

The Paradox of Analysis

Concepts play a pivotal role in shaping our intellectual life, acting as a bridge between ourselves and the world we perceive, understand, and know. Whether it involves categorizing architectural styles or establishing legal frameworks for presidential elections, concepts are instrumental in both comprehending and creating our reality.

The significance of concepts lies partly in what is known as a conceptual analysis. As the name suggests, the subject matter of this type of analysis is concepts. Its aim is to clarify them. A successful conceptual analysis often takes the form of an identity statement, asserting ‘To be X is to be Y ’ (or ‘ X is Y ’), where X represents the concept under examination (the *analysandum*), and Y represents the concepts providing the analysis (the *analysans*). For instance:

(1) To be a vixen is to be a female fox.

While seemingly straightforward, conceptual analysis faces a philosophical challenge known as the paradox of analysis. This paradox emerges from the tension between two essential conditions that conceptual analyses should meet: (a) expressing necessary identity truths and (b) providing informative statements. This paradox questions the feasibility of conceptual analysis, as some view the conditions as impossible to satisfy.

Consider the analysis in (1), revealing a close relationship between the concepts of being a vixen and being a female fox. If this analysis is correct, ‘vixen’ and ‘female fox’ are synonymous, fulfilling conditions (a) and (b). In other words, unless there is a change in the meaning of the concept of vixen, it is impossible for something to be a vixen and not be a female fox. One of its consequences is that we can substitute one term for the other without a change in the meaning of the whole sentence. Thus (1) and

(2) To be vixen is to be vixen

are indistinguishable in terms of their meanings. As such, they should share the same properties. If (1) satisfies conditions (a) and (b), then (2) should also do so. Since (2) does not satisfy the condition of being informative, neither does (1). This results in a situation where not only should (1) not count as a successful conceptual analysis, but where no conceptual analysis is possible in the first place. Any such analysis will be either false or uninteresting.

To address the paradox of analysis and restore the credibility of conceptual analysis, my research adopts a two-fold approach – descriptive and constructive. The descriptive aspect aims to scrutinize past solutions to the paradox and illuminate their shortcomings. Building upon this groundwork, the constructive part seeks to propose a novel approach to resolving the paradox. The proposed solution highlights a neglected aspect of conceptual analysis – its resemblance to the notion of the laws of nature. Consequently, I aim to develop the idea that conceptual analysis relies on what can be termed as the “laws of concepts.” This endeavor necessitates a deep exploration of the philosophical nature and significance of such laws, which will be the primary focus of my research. If indeed there exists a resemblance between conceptual analysis and the laws of nature, it could serve as a guiding principle for solving the paradox and fostering a better understanding of the notion of concepts. Accordingly, just as “Water is H₂O” stands as a necessarily true and informative claim, so does “Vixen is a female fox.” While significant differences exist between these two statements, these are primarily grounded in the subject matter of the analysis (the empirical world in the former and abstract concepts in the latter) rather than in their inherent character.