."

Also, if embedding "grass is green" in a larger sentence changed what it meant, then "if grass is green, grass isn't colorless" wouldn't say that grass's not being colorless was a consequence of its being green.

By parity of reasoning, if *x* is an utterance of the obviously meaningful sentence:

(ii) “if I promise to give you a ride to the airport next Tuesday, you’ll kill me if I break my word,”

and *y* is an utterance of:

(iii) “I promise to give you a ride to the airport next Tuesday,”

then *y* must affirm some truth or falsehood. If it didn't, *x* would be as meaningless as an utterance of (i). But clearly *does* affirm some truth or falsehood. And the same is therefore true of utterances of (i).

Thus, the spuriousness of Austin's position is a consequence of the fact, about to be demonstrated, that embedding a sentence *P* in ‹if *P*, then *Q*› does not typically change *P*'s meaning. The fact that

(I) there is an even prime larger than two

is false can be deduced from that:

(II) If there is an even prime larger than two, there is a prime number that is divisible by one, itself, and two, which is not possible

is true.

But (II) *wouldn't* necessarily be true if the occurrence in it of (I) had a meaning different from its usual one. For example, (II) would be true if that occurrence meant that 4 is an even prime larger than two. More importantly, if that occurrence had a meaning different from its usual one, (II) wouldn't

mean what it currently does, and it wouldn't necessarily say anything relevant to whether there was an even prime greater than two.

In general, if *P* meant one thing on its own and a different thing in ‹if *P*, then *Q*›, it would become impossible state *indirect arguments*.[19] in (An indirect argument is one of the form: *if P, then Q; not-Q; therefore not-P*.) But, to Austin's discredit, such arguments obviously can be stated.

In conclusion, so far as the philosophers just discussed are representative of philosophers in general, first-class philosophical thinkers are more likely to use their intelligence to defend orthodoxies, even wretchedly misguided ones, than to look for the truth. Ryle, Strawson, and Austin were at the world's first or second highest ranking philosophy department. And yet that they not only advocated views that any ten year old knows to be false. But they didn't just advocate them: they spent years of their lives urging acceptance of them. So these high-ranking members of high-ranking departments advocated views that were 100% false. So no one, even at a bottom-tier institution, could possibly say anything that's more false than what these high-rollers said. Hence my view students and professors of philosophy at first-tier institutions aren't as likely as one would think to produce better work than their counterparts at bottom-tier universities.

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[1] Expressions that are italicized and boldfaced are very important ones whose meanings must be known. In most cases, those terms are defined and explained in a footnote, if they aren't defined in the main text. The term "sensory observation" refers to any instance of sight, hearing, touch, etc.

[2] Fodor makes this point, in an exceptionally clear and forceful manner, in his (1981) essay “The present status of the innateness controversy,” which is one of the two or three best philosophical papers I have ever read. What I say in Chapter 9 of the present book is heavily informed by my reading of that paper.

[3] “BH” stands for “base times height.” It is my practice to give names to sentences that are frequently referred to, since it eliminates unnecessary verbiage from my prose and (partly, though not primarily, for that reason) makes it easier to follow.

[4] All principles express dependence relations, though this isn't always obvious. Consider the principle that: (MD) military dictatorships tend to be less responsive than democratically elected governments to the needs of those whose welfare they are duty-bound to promote.

MD is to the effect that, human psychology being what it is, *x*'s being a military dictatorship depends on *x*'s being less likely than a democratically elected government, other things being equal, to meet the demands of those whose interests it is duty-bound to promote.

Because all principles express dependence relations, Reason #1 and Reason #2 ultimately coalesce. A principle is not merely a general truth. That's why "any given tiger in North America is in some zoo" is not a principle. A principle must be intrinsically, as opposed to contextually, *explanatory*.

To be sure, "any given tiger in North America is in some zoo" *can* be explanatory---but only under rather special conditions. The way in which "a body's mass increases as it accelerates" is explanatory is clearly not so context-dependent---or, even if it is context-dependent to the same degree, it isn't context-dependent in the same way.

Unfortunately, since this manuscript is already overdue, these vague remarks are the best I can do in the way of making it clear how a truth must be explanatory for it to be a principle as opposed to a mere general truth.

[5] Why "probably not always"? Because, it seems to me, there are some non-empirical facts (e.g., nothing can be located, in its entirety, in two disjoint places at a given time) of which one can have knowledge *without* having to have analyzed anything. Also, it seems to me, that *in order* to analyze a concept and thus to obtain knowledge through conceptual analysis, one must *already* have non-empirical knowledge.

Some individuals hold that there is non-empirical knowledge that does *not* concern the structures or interrelations of concepts and therefore is *not* analytic, as we are using this term. For example, Kant (1787) held that there is non-empirical, non-analytic knowledge. In Chapter 10, it is argued that all non-empirical knowledge is indeed analytic.

Actually, this last statement isn't really accurate, for reasons I discuss in my (2006) article, *The analogue-digital distinction and the cogency of Kant's transcendental arguments*.

[6] The "‹" and the "›" are known as *quasi-quotation* marks. this context they may be treated as quotation marks. But, strictly speaking, they are not quotation-marks, and the differences between them and quotation marks are important in some contexts. An example of a variable is the expression "x" in "for any object x, if x has three cars, then x has more than one car." An example of an anaphoric pronoun is the "he" in "if a man owns more than three cars, he owns at least one car." It's obvious that anaphoric pronouns are similar to variables, if not identical with them.) What is the purpose of quasi-quotation marks? Consider the expression: "if *P* and *Q* and *R*, then *R*." That expression isn't true or false. So the sentence "For any propositions *P*, *Q*, and *R*, the sentence 'if *P* and *Q* and *R*, then *R*' is true" is *not* true. But the sentence "for any propositions *P*, *Q*, and *R*, a true sentence results when, given the open-sentence 'if *P* and *Q* and *R*, then *R*,' the variables are uniformly replaced with arbitrary sentences" is true. And (A) is a concise way of saying this. In general, quasi-quotation marks make it possible to express generalizations about sentences in a concise way. Quine was the first to see the need for quasi-quotation marks and duly introduced them in his (1941) book *Mathematical Logic*.

Why, incidentally, did I choose to explain the meanings of the terms "variable" and "anaphoric pronoun", not by defining them, but by giving examples of sentences in which they are used? Three reasons. First, to my knowledge, no viable definitions have been given, at least not in print. (In yet to be published work, I put forth what I believe to be definitions of them that are not totally implausible.) Second, any accurate definition of these terms would be extraordinarily hard to follow for anyone who didn't have a lot of background in semantics. accurate definitions are very hard to produce. This is a consequence of the fact that, with some trivial exceptions, *all* definitions are extremely intricate.

The exceptions include ones where, given an expression belonging to one language, one is merely

identifying its counterpart in some other language. They also include stipulative definitions, e.g. "let 'blerk' mean *triangle*." And there do seem to be *some* cases where, non-translational, non-stipulative definitions are not to so hard to produce, e.g. "a 'triangle' is a three-sided, straight-edged, closed, planar figure."

But a few comments about that definition are in order:

> (i) That definition embodied an *analysis* of the word "triangle" and, for that reason, wasn't easy to produce. (I didn't produce it; I merely repeated it.)
>
> (ii) Nobody learns what "triangle" means by being given such a definition.
>
> (iii) A definition (or analysis, or whatever it is) is useless unless knows what is meant by terms (e.g. "planar", "closed") whose meanings one is unlikely to know unless one knows the meaning of "triangle."
>
> (iv) That definition fails to fix the meaning of the word "triangle" and is thus not a viable definition. This is because the terms "straight", "closed", and so on, do not themselves have unambiguous meanings outside of artificial contexts. They are actually variables, not constants, whose meanings are specific, either implicitly or explicitly, by the dialectical context. The reasons for this are given in Chapter 1 of my book *Analytic Philosophy*, in the section titled "mathematical logic," which is the at the very end of that chapter.

[7] . In Chapter 3 of *Analytic Philosophy*, I provide a detailed answer to the question "what properties must an entity have if it is to be capable of being what we are thereby affirming in uttering declarative sentences?" In Chapter 3 of the present work, I put forth a truncated version of my answer to that question.

[8] See Kment (2007).

[9] After attending a lecture that Kment gave in 2006, I asked him in private why (3) isn't the right analysis of (1). His response was that my analysis was self-evidently false and that my question didn't deserve a response. (Out of the 20 or so people who publicly asked Kment questions about his lecture, only one audience-member, Bert Bandman asked a question that didn't assume the truth of Lewis' view. Bandman asked whether there were any alternatives to the view that statements such as (1) demanded that we posit the existence of alternative universes. Kment rolled his eyes, looked at his watch, and then said with a sigh: "yes, but none that are worth considering." Audience-members snorted at Bandman and laughed heartily at Kment's witty and informative reaction to his question. They then proceeded to ask questions which assumed the correctness of Kment's view and were sometimes prefaced by admiration for the patience and decency Kment had shown in his response to Bandman's deeply inappropriate question.

Apparently, only one audience member, besides myself, had any reservations about granting the existence of concrete (as opposed to purely fictitious) alternative universes. Which I found odd, given that we were at a philosophy conference, not a Grateful Dead concert.

[10] See Lewis (1973, 1984).

[11] Interestingly, British actors have a similar view. "To think like Hamlet", they say (this is not a quotation), "you must first *act* like Hamlet. Fake it till you make it. If you fake it long enough, you won't be faking it anymore: the mask you put on will now be your real face." American actors have the opposite view: "In order to *act* like Hamlet", they believe (again, this is not a quotation), "you must first *be* Hamlet: you must have his thoughts, feelings, and so on." Actors who follow this principle are

known as “method actors.”

[12] The psychopath must not be confused with the cynic. A cynic is somebody who himself has strong values but believes that, for the most part, others either don't have them or do have them but fail to comply with them. (Schopenhauer was a cynic; so was La Rochefoucauld. These thinkers are heroes of mine.) The cynic is, in many ways, the antithesis of the psychopath.

The word "cynic", I must point out, is ambiguous. Sometimes the word "cynic" refers to somebody who doesn't have values or has serious reservations about whether it's worthwhile to comply with them. But I will use the word "cynic" to refer to somebody who is skeptical, not about whether values are worth having, but about whether people are trying to comply with them.

[13] See Malcolm (1956).

[14] See Ryle (1949).

[15] See Russell (1919, p. 168) for a similar argument. The argument that I just put forth was, in respect of its substance and its wording, deliberately modeled on Russell's argument.

[16] This argument is an adaptation of one put forth by Peter Geach (1972). Geach was attempting to refute a doctrine called emotivism. But the structure of Geach's argument is the same as the structure of mine.

[17] See Austin (1962) for Austin's own rendition of his argument.

[18] "AA" is short for "Austin's argument."

[19] At least in English, unless English were changed in profound ways. It’s hard to believe that, in other languages, embedding a sentence *P* in a conditional of which it is the antecedent changes *P*’s meaning. So, in the aforementioned respect, English is presumably representative of all human languages, a consequence being that indirect arguments would be inexpressible, in any human language. But, so far as we know, they are expressible in all of them, without any of them having to undergo any changes at all.