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Words Matter

A Pragmatist View on Studying Words in First-order Philosophy

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Abstract

How much do words matter? Is it necessary to examine what the terms "knowledge" and "terrorism" really mean in a philosophical debate about knowledge or terrorism?

In this inquiry, I discuss how this question arises in a number of contexts such as the location problem for certain metaphysical and epistemological projects, the idea that changes in meaning change the subject under discussion, when evaluative terms like "terrorism" are contested and hinder normative debates, and when a dispute might be merely verbal.

Views on the role of words in first-order debates fall roughly into two camps. Some philosophers acknowledge the need to examine the actual meaning of terms in order to settle the subject matter of an inquiry, and they do so by either conducting conceptual analysis or using empirical methods. Meanwhile, others claim that it is largely unnecessary to analyse the meaning of terms when we are interested in the nature of things. I argue that for all of the cases considered, an updated version of Carnap's method of explication is the most promising method for settling the subject matter of inquiry. On this approach, we revise pre-theoretic terms guided by our aims. For a clearer view on what the subject matter of a debate is, I draw on David Lewis's notion of the subject matter of a statement.

My methodological approach has considerable advantages over traditional as well as more recent forms of conceptual analysis. Moreover, it promotes considering important terminological matters that are underrated by opponents of conceptual analysis. The upshot is that the ordinary meaning of words used in first-order inquiry does not matter much. The more important question is how to adjust and refine the meaning of these words in the light of our aims. How we decide this question has epistemic, ethical and pragmatic implications.

Contents

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Introduction

> That someone is [...] conceptually muddled about truffles is a matter of the profoundest indifference, but failure to think clearly about 'humanly important topics' is precisely what makes for irrational policy and inhumane practice—political, legal, medical, and therapeutic—and that is another matter entirely.
>
> —Jay Rosenberg (1998, xvii)

> Klarheit! Klarheit! Klarheit!
>
> —Gottlob Frege (1906, 297)

How much do words matter in philosophy? When studying philosophical topics such as causation, belief or justice, how important is it to examine the meaning of the words "causation", "belief" and "justice"? Several decades ago, eminent analytic philosophers held the view that philosophical problems essentially are problems concerning language and careful attention to language will fully resolve them. Today, it is commonly agreed that this so-called linguistic turn was a wrong turning (see Williamson 2004, 106). What role is there left for the study of words in first-order inquiries? I will discuss how this question arises in a number of cases such as the location problem in the context of certain metaphysical and epistemological projects, contested evaluative terms like "terrorism" that hinder normative debates, and when disputes are suspected of being merely verbal. Views on the role of words in first-order debates fall roughly into two camps. Some philosophers acknowledge the need to examine the actual meaning of terms in order to settle the subject matter of an inquiry, either by doing conceptual analysis or

using empirical methods. Others argue that it is largely unnecessary to analyze the meaning of terms when we are interested in the nature of things. I will argue that, in all the cases considered, an updated version of Carnap's method of explication is the most promising method to settle the subject matter of inquiry. On this approach, we revise pre-theoretic terms guided by our aims and informed by our findings. Moreover, I believe that much clarity can be gained by adopting a more systematic notion of subject matter than the intuitive notion in play. More particularly, I will draw on David Lewis's notion of the subject matter of a statement.

0.1 The Carnapian Pragmatism Defended in this Inquiry

The main current views on the role of words in first-order debates fall roughly into two camps: those who think that examining the meaning of words is crucial and those who think that it is largely unnecessary. Those who maintain that words matter disagree on the best method to study their meaning. The traditional approach was to provide an analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions based on intuitions about whether the term applies to a number of actual and hypothetical cases. This approach had been condemned for quite some time when Frank Jackson ([1998] 2008) offered a detailed and enthusiastic defence of an updated form of conceptual analysis in *From Metaphysics to Ethics*. This form of analysis, which is sometimes also referred to as the Canberra Plan, is responsive to some of the attacks on its traditional forerunner and has inspired philosophers to reconsider the merits of

conceptual analysis. In his latest book *Constructing the World*, David Chalmers (2012) defends an epistemological thesis for which a form of analysis that is even weaker than Jackson's is relevant. Moreover, a more traditional form of analysis is still commonly used in first-order debates in which a core term is unclear to an extent that hinders fruitful discussion. The debate about terrorism is a case in point that I will examine in some detail (Ch. 3). What proponents of some variant of analysis agree on is that it plays a modest role. It does not disclose the nature of things, but rather helps settle the subject matter of a substantive debate. The linguistic turn went too far, but it was not a wrong turning altogether.

Those who reject conceptual analysis, but agree that examining the meaning of terms is important, defend the use of empirical methods instead. When doing conceptual analysis, philosophers rely on their own intuitive judgements on whether an actual or hypothetical case is a case of liberty or knowledge. Experimental philosophers of the relevant flavour promote the use of empirical methods in particular, surveys and argue that, in order to derive results about the meaning of a term in a shared language, we need to study a representative number of intuitive judgements. For example, Joshua Knobe (e.g. 2003) has done influential work of this sort.

More analytic philosophers seem to be in the second camp. They maintain that it is not important what exactly speakers mean by "liberty" or "causation" when our aim is to gain more knowledge about the nature of liberty or causation. The phenomena determine the subject matter of inquiry

rather than ordinary language. The linguistic turn was a wrong turning altogether. Philosophers in this camp disagree significantly on other issues. Timothy Williamson (2007), for example, claims that a priori reasoning plays an important part in philosophy[1] whereas experimental philosophers of the relevant sort (a different faction from the one mentioned above) highlight the overwhelming significance of empirical methods (e.g. Kornblith 2002; for an overview, see e.g. Alexander and Weinberg 2007).

I will be steering a middle ground between the two camps. I agree with the second camp that examining the current meaning of terms is of strictly limited importance. However, I agree with the first camp that settling our terminology plays an important role in settling the subject matter of inquiry. I will propose that an updated version of Carnap's method of explication (in particular [1950] 1951, Ch. 1; 1963, 933–940) is the most promising method to settle terminological issues and thus the subject matter of first-order inquiry. The basic idea is that, in the course of inquiry, we revise pre-theoretic terms guided by our theoretical (and sometimes practical) aims and render them more suitable for these aims, for example, by making them more precise and let them trace the distinctions that are most significant for our interests. This involves epistemic, ethical and pragmatic considerations.

The Carnapian method to settle our terminology has considerable advantages over traditional as well as more recent forms of conceptual analysis.

[1] Note that Williamson (2004) does acknowledge a role for language in philosophy, but a role that differs from the one this inquiry is concerned with.

It avoids, for instance, the often-criticised heavy reliance on intuitions and vulnerability to counterexamples and does not make philosophical theories hostage to pre-theoretic language. Moreover, it promotes considerations on important terminological matters that are underrated by opponents of conceptual analysis. Potential challenges to my approach will be addressed as well in particular that it merely changes the subject, turns substantive dispute into merely verbal ones, or fosters biased terminology.

I will sometimes label the method "explication" to honour my source of inspiration. However, I will often call it "terminological revision" or "terminological improvement" instead, to avoid confusion with the wide range of things that are sometimes referred to as explications (e.g. explanations, clarifications, definitions etc.).

Even though my approach is greatly indebted to Carnap's account of explication, my aim is not exegetical. A number of philosophers have provided valuable discussions of how to best interpret Carnap's account of explication in the context of his work and the work of his time (e.g. Carus 2007; Hanna 1968; Maher 2007; Stein 1992; Wagner 2012). I will not contribute to this debate, but use Carnap's account of explication as a starting point. Carnap's account remains quite sketchy and my aim will be to develop it in a way that is responsive to current themes and challenges.

An important aspect of Carnap's account that I retain is its pragmatism. How we refine our terms should ultimately depend on our theoretical or practical aims. However, I part company with Carnap where restrictions on

language pluralism are concerned. In his *The Logical Syntax of Language*, he (1937, §17) embraces a principle of tolerance according to which "in logic there are no morals. Everyone is at liberty to build up his own logic, i.e. his own language, as he wishes. All that is required of him is that, if he wishes to discuss it, he must state his methods clearly, and give syntactical rules instead of philosophical arguments." In contrast, I will argue (Chs. 3, 5) that there are certain limits to linguistic tolerance. Terminological refinements are only acceptable if they are guided by respectable aims and whether an aim is respectable depends on ethical, epistemic and pragmatic considerations. In this respect, my view might be reminiscent of the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce who acknowledges an "ethics of terminology".[2] Moreover, my view will not be committed to Carnap's semantic internalism or the metaphysical anti-realism often ascribed to him (see e.g. Eklund 2013).

Another core aspect of Carnap's account that I retain is its naturalism. "Naturalism" is a fashionable term and nowadays many philosophers with vastly different views call their views naturalistic. That a view is naturalistic typically implies that it acknowledges a continuity of philosophy with the sciences. At any rate, this is the sense in which the Carnapian view that I will defend is naturalistic. If I am right, it promotes a certain methodological continuity of philosophy with the sciences. For Carnap, philosophy is mainly philosophy of science and many of his examples are explications of scientific terms such as "temperature" or "probability". I agree with Carnap that

[2] For an illuminating presentation of Peirce's ethics of terminology see Haack (2009).

explication or something akin to it is commonly used in the sciences. Economists use notions of poverty that are more specific than the everyday notion. They distinguish, for example, between absolute and relative poverty and attempt to render poverty measurable. In physics, "mass" is used with several and much more precise meanings than in everyday life. Economists and physicists have revised the ordinary terms for the purpose of their inquiries. If this is on the right track and explication is widely used in the sciences, to recommend its use in philosophy is to recommend a certain methodological continuity with the sciences.

Besides my historical source of inspiration, I should also mention current philosophers who can be seen as my allies as far as the use of Carnapian explication in philosophy is concerned. Philip Kitcher (e.g. 2007; 2008) defends explications of the concept of race and a number of concepts in the philosophy of biology like the concept of a species. I have mentioned that Chalmers (2012) argues for a thesis that involves a certain weak form of conceptual analysis. Chalmers also notes his sympathy for Carnap's method of explication. I will argue (Ch. 2) that the form of explication that I develop is compatible with Chalmers's weak form of analysis and a fruitful addition to his framework. Moreover, in the area of moral and political philosophy, James Griffin (2008) has recently defended a notion of human rights that he claims to be an explication of the ordinary notion in a broadly Carnapian sense. These philosophers do not provide a detailed account of explication or defend its

advantages over currently available methods. I hope that my inquiry will fill in this gap.

Another important source of inspiration for my inquiry is David Lewis's (1988) account of the subject matter of a statement. At the heart of my inquiry are confusions regarding the subject matter of debates such as failures to address the subject matter at issue, highly contested evaluative terms, and parties to a dispute talking past each other. Subject matter is a somewhat neglected topic in philosophy. However, a few proposals have been made. As I will argue (Ch. 1), the most promising of the few extant accounts is Lewis's (1988) account of the subject matter of a statement. I will draw on this account in order to clarify what the subject matter of a debate is.

Concerning the core question addressed in this inquiry, an important issue is whether to focus on words or concepts, on language or mind. I will focus on words. A frequently cited reason (e.g. Kingsbury and McKeown-Green 2009, 176–181) to focus on concepts is that the focus on words limits us to a particular language (e.g. English) and a particular linguistic community (e.g. English speakers) whereas the focus on concepts does not (see Williamson 2007, 13–14). However, it is not obvious that words in different languages cannot have the same meaning; in particular, words that are used in international debates. Moreover, it is not obvious that a focus on concepts avoids such potential restrictions. Recent empirical findings might suggest that concepts are tied to a cultural or socio-economic background (see e.g. Nichols, Stich and Weinberg 2003). Hence, our current state of knowledge does not

seem to allow for a clear decision on whether the focus on words or concepts is less restricted.

My reason for choosing to focus on words is that this sits more comfortably with my methodological view. The method that I am going to defend can clearly be applied to words and, as I will argue, it is compatible with a range of semantic views. By contrast, it is not clear whether it can be applied to concepts if we adopt any of the most common views on the nature of concepts.

What is the scope of my claim in this inquiry? When do terms require our attention even if they are not the primary focus? When do their shortcomings render the subject matter unclear? The considerations in this inquiry suggest that the problem is not so much that we have an insufficient understanding of what such terms as "knowledge" or "terrorism" actually mean in ordinary or pre-theoretic language. Rather, these terms require special attention because they are not well suited to the aims of an inquiry, that is, to the questions we hope to address and the issues we hope to resolve. There can be different reasons for this, such as that a term is too indeterminate, contested, ambiguous or does not trace the distinctions that are most relevant for our aims. Some of the subject matter related problems these shortcomings raise are unclear entailments of claims, verbal disputes, failures to address the subject matter at issue, contested subject matters, and parties to a debate talking past one another.

What are the consequences of my methodological recommendation for philosophical practice? Counterexamples and intuitions about the application of a term to actual and hypothetical cases play a much more modest role than they currently do. By contrast, considerations about respectable aims such as the relative significance of theoretical questions or the legitimacy of practical endeavours gain in importance. Moreover, definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions come within reach.

It should be clear from the considerations thus far that metaphilosophical—in particular, methodological—issues are core to this inquiry. However, methodology without awareness of first-order debates is empty and first-order debates without any awareness of methodology is blind.[3] Hence, I will use examples from different areas of philosophy to illustrate my considerations. Moreover, some issues in the philosophy of language (such as the subject matter of statements and disagreement) and in metaethics (such as essentially contested concepts and disagreement) will also be discussed and I will take at least a glance at some metaphysical and epistemological questions. Each chapter focuses on a different problem regarding the subject matter of a debate or inquiry that raises questions about the need to examine the meaning of terms.

[3] I am liberally borrowing from Immanuel Kant (CPR, A51, B76).

0.2 Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 addresses what I will call the subject change thesis: If the meaning of a core term changes, the subject matter under discussion changes. This thesis is sometimes invoked to support the need for conceptual analysis or empirical research into the actual meaning of terms. We need to study the actual meaning of "pain" in order to settle the subject matter of an inquiry into pain (see e.g. Jackson [1998] 2008, 30, 38, 48, 118; Alexander and Weinberg 2007, 58). Moreover, it is sometimes used to criticize an account that seems revisionary. Someone who addresses a question about race in the ordinary sense of "race", and answers using a quite different technical notion, merely changes the subject (see e.g. Haslanger 2006, 106). In both contexts, subject change appears as a bad thing.

I argue that even though two clarified variants of the subject change thesis can be vindicated, subject change is not always a bad thing. There is an important beneficial form of subject change due to meaning change, namely, when we improve the meaning of terms in the light of our aims. Subject change due to terminological improvement is beneficial because it brings into focus the subject matter that we should be focusing on given the aims we hope to attain. The method of terminological improvement that I develop is an updated version of Carnap's method of explication. Moreover, I use Lewis's account of the subject matter of statements in order to clarify what the subject matter of a debate is.

The upshot of Chapter 1 is that attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, this does not necessarily mean that we need to examine the current meaning of terms. It can be beneficial to revise the meaning of terms and thus the subject matter under discussion.

Chapter 2 is concerned with what Jackson ([1998] 2008, 2–5) has termed the location problem. The problem arises in the context of a metaphysical or epistemological project. The basic idea underlying the metaphysical project is that a complete description of reality does not need to mention everything. It is, for instance, not necessary to mention water as well as H_2O. Such a project raises the problem of how we can move from findings in terms of a basic vocabulary (for example, findings about H_2O) to claims in terms of a non-basic vocabulary (for example, claims about water). This matters because we care about a lot of things that are not mentioned in the basic description of reality or in the class of basic truths like water, pain, liberty or probability.

I will steer a middle ground between those like Jackson who defend the use of conceptual analysis and those who argue that special attention to language is not required at all and empirical research into the relevant phenomena suffices (e.g. Block and Stalnaker 1999; Kornblith 2002; Schroeter 2006). I will argue that terminological revision in the Carnapian sense developed in Chapter 1 is the most promising method to clarify non-basic terms and thus mediate between the subject matter described in basic terms

and its description in non-basic terms. I will also show how this method is compatible with the weak form of conceptual analysis Chalmers (2012) uses in his scrutability framework, an epistemological project that raises a location problem. What is more, it appears to be a fruitful addition to it.

Considerations in Chapter 2 lend further support to the view that emerged in Chapter 1. Attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, to examine the current meaning of terms is not always the best way to do so. As regards the location problem, it is more fruitful to revise ordinary or pre-theoretic terminology in light of our aims and findings and thus determine the subject matter we ought to focus on. Moreover, considerations in Chapter 2 situate my view in relation to a range of alternative approaches.

Chapter 3 discusses the problem that arises when evaluative terms in normative inquiry are contested. The main example to illustrate my considerations will be the term "terrorism". The failure to disagree on a definition of terrorism inside and outside philosophy hinders discussions about moral as well as political and legal issues. The question is whether settling the subject matter of this debate involves examining what we mean by "terrorism".

The standard approach is to clarify contested evaluative terms by providing a traditional conceptual analysis. I will not rehearse notorious objections against traditional conceptual analysis in any detail. Instead, I will argue that the Carnapian form of terminological revision developed in previous chapters avoids these objections. Moreover, I will address the concern that this

method fosters terms that are biased towards certain interests and refine my account accordingly. I will also provide reason to think that the claim to study phenomena rather than terms, made, for example, by proponents of the "jazz account of meaning" (e.g. Haslanger 2010; Schroeter and Schroeter 2009), does not avoid terminological issues, but supports the need for terminological revision instead.

The upshot will be that the view developed in previous chapters applies in the context of normative inquiry as well. The most promising method to clarify contested evaluative terms and to thus settle the subject matter of normative inquiry is a Carnapian form of terminologocal revision rather than conceptual analysis. What matters is not so much the meaning these terms currently have, but the meaning they ought to be given in light of our theoretical (and sometimes practical) aims. This raises very general questions about the relative significance and respectability of our aims.

Chapters 4 and 5 are about merely verbal disputes and how to resolve them. That disputes can be merely verbal has sparked some recent interest in philosophy and numerous philosophical disputes have at some point been suspected of being merely verbal when properly understood (see Chalmers 2011, 517; Sidelle 2007, 83). Roughly, a dispute is verbal when parties do not actually disagree on a substantive issue, but merely talk past one another due to some linguistic confusion. The appropriate treatment for such pointless disputes is to smooth them out and focus on the actual, substantive issues (if any) that remain.

Verbal disputes are another phenomenon that raises the question of how important it is to examine the meaning of terms in first-order inquiry. After all, an obvious suggestion is to clarify the meaning of the terms used in order to resolve a verbal dispute. I will propose a view on verbal disputes and how to resolve them that is informed by my broadly Carnapian methodology and the Lewisian notion of subject matter developed in earlier chapters. The upshot will be that even if certain philosophical disputes share the core features of merely verbal disputes, this does not automatically warrant the common belittling attitude. Something important can and often does depend on the linguistic confusion involved, namely, how to delineate the subject matters of a more general debate to which the verbal dispute in question belongs. Where this is the case, the dispute is more accurately described as a vital verbal dispute. I will also argue that, even though Chalmers's (2011) method of elimination, provided certain weaknesses are fixed, is a more suitable method to resolve verbal disputes than conceptual analysis, it does not fully resolve vital verbal disputes. The more promising method to resolve vital verbal disputes is the Carnapian method to clarify terms developed in earlier chapters.

Again it appears that attention to words is important in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. Moreover, in a number of philosophically important cases, including vital verbal disputes, it is more promising to revise terms in light of our aims than to analyse their current meaning.

The last section of Chapter 5 will be an addendum that deals with a common objection to my methodological recommendation in this inquiry. Thus, if we accept the Carnapian views it involves, many substantive disputes come out as merely verbal.

0.3 Historical Background

As outlined above, I take my inquiry to be well motivated in the context of current debates. The historical background adds a further dimension to this motivation. It traces how the question and its significance have arisen in its current form. The distinction between analytic and continental philosophy is questionable. Nevertheless, there is a fairly uncontentious conception of analytic philosophy as a cluster of issues, approaches and maybe also values. My inquiry stands in the analytic tradition in this sense. It engages with a certain ideal of clarity that has always been a core value of analytic philosophy. As William D. Hart (1990, 197) puts it: "Praise for clarity and, perhaps even more, condemnation for its opposed vices have been perceived as characteristic of philosophy done in analytic style."

The relevant ideal of clarity goes back at least as far as the early modern ages. At the heart of René Descartes's rationalism is the idea that clarity is a mark of truth. At the beginning of the Third Meditation, he ([1641] 1992) claims that whatever we perceive very clearly and distinctly is true. At the end of the nineteenth century, Charles Sanders Peirce ([1878] 1992) criticises Descartes's conception of clarity and proposes a pragmatist account of how to

make our ideas clear. The view that I defend in this inquiry agrees with Peirce's view in so far as pragmatic considerations should guide our clarifications. Another historical development that is particularly relevant to this inquiry is the linguistic turn in the first half of the twentieth century. The label "linguistic turn" has arguably been given currency by a volume edited by Richard Rorty in 1967 entitled *The Linguistic Turn*. It is commonly applied to a range of loosely related developments in philosophy. Rorty describes the one that is relevant to my inquiry as follows:

> The purpose of the present volume is to provide materials for reflection on the most recent philosophical revolution, that of linguistic philosophy. I shall mean by "linguistic philosophy" the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use. (Rorty 1967, 3)

Ludwig Wittgenstein was one of the leaders of this revolution. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, he proclaims that "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" ([1953] 1999, §109) and adds later that "the clarity we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear" ([1953] 1999, §133). Thus, philosophical problems arise only due to linguistic confusions and are to be fully resolved by examining language. Other philosophers' views are somewhat less extreme, but they share the assumption that studying language is necessary and sufficient to solve philosophical problems. Terminological clarity is a core part of this program. In order to answer philosophical questions about the nature of causation or pain, we are

required to settle what "causation" and "pain" mean. This is supposed to fully answer or resolve the question.

The form of clarity promoted by the linguistic turn is a thorough understanding of what the terms we use really mean. Doubts about the importance of this form of clarity arose towards the mid-twentieth century and found expression in the dictum "Clarity is not enough". H. H. Price (1945, 1) points out: "For it is felt by quite a number of people, rightly or wrongly, that during the twenty years between the two wars philosophy had somehow taken the wrong turning." In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, this uneasiness develops into a new self-image of philosophy in which the study of concepts and terms plays a bit part. Thus, examining the meaning of the terms "pain" and "causation" does not answer or resolve questions about the nature of pain and causation.

In *From Metaphysics to Ethics*, Jackson reconsiders the importance of the form of clarity promoted by the linguistic turn. It is by no means a linguistic re-turn. In his view, conceptual analysis does not fully answer philosophical questions about the nature of things. Nevertheless, he argues that it is a necessary first step in a larger metaphysical project concerned with the nature of reality. Hence, he revives the idea that close attention to what our terms actually mean is indispensable.

I am doubtful that this form of clarity is crucial. However, I agree with Jackson that terminological clarity of some form is important and more important than opponents of conceptual analysis typically acknowledge. In my

view, the form of clarity that matters is the clarity that we attain when we improve our terms in light of our aims and based on our findings. Somewhat paradoxically, this form of terminological clarity is not a merely terminological issue; it is influenced by substantive claims and answerable to not only pragmatic, but also ethical and epistemic considerations. Nevertheless, like Jackson, I do not recommend a linguistic re-turn. The form of terminological clarity that I promote settles the subject matter of first-order inquiry, but it does not answer the questions it addresses.

In order to bring out the difference between the form of clarity promoted by Jackson and the form of clarity that I advocate, consider an ambiguity besetting philosophers' talk of clarity. As Lewis ([1973] 2005, 91) puts it, "'unclear' is unclear: does it mean 'ill-understood' or does it mean 'vague'?" Both ways to use "(un)clear" are common in philosophy. This suggests a distinction between two forms of clarity; call them descriptive and revisionary clarity. Descriptive clarification is what we do when a term is unclear in the sense of ill-understood. What we improve is *our understanding* of the term while the term itself remains the same. Revisionary clarification is what we do when something is unclear in the sense Lewis describes as vague. Thus, we not only improve our understanding of a term, we improve the term itself by rendering it more precise.[4] Jackson's view supports the need for descriptive clarity in order to settle the subject matter of philosophical inquiry whereas I claim that revisionary clarity is needed.

[4] This presupposes that we do not adopt an epistemic theory of vagueness.

0.4 The Broader Significance of this Inquiry

I should briefly sketch what the broader significance of this inquiry could be. As noted earlier, I believe that the Carnapian method of terminological revision defended in this inquiry is used in the sciences as well. Moreover, I think that a similar method is commonly used to define legal terms and thus influences political debates. If this is right, this inquiry suggests refinements for these practices. Furthermore, the problems discussed in Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5 occur outside philosophy as well. That the term "terrorism" is contested poses as much a problem for international politics as it does for philosophy, and political as well as everyday disputes can be merely verbal. My methodological recommendation applies in these cases as well. Thus, a Carnapian form of terminological revision is a promising method to settle the subject matter of a political or legal debate about terrorism in a way that is sensitive to ethical and pragmatic aspects.

Chapter 1

Changing the Meaning and Changing the Subject

When studying causation, knowledge or race, is it necessary to study what the terms "causation", "knowledge" and "race" mean? This chapter is concerned with a first idea that raises this question. I will call it the subject change thesis: if the meaning of a term changes, the subject matter that is being addressed changes. This thesis suggests an affirmative answer to the question.

The subject change thesis is sometimes invoked to support the need to analyze the meaning of the core terms of an inquiry into the nature of things. We need to study the actual meaning of "pain" or "morally responsible" in order to settle the subject matter of an inquiry into pain or moral responsibility (see e.g. Jackson [1998] 2008, 30, 38, 48, 118; Alexander and Weinberg 2007, 58).

Moreover, the subject change thesis is sometimes used to criticize an account that seems revisionary. Someone who addresses a question about race in the ordinary sense of "race" and answers using a technical notion of "race" that is quite different from the ordinary notion seems to be merely changing the subject (see e.g. Haslanger 2006, 106). He does not tell us whether discrimination based on race is widespread in academia, but whether discrimination based on race* is widespread. In both contexts, subject change appears as a bad thing.

The aim of this chapter is to argue that there is an important beneficial form of subject change via meaning change. I will start by spelling out different variants of the subject change thesis. For a clearer understanding of what the subject matter of a debate is, I will draw on David Lewis's (1988) notion of the subject matter of a statement and explain why this notion of subject matter is more promising than extant alternatives. It will appear that meaning change is, indeed, sufficient for subject change. However, as I will go on to argue, subject change is not always a bad thing. There is an important beneficial form of subject change due to meaning change. It occurs when we improve the meaning of terms in the light of our aims. The account of terminological revision or improvement that I will develop is a version of Carnap's method of explication, updated in order to accommodate current themes and challenges. Such terminological improvements change the subject matter in a beneficial way because they adapt it to our aims. They do not provide a better understanding of the (potentially confused) subject matter that is being debated, but specify the subject matter that we should be focusing on given the aims we hope to attain.

This conclusion casts doubt on how the subject change thesis is used to defend conceptual analysis or empirical research into the current meaning of terms and to criticize revisionary accounts. The question is not so much whether an account is changing the subject, but whether there is good reason for the suggested change. As a result, attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, this does not

necessarily mean that we need to examine the current meaning of terms. It can be beneficial to revise the meaning of terms and thus the subject matter of inquiry.

In the last section, I will consider a potential concern with the Lewisian notion of subject matter. This notion is formulated in the framework of possible world semantics and is therefore liable to a number of difficulties that go under the heading of "hyperintensionality". Roughly, the question is whether the notion is fine-grained enough to account for certain differences in subject matter for example, between necessarily true statements.

1.1 The Subject Change Thesis

The aim of this section is to clarify the subject change thesis and set forth different possible interpretations. Here are some recent manifestations of the subject change thesis. In his defence of conceptual analysis, Frank Jackson urges:[5]

> As Lewis Carroll said through the character of Humpty Dumpty, we are entitled to mean what we like by our words. But if we wish to address the concerns of our fellows when we discuss the matter—and if we don't we will not have much of an audience—*we had better mean what they mean. We had better, that is, identify our subject matter via the folk theory of rightness,* wrongness, goodness, badness, and so on. (Jackson [1998] 2008, 118, my emphasis; see also [1998] 2008, 30, 38, 48)

Haslanger defends her account of race as follows:

> I will argue, first, that the constructionist *is not changing the subject, or changing our language* [...]. Second, I will argue that although the constructionist suggests that we come to a new understanding of our concepts, this *does not require*

[5] For a similar argument, see also Peter F. Strawson (1963, 504–505).

> *replacing our old concept* with a new one, but understanding our original concept better. (Haslanger 2006, 106, my emphasis)

Griffin identifies the following potential concern with his revision of the notion of a human right:

> And if a stipulation for the term 'human right' yields a very different extension from that in the Enlightenment, why think that it is the best stipulation? Why think even that it explains the term we set out to explain in the first place? Does it not just change the subject? (Griffin 2008, 28)

In a survey paper on experimental philosophy, Joshua Alexander and Jonathan Weinberg identify essentially the same concern:

> Philosophical practice is not concerned with understanding the nature of knowledge (or belief, freedom, moral responsibility, etc.) in some technical sense, but of knowledge as the concept is ordinarily understood outside of strictly philosophical discourse and practice. If it were concerned only with the technical sense of the concept, it would be divorced from the concerns that led us to philosophical investigation of the concept in the first place and its verdicts would have little bearing on those initial concerns. As such, large and central swaths of philosophical practice must be concerned with the ordinary concepts. (Alexander and Weinberg 2007, 58)

Two general variants of the subject change thesis emerge from these quotes:

(1) The subject under discussion changes if the meaning of a core term changes.

(2) The subject under discussion changes if a core concept is replaced.

I will set aside variant (2) and its relation to variant (1) because this inquiry focuses on terms rather than concepts. Variant (1) can be interpreted in different ways depending on what semantic views we adopt. I will focus on two common views. We could adopt a semantic externalism on which the

meaning of a term is nothing but the referent, understood as what a term applies to in the actual world and everything possible that has the same nature. On this view, the referent and thus the meaning of "water" is H_2O. What competent speakers associate with water—for example, that it is the thirst-quenching liquid in rivers and lakes—is not part of the meaning. The resulting thesis is the following:

(1.1) The subject under discussion changes if what a core term refers to changes.

According to this thesis, a change in what speakers associate with the referent alone would not effect a subject change. Alternatively, we can adopt a semantic internalism on which the meaning of a term is more than its referent. We could maintain that the properties or application conditions competent speakers associate with a term are part of its meaning, namely, its intension. The resulting subject change thesis is the following:

(1.2) The subject under discussion changes if the intension of a core term changes, that is, the application conditions speakers associate with it.

This thesis is stronger than the first one. What people associate with a term can change even if its referent does not change. A linguistic community can keep

referring to H_2O with the term "water" even if the properties they associate with water change, for instance, from "the thirst-quenching liquid in wells" to "the thirst-quenching liquid that comes from taps".

In order to further clarify these variants of the subject change thesis, it is important to spell out what a subject matter is such that it could change due to a change in meaning. Subject matter is a somewhat neglected topic in philosophy, but a few interesting proposals have been made. An obvious idea, suggested by Gilbert Ryle (1933, 10–12), is that a statement is about the things it mentions, that is, the things the terms in it refer to. The statement "Billy goes to school" is, for example, about Billy and about school. Unfortunately, this proposal fails. As Nelson Goodman (1961, 4) has pointed out, statements are often about things they do not mention. "All children go to school" is also about Billy who is one of these children, but it does not mention him. As Goodman (1961, 4) goes on to argue, it does not help to suggest instead that a statement is about the things its entailments mention. This proposal allows us to say that "All children go to school" is about Billy because it entails "Billy goes to school", which mentions Billy. However, the proposal leads to many unwanted subject matters as well. "Billy goes to school" entails "Billy goes to school or elephants can fly". Hence, the statement "Billy goes to school" is about elephants. This is clearly an unwanted result.

Lewis (1988, 11–14) has offered a more promising proposal. What do all statements about the same subject matter have in common? They obviously differ in content and truth-value. Moreover, they do not all mention the same

thing. However, their truth-value at a world supervenes on the same respects of this world. In consequence, when two worlds are exactly alike with respect to a certain subject matter, a statement about this subject matter has the same truth-value at both worlds.[6] This suggests a simple test for what a statement is about. We simply ask what the respects are such that changes in these respects at a world might affect the truth-value of the statement at this world. The statement "Human rights are universal" is about human rights because changes in how things are at a world with respect to human rights might affect the truth-value of this statement at that world. For the same reason, the statement "Scepticism is mistaken" is about knowledge even though it does not mention it. Arguably, changes in how things are with respect to knowledge at a world might affect the truth-value of this statement at that world. Notably, a statement has always several subject matters in this sense. "Billy goes to school" is about Billy, but also about school, about who goes to school, about whether Billy goes to school etc.[7]

What is the appeal of the framework of possible world semantics in this context? In such a framework, possible worlds are maximally specified ways the world might be. Using statements, we can communicate, amongst other things, what the world might be like in some respect or another. This is compatible with a whole range of ways the world might be like in all respects,

[6] For the sake of simplicity, I focus on subject matters statements are entirely about. Lewis also discusses how statements can be partly about a subject matter, and things are more complicated in these cases.

[7] Yablo (2012, lecture 1) insists that a statement must have one unique subject matter. I do not share this impression. It seems quite natural to say that a statement has a number of more or less general subject matters.

that is, with a range of maximally specified ways the world might be. Hence, the content of a statement can be modelled as a set of possible worlds. "Billy goes to school" picks out the set of all possible worlds in which Billy goes to school. When evaluating its truth-value, we consider whether the actual world is among these worlds in which Billy goes to school. What the actual world is like in other respects and hence which of these worlds it is does not matter.

On the Lewisian notion, the subject matter of a statement has to do with its content, that is, with what it represents the world as being like. When evaluating statements about a subject matter, we consider how the world might be with respect to the subject matter in question. We can lump together all possible worlds that are exactly alike with respect to that subject matter. That they differ in other respects is irrelevant because it is irrelevant for the truth-value of statements about the subject matter at issue. As a result, a subject matter partitions logical space into mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive regions. This is because "being exactly alike with respect to subject matter SM" is an equivalence relation; it is reflexive (every world is exactly alike to itself with respect to SM), symmetric (if world w_1 is exactly alike to w_2 with respect to SM, then w_2 is exactly alike to w_1 with respect to SM) and transitive (if w_1 is exactly alike to w_2 and w_2 is exactly alike to w_3 with respect to SM, then w_1 is exactly alike to w_3 with respect to SM).

An important specification concerns how we conceive of logical space, that is, in what sense of "possible" we talk about possible worlds. I will work with the assumption that epistemically possible worlds matter where subject

matters are concerned. This means that we evaluate ways the world might be like *for all we know*. All possibilities we can conceive independently of what the world is actually like are relevant for the subject matter of statements. However, I will also discuss how a different decision on this matter would affect the argument.

The subject change thesis concerns not so much the subject matter of individual statements, but the subject matter of a debate. Therefore, it is useful to point out that subject matters in the Lewisian sense cannot only be raised by making statements, but also by posing questions if we conceive of the content of questions in a certain, popular way. In this view, the content of a question is a partition of logical space into mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive regions where the worlds in each region agree on the answer to the question.[8] The content of the question of whether Billy goes to school is a partition of logical space into two regions, into the worlds in which Billy goes to school and the worlds in which Billy does not go to school. This is the same partition that is invoked by the subject matter whether Billy goes to school. This is how a question raises a subject matter.

How can we use the Lewisian notion of subject matter to assess whether the subject matter of a debate changes if the meaning of a core term changes? A subject matter in Lewis's view attaches primarily to statements. As I have shown, we can easily extend the view such that questions raise subject

[8] Partition semantics for questions have been suggested by, e.g., Higginbotham and May (1981) and Belnap (1982).

matters in this sense as well. I suggest the following way to test whether the subject matter of a debate changes due to meaning change. We assess whether statements that use the changed term address a subject matter raised by a question that contains the original term; that is, we assess whether these statements invoke the partition invoked by the question. Thus, we assess, for example, whether the statement "Discrimination based on race* is widespread" addresses the subject matter raised by the question "Is discrimination based on race widespread?", posed before the change in meaning.

1.2 Meaning Change Without Subject Change?

The task for this section is to assess variants (1.1) and (1.2) of the subject change thesis. To begin with, note that these variants clearly do not state a necessary condition for subject change. Subject changes happen very often without changes in meaning; for example, when people talk first about the weather and then go on to discuss the upcoming elections. Hence, the question is whether variants of the subject change thesis state a sufficient condition for subject change.

1.2.1 Assessing Variants of the Subject Change Thesis

Let me start with the weaker variant (1.1): The subject under discussion changes if what a core term refers to changes. Take the notorious example "fish". In the early nineteenth century, "fish" was still commonly applied to whales. Let us assume that what speakers associated with the term fish was

"animals with fins living in the water" and that the term actually applied to whales (people were not systematically mistaken in their application of the term to whales). Let us assume, furthermore, that scientific discoveries have induced a change in the meaning of "fish". The properties associated with the new term "fish*" are "animals that live in the water and share certain biologically salient features". Whales are not part of the extension of this term. Did this change in meaning effect a change in subject matter?

The test that I have suggested at the end of the previous section is to take a debated question that contains the original term and assess whether statements using the revised term address the subject matter it raises, that is, invoke the same partition. The question "Have some species of fish become extinct?" raises the subject matter whether some species of fish have become extinct. This subject matter partitions logical space into two regions, worlds in which this is the case and worlds in which it is not. Does a statement using the revised term fish* like "Some species of fish* have become extinct" address this subject matter? It does not because it invokes a different partition.

Take two worlds w_1 and w_2 such that in w_1 no species has ever become extinct and in w_2 all and only species of whales have become extinct. These two worlds are in different regions of the partition invoked by the question; w_1 is in the regions with worlds in which no species of fish has become extinct and w_2 is in the regions with worlds in which some species of fish have become extinct, namely, all species of whales. By contrast, these two worlds are in the same region of the partition invoked by the statement that contains the

revised term fish*. They are both in the region with worlds in which no species of fish have become extinct. This vindicates subject change thesis (1.1): The subject under discussion changes if what a core term refers to changes.

How about the stronger thesis (1.2)? Does the subject under discussion change if the intension of a core term changes? Let us consider a case in which the intension but not the referent changes in order to keep this thesis separate from thesis (1.1). Suppose that, at some point in time, the intension of the term "water" was "the thirst-quenching liquid in wells". At a later stage, when water wells were no longer used, this intension changed and what speakers came to associate with the term "water*" was "the thirst-quenching liquid that comes from taps". It so happens that the thirst-quenching liquid in wells and the thirst-quenching liquid that comes from taps in the actual world is H_2O. Hence, "water" and "water*" have the same referent, but different intensions. Is this change in intension alone sufficient for subject change?

Take the question "Is there water on Earth?", which raises the subject whether there is water on Earth. Does a statement using the revised term "water*" like "There is water* on Earth" address this subject? It does not if we take subject matters to partition epistemically possible worlds. For all speakers know a priori, there are possible worlds that are exactly alike with respect to whether there is water on Earth, but differ with respect to whether there is water* on Earth. Take two worlds w_1 and w_2 such that there is no H_2O and nothing in the wells in either of these worlds. However, the thirst-quenching liquid XYZ is coming from taps in w_2. These two worlds are in the same

region of the partition invoked by the question "Is there water on Earth?" because they are exactly alike with respect to the stuff in wells. But they are in different regions of the partition invoked by the statement "There is water* on Earth" because they differ with respect to the thirst-quenching liquid that comes from taps. The partitions invoked are not the same and hence the subject matter changes. This vindicates subject change thesis (1.2): The subject under discussion changes if the intension of a core term changes.

Notably, it is possible to hold on to the claim that terms have intensions, but reject the stronger subject change thesis (1.2) and maintain that only (1.1) provides a sufficient condition for subject change, that is, that only a change in referent is sufficient and not a change in intension alone. However, this move is only available if we assume that only metaphysically possible worlds are relevant for subject matters and not the larger set of epistemically possible worlds. If we focus on metaphysically possible worlds alone, there are no possible worlds that are exactly alike with respect to water, but differ with respect to water*. These terms have the same referent H_2O and, in all metaphysically possible worlds, the thirst-quenching liquid in wells and the thirst-quenching liquid that comes from taps is H_2O. Therefore, metaphysically possible worlds cannot differ with respect to water without differing with respect to water*. The partitions invoked by the question "Is there water on Earth?" and the statement "There is water* on Earth" is the same; the subject matter does not change due to the change in intension because the referent remains the same.

The result of this assessment is that the weaker variant (1.1) of the subject change thesis has been vindicated; the subject under discussion changes if what a core term refers to changes. The stronger variant (1.1) can be confirmed if we grant that terms have intensions and that subject matters partition epistemically possible worlds. In this view, the subject under discussion changes even if only the intension of a core term changes.

1.2.2 Precisification: A Borderline Case

Are there not cases in which the referent changes to such a limited extent that the subject under discussion does not change? Sometimes we merely render a term more precise for the purpose of theorizing. Does this really change the subject?

An important question regarding human rights is whether some human rights are violated. In his recent book on human rights, James Griffin (2008, 2) highlights that the traditional term "human right" is too vague and addresses questions concerning human rights using a precisified term "human right*". Does he address the questions that are under discussion or change the subject?

The question "Are some human rights violated?" raises the subject whether some human rights are violated. Since the ordinary term "human right" is vague, it is not entirely clear how this subject matter partitions logical space. When a term is vague, there are borderline cases such that it is not clear whether the term applies to them. The right to work is such a borderline case; it is not clear whether the traditional term "human right" applies to it. As a

result, it will be unclear for some pairs of worlds whether they are exactly alike with respect to whether some human rights are violated. Suppose that the only difference between worlds w_1 and w_2 that might be relevant to human rights is that in w_1 all people are granted the right to work whereas in w_2 only men are granted the right to work. Does this difference mean that the two worlds are in different regions of the partition invoked by the question or in the same region? Different precisifications of the term "human right" will yield different answers. One way to understand the partition invoked by the question that contains the vague term "human right" is as a set of closely similar partitions, corresponding to different precisifications of the term.

Griffin (2008, 206) defines "human rights*" such that the right to work does not fall under it; other borderline cases are decided as well. Does the statement "Some human rights* are violated" address the subject matter raised by the question above? It is not entirely clear whether the result is that Griffin addresses the subject matter raised by the question or not. On the one hand, we could argue that this is not the case because a statement using his notion invokes one partition whereas the question invokes a whole set of partitions. On the other hand, the statement selects one partition of this set.

In any case, the important points seems to be that, even if Griffin's precisification changes the subject, this subject change does not seem to be on a par with the worrisome subject changes we had in mind. Rather, it might be a beneficial subject change; the subject that is now under discussion is more

precise. I will examine the idea that, more generally, subject change due to meaning change can be beneficial in the next section.

1.3 A Beneficial Form of Subject Change

The aim of this section is to argue that there is an important beneficial form of subject change due to meaning change. This change occurs when we improve our terminology in the light of our aims. This casts doubt on how the subject change thesis is used to defend conceptual analysis or empirical research into the current meaning of terms and to criticize revisionary accounts. The question is not so much whether an account is changing the subject, but whether there is good reason for the suggested change.

1.3.1 Terminological Improvement: A Carnapian Account

The account of terminological revision or improvement that I will develop is an updated version of Carnap's method of explication. Philosophers who are sympathetic to terminological revision often simply refer back to Carnap's account of explication (e.g. Chalmers 2011; Craig 1990; Griffin 2008; Justus 2012; Kitcher 2007, 2008). However, his account (in particular Carnap [1950] 1951, Ch. 1; 1963, 933–940) remains quite sketchy and, even though detailed interpretations that do Carnap justice and disclose the role of explication in the history of philosophy are on offer,[9] more needs to be done in order to derive an account of terminological revision that is responsive to today's themes and challenges. Carnap introduces the method of explication as follows:

[9] E.g. Carus 2007; Hanna 1968; Maher 2007; Stein 1992; Wagner 2012.

> The task of explication consists in transforming a given more or less inexact concept into an exact one or, rather, in replacing the first by the second. We call the given concept (or the term used for it) the explicandum, and the exact concept proposed to take the place of the first (or the term proposed for it) the explicatum. The explicandum may belong to everyday language or to a previous stage in the development of scientific language. […] A concept must fulfil the following requirements in order to be an adequate explicatum for a given explicandum: (1) similarity to the explicandum, (2) exactness, (3) fruitfulness, (4) simplicity. (Carnap 1951, 3, 5)

In this quote, Carnap talks about improving concepts. In other passages (e.g. 1951, 3; 7–8), however, he talks about explicating general terms. I will focus on terms for the reasons set forth in the introduction. Thus, we improve terms that are already in use. Usually, we revise the meaning of these terms by stipulating criteria of application which determine how to sort hypothetical and actual cases. However, sometimes we change the label as well, that is, the sequence of sounds or letters that carry the meaning. This happens, for example, when we decide to split a term and want to avoid ambiguity. In such a case, we might choose to add a qualifying adjective like "propositional knowledge" and "non-propositional knowledge". Therefore, it is appropriate to say that we improve terms and not just the meaning of terms.

A remark regarding semantic commitments is in order. Carnap suggested the distinction between the extension and the intension of a term. Nevertheless, the account of terminological improvement or explication that I will develop remains neutral on the controversial question of whether terms have intensions as part of their meaning and whether speakers have a priori access to them. Since the aim is to improve a term, it is necessary to provide a basic understanding of the term to be improved. However, it suffices in

general to give a couple of examples, perhaps accompanied by some informal explanations in order to identify the term one attempts to improve. It is not necessary to spell out conditions that guide one's application of the term. The aim is to give a sense of how the term is correctly applied. In his explication of the notion of a human right, Griffin (2008, 1–2, 9–14), for example, specifies that his main interest is in the notion of a human right as used in ethical assessments of our society (e.g. by the United Nations in its recent verdict that the United Kingdom breaches the human rights of prisoners by not allowing them to vote) and delineates its historical meaning as that of a right that we have simply by virtue of being human. In order to improve the term, we then go on to stipulate conditions on application. However, the idea that we can stipulate conditions on application does not presuppose that terms that have not been introduced explicitly have conditions on application as part of their meaning and that competent speakers grasp these.

Once we have identified the term that we want to improve, what guides our revision? In the quote above, Carnap lists a couple of requirements that should be weighed against each other, namely, similarity, precision, fruitfulness and simplicity. I am inclined to think that there is no such list that fits all cases. Instead, I propose that the two main criteria guiding a revision are similarity and the aims that motivate the revision (this is in the vicinity of what Carnap calls "fruitfulness"). The result is a more pronouncedly pragmatic approach in which our aims play the key role.

Similarity matters because the aim is to improve a term that is being used rather than to introduce a new term. The relevant similarity has not received much attention in the Carnapian tradition. One helpful way to understand the required similarity is as an agreement to some extent in actual and hypothetical cases of application.[10] Griffin (e.g. 2008, 2, 33), for example, defines the term "human right" as an entitlement required to protect our "normative agency", that is, the distinctively human ability to choose and pursue a life one judges worthwhile. This explication retains the extension of the historical notion to a large, albeit not complete extent (Griffin 2008, 194, 202).[11]

What improvements are desirable and how much deviance from the initial term depends, I suggest, on the aims that motivate the revision. This criterion is in the vicinity of what Carnap calls fruitfulness. Carnap (1951, 7) claims that a term is more fruitful if it is more useful to formulate general statements. However, formulating many general statements is not the only use that we want to put a term to. Moreover, the suitability of a term to formulate general statements does not help decide between alternative explications of a term that are equally suitable to formulate general statements, but general statements about different issues. This will become clearer in due course. I

[10] This idea occurs in Carnap's (1951, 7) own account. However, I disagree with Carnap that it is the number of cases that matters, as will become clearer in due course (see also Goodman 1977, 9). Another idea, which was not suggested by Carnap, is to state relations to other terms that should be retained. An explication of the term "knowledge" should arguably preserve certain relations to the term "truth"; for example, that everything that is known is true.

[11] Following Carnap, I use "explication" sometimes to talk about the process, sometimes to talk about the result.

suggest starting with the general idea that the aims that motivate the revision should guide it. The difficult task is then to specify these aims in a suitable way.

In philosophy, the relevant aims are primarily of a theoretical nature and these will be my focus here; I will talk about the role of practical aims in Chapter 3. Theoretical aims have to do with providing a theory of something. Some suggest that we need to specify the (theoretical) role we want a term to play (e.g. Chalmers 2011, 538; Haslanger 2000, 33). But what does a theoretical role in the relevant sense consist of?

One useful starting point is to identify the issues that we hope to address using the term in question.[12] It seems that different issues can motivate different revisions because the distinctions that are salient for certain issues do not necessarily coincide with those that are salient for a different sort of issues. Take one rival explication of the notion of a human right. John Rawls's (1999, §10) political notion has a considerably narrower extension than Griffin's naturalistic notion; the list of human rights is considerably shorter. At least part of the reason is that they hope to answer different issues. Rawls's aim is to address such political issues as to what extent the autonomy of other peoples should be respected and where to set the boundaries of international toleration. The distinctions that matter for this aim differ from those that matter for questions concerning the protection of fundamental human

[12] Kitcher (2008, 115) makes a congenial suggestion. Importantly, the desired role of a term in a theory we are about to develop, which is what I am concerned with, must not be confused with the role identified by a conceptual analysis on Jackson's ([1998] 2008) account. Roughly speaking, a conceptual analysis compiles all platitudes about some x of interest—e.g. belief or justice—and thus the role x plays in folk theory. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 2.

interests. Rawls's works, for example, with the distinction between decent and indecent peoples, whereas Griffin invokes the idea of normative agency as distinguished, for example, from rational agency.

A problem arises if we use the very term we want to revise in order to frame our aims. We could suggest that Griffin's revision of the notion of a human right is motivated and guided by the aim to address such issues as whether everyone should be granted human rights. The problem is that this aim does not rule out outlandish revisions because it changes together with the terminological revision. We could suggest to use "human rights" to refer to the right to access my house. This revision makes it very easy to attain our aim and determine whether everyone should be granted human rights (in this sense); of course not. However, it is clearly an unacceptable revision of the term "human right"; it has nothing to do whatsoever with the initial notion.

It might be objected that such a revision is ruled out because it does not fulfil the requirement of similarity. This does not seem to be the best solution. We do not want to rule out the possibility that some aims might call for considerable deviance.

A better solution is to adopt the general rule that we should not formulate the aims guiding a revision using the term that we attempt to revise.[13] This notwithstanding, it can be helpful to mention the term, that is, to

[13] What complicates matters somewhat is that terminological revisions are usually not done in isolation. Typically, we revise a family of interrelated core terms that are relevant for the theoretical aim at issue. This can make it more difficult to formulate a relevant subject matter without using a term that is being revised.

talk about the term rather than using it when stating the aims.[14] An aim guiding Griffin's explication could be to provide a term that refers to those rights in the vicinity of what we call "human rights" that have a special moral significance as compared to other rights (recall that Griffin is interested in the notion as used in ethics). That this aim mentions the initial term "human right" ensures the desirable continuity with the initial terminology. Moreover, it renders the aim specific enough to be helpful. Note that if we formulate the aims in this way, we do not need to mention similarity as an additional requirement anymore and can focus on the aims alone as guiding a revision.

What improvements do such aims motivate? One improvement, also cited by Carnap in the quote above, is to render a term more precise.[15] Theoretical aims typically require some degree of terminological precision. Vague terminology leads to vague claims or can even make it impossible to give a determinate answer to certain questions. If we understand precision like in section 1.2.2 above, we can say that an explication increases precision if it settles some actual and hypothetical borderline cases. Griffin (2008, 2) attempts explicitly to increase precision in this sense; his account should settle at least some of the notoriously contested cases of human rights.[16] Such an increase in precision is often achieved by drawing on rather precise terms of a

[14] On this use–mention distinction, see Quine ([1940] 1981, 23–26).
[15] I set aside epistemicism about vagueness. If we adopt such a view, to render a term more precise does not mean to change its meaning, but to change our understanding of it.
[16] Based on the idea that we care about relations between terms (see Fn. 6), we could also say that an explication renders a term more precise in that it determines some of its relations to other important terms.

theory into which the explication is introduced.[17] It often takes the form of a definition, but, depending on how vague the initial term is or what the borderline cases are, something less ambitious—necessary conditions, a list of items in the extension, etc.—can suffice.

Importantly, theoretical aims cannot only motivate terminological refinements. They can motivate more considerable terminological change. If Rawls and his followers are right, and the notion of a human right should play a key role in a debate about international toleration, then we need to redefine the notion of a human right in a way that differs significantly from the tradition. As noted earlier, in the context of this issue, the term needs to track other distinctions than the ones it tracks traditionally.

Notably, to decide which distinctions a term should track in the context of a certain theoretical endeavour can involve considering empirical research. In the case of "fish" discussed earlier, the scientific endeavour motivated a redefinition based on empirical findings about the nature of whales. Hence, explication is not a distinctively a priori method.

1.3.2 Beneficial Subject Change

I have called attention to two ways in which the subject change thesis is used and, in both cases, subject change is supposed to be a bad thing. The aim of this subsection is to argue that, to the contrary, subject change due to meaning change can be beneficial. More specifically, I will argue that the Carnapian

[17] This draws attention to the fact that explications often happen within a theoretical framework, which is potentially developed at the same time.

form of terminological improvement introduced in the last subsection changes the subject matter in a beneficial way.

The relevant terminological improvements are motivated by our aims. If successful, they render our terminology suitable for the tasks that we hope to accomplish using them. They ensure that our terms track the distinctions that are salient in the context of our aims. As regards the subject matters under discussion, these terminological improvements do not provide a better understanding of the potentially confused subject matter that is initially raised in a debate. Instead, they adjust the subject matter that is being debated using the terminology in question to our aims; they help us raise the subject matter that we should be focusing on given the aims we hope to attain.

Sometimes the terminological improvement is mainly a precisification. In this case, as highlighted earlier, we precisify the subject matter under discussion; we select one of a range of closely related partitions that were initially invoked. In other cases, the adjustment is more significant. In such a case, we introduce a partition that is quite different from the one initially invoked. In both cases, the terminological revision leads us to invoke a subject matter that is better adjusted to our aims, a partition that sorts possible worlds based on the distinctions that are most salient for our aims.

When Griffin precisifies the notion of a human right for the purposes of addressing certain moral issues, he specifies the subject matter that we should focus on in the context of discussing these moral issues. When the term "fish" was revised for the purpose of addressing certain scientific issues, the

subject matter changed to the one that scientific inquiry concerned with these issues should focus on.

Not every terminological revision that serves some aim changes the subject in a beneficial way. As noted earlier, aims need to be formulated in the right way. An aim that motivates outlandish revisions leads to an outlandish subject change and not a beneficial one.

Moreover, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, not every aim is respectable. Some aims are less significant than others and some aims are morally dubious. A terminological revision that serves such an aim is dubious and does not change the subject in a beneficial way.

Furthermore, an aim can be formulated in the right way and be perfectly respectable, but it might not be an aim that is best attained using the term in question. Some philosophers think that Rawls's revision of the notion of a human right is motivated by an issue that should not be addressed using the notion of a human right. If these critics are right, the subject change effected by Rawls's revision is not beneficial, but motivated by the wrong aims.

That subject change can be beneficial casts doubt on how the subject change thesis is used to defend conceptual analysis or empirical research into the current meaning of terms and to criticize revisionary accounts. In both contexts, the tacit assumption is that subject change is a bad thing. We need do carefully analyze the current meaning of terms in order to settle what subject matter is debated using them and to avoid changing the subject. An account's being revisionary speaks against it because this indicates that it does not

address what we have been discussing, but merely changes the subject. However, if subject change can be beneficial, these ways to argue are flawed. That an account is changing the subject is not a reason to reject it. The question is whether there is good reason for the suggested change.

1.3.3 Weak Metaphysical Commitments

What are the metaphysical costs of accepting the view that subject change can be beneficial? On the anti-realist view often ascribed to Carnap, the world is not objectively structured; we decide where to draw the lines. The Carnapian form of terminological improvement developed allows that we choose the distinctions our terms should track depending on our aims.[18] This seems to suggest that this form of terminological improvement and beneficial subject change is only acceptable for metaphysical anti-realists. However, this is not the case.

Take Theodor Sider (2011), whose metaphysical realist view that the world is structured in a certain objective way and whose claim that language should carve these "joints in nature" severely restricts the freedom to choose referents. Furthermore, Sider (e.g. 2011, Ch. 3.2) is inclined towards the semantic view that, even though our usage of terms is not always ideally joint-carving, their meaning actually is, because objectively given kinds are more eligible as referents and this outweighs errors in usage (a currently popular view also referred to, by Sider and others, as "reference magnetism"). In

[18] For a recent discussion of different forms of language pluralism and their background metaphysical assumptions, see e.g. Eklund (2013).

combination, these views seems to render terminological improvement at best obsolete; there is nothing to improve because our terms already refer to the best candidates, they already track the joints in nature. The only improvement worth aspiring to is an improved understanding of the meaning of our terms.

However, even a metaphysical realist like Sider can accept the possibility and usefulness of terminological improvement in some areas and to some extent. Thus, Sider (2011, Ch. 4.4) acknowledges that there are terms like "beautiful" whose meaning is arguably not joint-carving and where no more joint-carving candidate meaning is in the vicinity of how we use the term. In such a case, terminological improvement is possible and, according to Sider, is guided by our values. Moreover, Sider (e.g. 2011, Ch. 5.3) considers the possibility that our terminology in general might turn out not to be joint-carving after all. In this case, he recommends terminological revision with the aim of rendering terms more joint-carving. Hence, the form of terminological improvement and beneficial subject change developed here is not tied to strong metaphysical commitments.

1.4 A Hyperintensional Notion of Subject Matter?

In this last section, I will explore some potential difficulties that arise for the Lewisian notion of subject matter. Being formulated in the framework of possible world semantics, the notion might be liable to a number of difficulties that go under the heading of "hyperintensionality". Roughly, the question is whether the notion is fine-grained enough to account for certain differences in

subject matter for example, between necessarily true statements. I will not be able to resolve these intricate difficulties. My aim will be to specify what hyperintensionality-related difficulties might arise and sketch possible stances.

One potential problem concerning hyperintensionality is the following. Some statements are true at the exact same worlds, but they cannot be replaced in every context without a change in truth-value. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that "extended" and "coloured" apply to the same things at every epistemically possible world.[19] Take the statements S_1 "Nothing extended is smaller than 10 cm" and S_2 "Nothing coloured is smaller than 10 cm". They have the same truth-value at every possible world. In consequence, they also share all subject matters in the Lewisian sense. On the Lewisian notion, something is the subject matter of a statement if the truth-value supervenes on it, that is, if it is not possible that the truth-value of this statement at a world changes while everything remains the same regarding this subject matter. Take the subject matter of extended things. It invokes a partition such that the worlds in each region are exactly alike with respect to extended things. A statement like S_1 has this subject matter because it has the same truth-value at all worlds that are in the same cell of this partition. This is also the case for S_2 because, as observed above, it is true at the same worlds as S_1. Hence, it is not possible that the truth-value of S_2 at a world changes while everything regarding the extended things remains the same at this world. As a result, the extended things are one of the subject matters of S_2 "Nothing coloured is

[19] I am borrowing this example from Yablo (2012, lecture 1).

smaller than 10 cm". This seems odd; it seems to suggest that the Lewisian notion of subject matter is not fine-grained enough to distinguish between the subject matters of S_1 and S_2.

A similar situation arises for necessarily true statements. All necessarily true statements are true at the same worlds, namely, at all possible worlds. If we take the subject matter of a necessarily true statement that can be described as whether S, we get the limiting case of a partition with only one region. The statement "All vixens are female foxes" is necessarily true. The subject matter whether vixens are female foxes invokes a partition with only one region because all possible worlds are exactly alike with respect to whether vixens are female foxes; there is no possible world in which this is not the case. It is not clear whether we should call this a subject matter. If we do, then the oddity arises that it is a subject matter that is shared by all necessarily true statements. They all have a subject matter whether S that invokes this same limiting case of a partition with only one region.

What is more, necessarily true statements do not only share their subject matter whether S, they share all subject matters—those that they intuitively have and those that they do not. This is because the Lewisian notion suggests that they are about every subject matter there is. Whatever partition we take, a necessarily true statement has always the same truth-value at the worlds in the same region, simply because it is true in every possible world. Therefore, every subject matter whatsoever passes the supervenience test and is thus a subject matter of a necessarily true statement. The statement "Vixens

are female foxes" is not only about vixens, but also about whether it rains tomorrow.

Alternatively, we could say that necessarily true statements have no subject matter. This seems prima facie odd. Is "vixens are female foxes" not about vixens? However, it might be the better option. After all, something that we cannot rationally disagree on is maybe not a real subject matter.

In any case, it seems that we cannot resolve the problem without accepting some oddity or another. If we want to avoid all the oddities identified so far, we need to render the Lewisian notion of subject matter hyperintensional. This is likely to come with oddities as well.

On a hyperintensional notion, statements that are true at the exact same possible worlds do not share all their subject matters. One potentially promising line of inquiry would be to consider introducing impossible worlds and to assume that not only possible but also impossible worlds belong to the logical space partitioned by a subject matter.[20] Tentatively, on this approach, S_2 "Nothing coloured is smaller than 10 cm" does not have the subject matter of extended things because some impossible worlds that are exactly alike with respect to extended things and thus in the same cell of this partition are not exactly alike with respect to coloured things. As a result, S_2 does not have the same truth-value at worlds within the same region of this partition.[21]

[20] Some philosophers have argued for the introduction of impossible worlds to interpret talk on counterpossibles. For an overview of the debate, see e.g. Berto 2012.
[21] For an alternative, see e.g. Yablo (2012, lecture 1).

The aim in this section was not to suggest that the Lewisian account of the subject matter of a statement fails. The aim was to draw attention to a difficulty that arises in some cases and that needs to be addressed. Notably, this difficulty arises for possible world semantics more generally and it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to resolve it. In any case, there are a number of possible approaches to the problems as they arise for the Lewisian notion of subject matter, but more work is necessary to assess them.

Conclusion

Do we need to study what our terms actually mean when we are examining the nature of things? This chapter was concerned with a first idea that raises this question, the subject change thesis: The subject matter under discussion changes if the meaning of a core term changes.

This thesis is sometimes invoked in order to defend the need for conceptual analysis or empirical research into the actual meaning of terms. We need to study the actual meaning of "pain" or "morally responsible" in order to settle the subject matter of an inquiry into pain or moral responsibility Moreover, it is sometimes used to criticize an account that seems revisionary. Someone who addresses a question about race in the ordinary sense of "race" and answers using a technical notion of "race" that is quite different from the ordinary notion seems to be merely changing the subject. In both contexts, subject change appears as a bad thing.

In this chapter, I have argued that even though two clarified variants of the subject change thesis can be vindicated, subject change is not always a bad thing. There is an important beneficial form of subject change due to meaning change, namely, when we improve the meaning of terms in the light of our aims. The method of terminological improvement that I have developed in the course of my argument is an updated version of Carnap's method of explication. Moreover, I have used Lewis's account of the subject matter of statements in order to clarify what the subject matter of a debate is.

The relevant terminological improvements change the subject matter in a beneficial way because they adapt it to relevant aims. They do not provide a better understanding of the (potentially confused) subject matter that has been under discussion all along, but specify the subject matter that we should be focusing on given the aims we hope to attain. This result casts doubt on how the subject change thesis is used to defend conceptual analysis or empirical research into the current meaning of terms and to criticize revisionary accounts. The question is not so much whether an account is changing the subject, but whether there is good reason for the suggested change.

The upshot of this chapter is that attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, this does not necessarily mean that we need to examine the current meaning of terms. It can be beneficial to revise the meaning of terms and thus the subject matter of inquiry. In subsequent chapters, I will go a step further. I will examine different cases in which the subject matter of inquiry needs to be settled and argue that

terminological revision is in these cases a more promising approach than extant alternatives.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Analysis and the Location Problem

This chapter focuses on what Frank Jackson ([1998] 2008, 2–5) has termed the "location problem", another problem that raises the question of how important it is to study the meaning of words in first-order inquiry. The location problem arises in the context of a metaphysical or epistemological project. The basic idea underlying the metaphysical project is that a complete description of reality does not need to mention everything. It is, for instance, not necessary to mention water as well as H_2O. The question arises how we can move from findings in terms of a basic vocabulary (for example, findings about H_2O) to claims in terms of a non-basic vocabulary (for example, claims about water). This matters because we care about a lot of things that are not mentioned in the basic description of reality or in the class of basic truths like water, pain, liberty or probability.

Frank Jackson ([1998] 2008, Ch. 2) defends a certain form of conceptual analysis, sometimes called the Canberra Plan, as a solution to this problem. It is necessary to analyze the current meaning of "water" in order to be able to move from basic findings about H_2O to claims about water; this is the only way to determine which subject matter in ordinary terms H_2O findings are about. His opponents (e.g. Block and Stalnaker 1999; Kornblith 2002; Schroeter 2006) argue that solving the location problem does not require conceptual analysis or, more generally, special attention to words.

I will be steering a middle ground between these views. I will argue that terminological revision in the Carnapian sense developed in Chapter 1 is the most promising method to clarify non-basic terms and mediate between the subject matter described in basic terms and its description in non-basic terms. It settles the subject matter of non-basic inquiry in a way that does not make it hostage to current terminology and avoids a number of difficulties with conceptual analysis. Moreover, I will argue that something important is lost if we neglect terminological issues altogether and that Carnapian revision might be an acceptable terminological endeavour for opponents of conceptual analysis. I will also outline how Carnapian revision is a natural and fruitful addition to David Chalmers's (2012) scrutability framework even though this framework includes some form of conceptual analysis.

These considerations lend further support to the view that emerged in Chapter 1. Attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, as far as the location problem is concerned, to examine the current meaning of terms is not the best way to do so. It is more fruitful to revise ordinary or pre-theoretic terminology in light of our aims and findings and thus determine the subject matter we ought to focus on. Moreover, considerations in this chapter situate my view in relation to a range of alternative approaches.

2.1 The Location Problem

In its most general form, the location problem is the problem of how we can move from findings in terms of a preferred, basic vocabulary to claims in terms of a non-basic vocabulary (Jackson [1998] 2008, 2–5). This might include moving from findings about H_2O to claims about water, from insights into brain states to claims about the mental, or from findings about non-normative reality to normative claims.

The location problem typically occurs in the context of a larger metaphysical or epistemic project. It arises for the metaphysician who wonders what a description of the world would look like that is complete, but as sparse as possible. This description would only contain fundamental terms and concern fundamental reality; maybe micro-physical reality is fundamental or close to it. There is much to disagree on here, but it is uncontroversial that terms such as "liberty", "water" or "knowledge" would not occur in this description. Of course, these non-fundamental phenomena would still matter to us. We would still care whether there is a climate change, whether there is enough water for everyone, or whether our beliefs amount to knowledge. The idea is that we can move from our description of fundamental reality to claims about the non-fundamental things that supervene on them. But, in order to do so, we need to solve the location problem; that is, we need to settle that findings about H_2O (or something more fundamental) are the parts of the fundamental description that are relevant to water etc.

The location problem also arises for the epistemologist who thinks that some kinds of truths are more basic than others and, if we knew these truths, we would be in a position to know the non-basic truths that depend on them. For example, truths about H_2O are more basic than truths about water. The more basic truths employ a basic vocabulary and terms like "water" and "knowledge" do not seem to be among them. In order to move from basic truths to truths about water, we need to solve the location problem; that is, we need to settle that it is the H_2O truths that are relevant to whether water covers most of the Earth or to whether there is enough water for everyone.

The controversial issue this chapter is concerned with is how to solve the location problem and, in particular, whether this involves close attention to the meaning of terms.

2.2 Jackson's Solution: Conceptual Analysis Canberra-style

Frank Jackson has not only coined the term "location problem", he (e.g. 2010; 2009; [1998] 2008; 2001a; 2001b; Chalmers and Jackson 2001) also advocates a method to solve it, a variant of conceptual analysis that avoids major objections against its traditional forerunner. This variant of analysis is sometimes also called the Canberra Plan. However, a variety of approaches go sometimes under this heading (see e.g. Braddon-Mitchell and Nola 2009) and my considerations will only apply to Jackson's variant of conceptual analysis. The aim of this section is to present Jackson's solution to the location problem

and highlight some of its strengths before turning to the difficulties in the following section.

For Jackson, the location problem arises in the context of the metaphysical project outlined in the last section. In this context, the problem is that, given findings about basic reality stated in basic terms as part of a complete but sparse description of reality, how can we move to findings about non-basic phenomena stated in non-basic terms? For example, what can we say about water given a complete description of the world in a basic vocabulary? How do we determine that it is the H_2O facts that are relevant such that we can move from the finding that H_2O covers most of the Earth to the insight that water covers most of the Earth? H_2O findings are presumably not among the most basic ones, but they are quite basic and for the purpose of illustration it will be helpful to treat them as basic.

Jackson's solution (in particular [1998] 2008, Chs. 2, 5) involves two steps. The first step is a conceptual analysis that determines what we mean by "water" (in one sense of "mean" as will become clear in due course). The second step is to identify which of the basic things discovered by empirical research we thereby pick out. Let me spell out these steps in a bit more detail as it will be relevant for subsequent arguments. Moreover, it is important to highlight how this form of conceptual analysis differs from the traditional practice and thus avoids some notorious objections.

Jackson's variant of conceptual analysis does not take the traditional form of a small set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions,

but the form of a Ramsey sentence.[22] This avoids criticisms to the effect that our concepts or the meaning of our terms cannot be accurately captured by a small set of necessary and sufficient conditions.[23] The basic idea is that the application conditions speakers associate with a term can be made explicit if we look at accepted statements in which the term occurs. Which statements Jackson takes to be relevant is not entirely clear. He ([1998] 2008, 31) notes that we need to appeal to "what seems to us most obvious and central", to what comprises "our folk theory" of water, free will or pain. Canberra Planners often say that what matters are "the platitudes", but this is somewhat misleading.

Some of the non-fundamental terms we are analysing are part of a theory and the statements in which they occur are not platitudinous at all. More generally, what statements matter is a point of considerable disagreement among different Canberra Planners. Some include most of the accepted statements about an F in question (e.g. Nolan 2009). Jackson, it seems, needs to be more restrictive because he takes the analysis to reveal the meaning of a term. Hence, his analysis should be restricted to statements that only someone who does not fully grasp the term's meaning would reject. As regards the term "water", relevant statements could include "Water is thirst-quenching", "Water

[22] The method goes back to Ramsey (1931) and was further developed by Carnap (1963) and Lewis (e.g. 1970). For more recent developments, see e.g. Braddon-Mitchell and Nola (2009).
[23] This criticism is often based on empirical findings in cognitive psychology that suggest that concepts do not have such a structure; for an overview, see e.g. Laurence and Margolis (2003a), 190–195. Wittgenstein's ([1953] 1999, §65–71) suggestion in the *Philosophical Investigations* that the things that fall under a concept are connected via family resemblances rather than sharing a small set of features can be seen as a forerunner.

is odourless and colourless unless it is polluted", "Water is the stuff in rivers, lakes, ponds and fountains" etc. In order to derive the Ramsey sentence and thus the analysis of a term like "water", we treat the folk theory as one long statement, a conjunction of all individual statements (see Jackson [1998] 2008, 140–141). In this long statement, we replace all occurrences of "water" with a variable and quantify over it. The resulting Ramsey sentence for water is then something like "There is an x such that x is a thirst-quenching liquid and x is odourless and colourless and x is the stuff in rivers, lakes, ponds and fountains …" Based on the Ramsey sentence, we can derive application conditions for the term "water" of the form "x is water if and only if x is a thirst-quenching liquid, x is odourless and colourless … (i.e. satisfies the Ramsey sentence)".

In order to arrive at such an analysis, we need to compile the statements that go into the Ramsey sentence. Jackson (e.g. [1998] 2008, 36, 38, 64–65, 130) assumes that, even though competent speakers do not have an explicit grasp of most of these statements, they have at least an implicit grasp. This is what guides them in their application of the term. Therefore, we can rely on speakers's intuitions about the application of a term to actual and hypothetical cases. As a result, a conceptual analysis is a priori rather than based on empirical research. A priority and reliance on intuitions are the core features that Jackson's account shares with traditional accounts of conceptual analysis and what makes his method a form of conceptual analysis.

Importantly, unlike the traditional practice, Jackson's approach does not require a complete, explicit analysis (Jackson [1998] 2008, 62–64; Chalmers

and Jackson 2001, 6–8). He acknowledges that explicit analyses are, as Edmund Gettier's (1963) counterexamples to the traditional analysis of "knowledge" and the debate they have generated show, difficult to come by. Moreover, it might in some cases even be literally impossible to provide an explicit analysis because the Ramsey sentence would be infinite. What matters is that competent speakers can judge whether a term in question applies in an actual or hypothetical case described without using the term in question. Based on this conditional ability, we can provide an approximate explicit analysis and improve it continually. Note that this is precisely how the debate about Gettier's counterexamples works.

That Jackson's variant of conceptual analysis does not require explicit, complete analyses avoids notorious arguments against traditional conceptual analysis to the effect that it is impossible to give explicit analyses, typically based on the observation that there does not seem to be any successful explicit conceptual analysis in the whole history of philosophy up until today.

Another strength of Jackson's account of conceptual analysis is that it avoids certain powerful objections from semantic externalism. Hilary Putnam (1975) and Saul Kripke (1980) have argued that the meaning of terms is at least in part determined by factors external to speakers such as the world around them and the linguistic community that they are part of. This is often thought to speak against conceptual analysis because a priori conceptual analysis can only reveal what speakers grasp, but not what the world contributes. However, Jackson's variant of conceptual analysis is perfectly compatible with Kripke's

and Putnam's considerations (Jackson [1998] 2008, 37–41). What is more, Jackson argues that Kripke and Putnam rely on conceptual analysis in some sense for their arguments.

On Jackson's ([1998] 2008, 38–40) reconstruction, Putnam's Twin Earth case relies on our intuitions about the application of "water" in different cases. More precisely, cases are evaluated in two different ways in that they are once considered as actual and once as counterfactual. When we evaluate cases as actual, we draw on our grasp of a term's meaning alone and not on any knowledge we might (or might not) have about what the actual world is like. This is what a competent speaker must grasp and what, according to Jackson, plays a crucial role in communication. This is also what a conceptual analysis reveals because it is that aspect of the meaning that is known a priori. Jackson calls this the A-intension ("A" for actual) and what it picks out at every world is called the A-extension. The above analysis of "water" identifies "the thirst-quenching liquid that is odourless and colourless etc." as its A-intension. The A-extension of "water" at every world, including Twin Earth, is then the thirst-quenching liquid that is odourless and colourless etc.

The second way to evaluate cases is as counterfactual. In order to do so, we draw on our knowledge about the nature of a term's referent at the actual world. This requires knowledge about the actual world that is not required for competence with a term. Hence, it is not something that we can reveal by doing conceptual analysis. When evaluating the Twin Earth case in this way, we draw on our knowledge that "water" at the actual world refers to

H_2O; this is the nature of what the A-intension picks out at the actual world. In this evaluation, nothing is counted as water that is not H_2O. Hence, XYZ is not counted as water. Jackson (e.g. [1998] 2008, 47–49) calls this aspect of the meaning of a term its C-intension and C-extension ("C" for counterfactual).

What Twin Earth shows, on Jackson's reconstruction, is not that terms do not have an A-intension that determines the application at a world considered as actual. It shows, relying on our intuitions about the Twin Earth case and thus on the practice of conceptual analysis, that for terms like "water" the A-intension contains an indexical element that assigns the actual world a role in determining the referent. As a result, the analysis of "water" above needs to be amended along the following lines: "x is water if and only if x is the thirst-quenching, odourless, colourless stuff around here" (note how this is another step towards a better approximate explicit analysis).

Let us now turn towards the second step of Jackson's solution to the location problem. The first step was a conceptual analysis revealing what a term applies to at a world considered as actual, that is, it's A-intension. The second step is to identify the C-intension, drawing on empirical findings as captured in a basic description of the world. Alternatively, Jackson (like his forerunners and other Canberra Planners) often says that the analysis identifies the role something like water plays, and the aim of the second step is to identify what on the basic level plays this role or realizes the relevant folk theory given by the Ramsey sentence. Several aspects of this second step will be discussed in more detail in what follows.

But first let me state how the two steps together solve the location problem, that is, how they allow us to determine that, if we want to know something about water, it is the basic findings about H_2O that we need to turn to. The first step allows us to determine a priori what we are concerned with when we are inquiring about water, the thirst-quenching stuff around here. The second step serves to identify the nature of what is at issue on the basic level (H_2O). Hence, given a complete description in basic terms, we can work out all there is to know about less basic things a priori. The argument runs as follows:

P1 X is water if and only if it is the thirst-quenching stuff around here. (a priori analysis)

P2 H_2O is the thirst-quenching stuff around here. (a posteriori finding)

C H_2O is water.

This allows us to a priori deduce non-basic truths from basic ones; for instance, that water covers most of the Earth, from the finding that H_2O covers most of the Earth. I will now turn to the difficulties that arise for this solution to the location problem.

2.3 Difficulties with Jackson's Solution

This section is concerned with difficulties that arise for Jackson's solution to the location problem. The considerations will not amount to a knockdown argument, but identify considerable difficulties.

A first class of difficulties arises due to flaws of current folk theory. Plausibly, the application conditions underlying current practice with a term are not always well adapted to empirical findings on a basic level. Our current terms might be ambiguous, indeterminate or empty with respect to basic referents. This raises difficulties for Jackson's solution to the location problem. In his view (Jackson [1998] 2008, 30, 38, 48, 118; see also Ch. 1) we must not change the A-intension of terms, that is, folk theories, because this would merely change the subject. We want to move from basic truths to truths about causation, water or knowledge in the ordinary sense of these terms. Hence, we must retain the current A-intensions of these terms even if they appear flawed in the light of empirical findings. I will criticize Jackson's strategy to invoke "mature folk theory" in due course.

Suppose we want to know whether the claim S_1 "Water covers most of the Earth" is supported by the basic findings, that is, whether our basic description of the world a priori entails S_1. As Jackson, in a paper with Chalmers, (2001, 23–24) grants, it might well have turned out that the term "water" has two referents on the basic level, H_2O and XYZ. However, he does not explain how his solution to the location problem deals with such a case. Suppose each of the two kinds plays part of the water role; H_2O is the stuff in our rivers and lakes whereas the stuff that comes from taps and fountains is XYZ.[24] Moreover, let us assume the basic finding that H_2O covers most of the

[24] Block and Stalnaker (1999, 16–23) consider such a possibility, but construe it somewhat differently such that two kinds both play the whole water role.

Earth. The term "water" is then either ambiguous or has disjunctive meaning. In any case, in Jackson's view, we must not change its meaning because this would merely change the subject. Therefore, we cannot split the term "water" into two terms that refer to H_2O and XYZ respectively. As a result, it is not clear whether the basic description confirms or disconfirms S_1.

If we assume that "water" has disjunctive meaning and has H_2O ∨ XYZ as a referent, S_1 comes out true. If we treat "water" as ambiguous, we need an additional claim about ambiguity in order to determine whether S_1 is true. If we adopt the view that an ambiguous claim is true if it is true on at least one interpretation, S_1 comes out true. Other views on ambiguity could be adopted. Hence, we would need to provide a story about how the theory of ambiguity fits into our description of the world. We could argue that it is entailed by the basic findings or that it is a priori and independent of our basic empirical findings.

In any case, Jackson's solution to the location problem is at least incomplete. Moreover, as I will argue in the next section, even if we can confirm or disconfirm S_1 once we have enriched the framework, this solution to the location problem is not the best solution given how our theoretical interests are likely to develop in such a case.

A related problem arises for vague non-basic terms. As Jackson ([1998] 2008, 22) notes himself, there is bound to be considerable vagueness on the non-basic level. His treatment of this issue is nevertheless remarkably short. If I understand him correctly, he suggests that in these cases the basic

findings entail that it is indeterminate whether a non-basic statement is true. For example, basic findings that entail the exact number of hairs on John's head, who is a borderline case of "bald", entail that it is indeterminate whether or not John is bald. However, it remains unclear what this means. Does it mean that the statement "John is bald" has no truth-value? Or that it has a truth-value between true and false? In order to answer this question, a theory of vagueness is required and a story about how it fits into our complete description of the world.

Another case of multiple realizers occurs when several kinds play the role determined by folk theory quite well. Suppose we want to know whether our complete, basic description of the world supports the claim S_2 "More than 10,000 species live on the Great Barrier Reef". The folk theory of species could include assumptions like "Organisms of the same genus can be divided into different species", "Animals of the same species share certain biologically significant features", and "The number of species living in an area is a measure of biodiversity".

There are multiple accounts of species that seem to identify different realizers that play the species role identified by folk theory quite well. These accounts mainly disagree on the significant features members of a species share. On one account, species are groups of organisms that are reproductively isolated. On other accounts, species are groups of organisms that occupy the same ecological niche or have a shared common ancestry. Each account has its advantages and disadvantages and is better suited to some purposes than

others. Moreover, none of the identified realizers appears to be more natural or objective than the others.

Whether S_2 is true might change depending on which realizer we take to be the referent of "species". As a result, whether the complete, basic description of the world entails S_2 is not clear. Moreover, it is not clear whether a theory of ambiguity would help in this case because the different referents are in some sense rivals rather than being picked out by different, but equally accepted ways to use the term "species".

Next, take a case where we have no basic realizer rather than several. Suppose that we want to know whether S_3 "Discrimination based on race is widespread" is entailed by our complete and basic description of the world. Plausibly, the application of the term "race" was for a long time guided by the assumption that members of a race share certain important biological traits that they do not share with members of other races. Maybe an additional assumption guiding the application was that these traits manifest themselves in superficial features such as skin colour. Empirical findings suggest that there are no deep biological differences. If this is the case, the term "race" in its ordinary meaning—if reconstructed as suggested above—is not instantiated; hence, there is no realizer in the basic structure of the world. Therefore, the basic description of the world entails that S_3 is false; that is, it entails that it is not the case that discrimination based on race is widespread. It appears that, on Jackson's approach, the only option is eliminativism about race.

However, it is not obvious that this is the best option. Given the aim to fight racism, it might be more advantageous to hold on to the claim that discrimination based on race is widespread and revise instead the meaning of "race" in order to capture a phenomenon that actually exists. Sally Haslanger (2006), for example, suggests that "race" has a social kind as referent, roughly: groups of people who share certain social features such as being discriminated against based on superficial traits. If the idea that the members of a race share fundamental traits was indeed initially part of the A-intension of "race", to adopt such a description would in Jackson's view change the meaning of "race" and thus be ruled out. Our terminology and claims would be hostage to current terminology.

Anticipating such difficulties, Jackson ([1998] 2008, 44–45, 133–135; 2001a, 618) grants that current folk theory might not have a perfect realizer in many cases. He highlights that what matters therefore is "mature folk theory", that is, an idealized version of current folk theory or what current folk theory eventually evolves into when all flaws are straightened out. Adopting this strategy, we could insist that the mature folk theory of water or of a species would not be ambiguous and the mature folk theory of race would not be empty. However, it is doubtful whether this strategy can succeed.

Firstly, it remains unclear how to a priori discover mature folk theory. Testing our intuitions reveals current folk theory. Even if done carefully and over a longer period, we can at most eliminate flaws that are due to our insufficient understanding of our current practice. I take it that, in Jackson's

view, this is the role of Gettier's counterexamples and Putnam's Twin Earth. They do not help folk theory mature, but help us discover what our current folk theory actually is. However, testing our intuitions when presented with a variety of cases will not reveal mature folk theory in the sense of a theory that eliminates the flaws that emerge once we make empirical discoveries about the realizers of folk theory. Therefore, the most promising strategy seems to construct mature folk theory once we have made the relevant empirical discoveries. However, it remains utterly unclear why we should believe this to be what folk theory would have evolved into. In the absence of a strong argument, it seems much more plausible to assume that this is a revision of current folk theory in light of empirical findings.

Secondly, as Francois Schroeter and Laura Schroeter (2009, 9–10) admonish, the strategy of invoking mature folk theory commits us to the claim that a term's A-intension is an idealized version of what current speakers grasp. As a result, competent speakers would not fully grasp a term's A-intension, not even implicitly. This would undermine the vital role they play in communication in Jackson's view. The idea is (e.g. Jackson 2004, 266) that, using language, we can communicate views about what our world might be like. This does not require knowledge about what the world is actually like, but only linguistic competence. What speakers must know is how the words they use represent the world as being like. Hence, there has to be an aspect of the meaning of words that speakers know even if they do not know what the world is actually like. This is the role of A-intensions. This role is undermined

by the idea that A-intensions are mature, idealized versions of what speakers actually grasp. As a result, the idea of mature folk theory cannot save Jackson's solution to the location problem from the difficulties set forth above that arise due to flawed folk theories.

Another difficulty with Jackson's solution to the location problem arises from the heavy reliance on intuitions. Jackson's conceptual analysis does not share many of the problematic features of traditional conceptual analysis. However, it also relies on intuitions about whether a term applies to various actual and hypothetical cases. Proponents of so-called experimental philosophy have criticised this practice. I will not rehearse these notorious objections in any detail or take a stance on whether they are conclusive. I only want to point out that given how influential these objections have been, they need to be addressed or avoided. I will choose the second option.

The relevant objections fall into roughly two groups (for an overview, see Alexander and Weinberg 2007). Objections in the first group cite empirical studies suggesting that intuitions are unreliable as evidence. They are found to be unstable and vary systematically with factors that are irrelevant to the classified cases such as the socioeconomic status of the intuiter, their cultural background or whether they consider other examples first (e.g. Nichols, Stich, and Weinberg 2001; Swain, Alexander, and Weinberg 2008).

Objections in the second group do not cast doubt on the evidential status of intuitions, but on the way proponents of conceptual analysis collect intuitive evidence. Proponents of conceptual analysis like Jackson rely on their

own intuitions as well as on the intuitions of fellow philosophers. Proponents of the second objection criticise that these intuitions are not representative and hence cannot reveal the folk theory of causation, belief or marriage. In consequence, we need to do empirical research on what the folk's intuitions are rather than a priori reflection on our own intuitions (e.g. Knobe 2003; Nahmias, Morris, Nadelhoffer, and Turner 2005).

Jackson has not answered these objections in any detail,[25] but others have defended the traditional use of intuitions. In answer to the first objection, it has been argued, for example, that the surveys used by experimental philosophers often do not reflect a subject's intuitions and hence do not vindicate any claims about their evidential status (Bengson 2013). In answer to the second objection, it has been suggested, for example, that philosophers are better intuiters because they have been trained to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant aspects of cases etc. (e.g. Williamson 2011).

The last disadvantage of Jackson's solution to the location problem that I should mention is its—unsurprising—commitment to the view that terms have in general A-intensions that are a priori accessible to speakers. This semantic internalist view is highly controversial.[26] Therefore, an advantage of the solution that I will now propose is that it remains neutral on whether terms have A-intensions.

[25] Jackson considers the issue briefly in ([1998] 2008, 36–37; 2010, 184–185).
[26] Bigelow and Schroeter (2009) argue, for example, that this view relies on implausible psychological assumptions. Laurence and Margolis (2003b) criticize that A-intensions are not a priori accessible.

2.4 The Advantages of Terminological Revision

In this section, I hope to show that the broadly Carnapian form of terminological revision developed in the last chapter is a more promising method to solve the location problem.

How can we solve the location problem using this method? The story will be somewhat different for different kinds of terms, but take again the simple example that we wish to know whether S_1 "Water covers most of the Earth" is supported by findings on a (more) basic level. The revisionist does not start with a conceptual analysis, but with a more or less rough understanding of our current term "water". A few examples and informal explanations will often suffice.[27]

The next step is to identify what potential referents on the more basic level are in the vicinity of what we ordinarily call water. Suppose again that there are two kinds, H_2O and XYZ. The revisionist reacts by improving the current term "water" in light of these findings and guided by her aims; for example, the very general aim to provide an empirically informed theory of water detailing its distribution on Earth etc. She thus introduces two terms, "so and so water" and "such and such water" that are stipulated to refer to H_2O and XYZ respectively. She then goes on to use these terms instead of the ordinary term for her theory of water including such a claims as S_1* "Such and such water covers most of the Earth."

[27] This first step agrees with what other opponents of conceptual analysis recommend as a starting point (e.g. Kornblith 2002, 18; Laurence and Margolis 2003b).

A legitimate concern is that this does not really solve the location problem. We have not been able to determine whether S_1 concerning water in the ordinary sense is supported by our basic findings. All we have shown is that S_1* concerning water in a different sense is supported by our basic findings. We have changed the subject. However, drawing on considerations in Chapter 1 regarding beneficial subject changes, we can argue that terminological revision provides the answer to a question in the close vicinity to our initial question that is for most purposes more interesting. Thus, it is very likely that once we discover that there are two basic kinds that play each part of the water role, our interests shift somewhat. We are no longer interested whether water in its ordinary and as it turns out ambiguous sense covers most of the Earth. Rather, we refine our question and ask whether so and so water or such and such water covers most of the Earth. That S_1* "Such and such water covers most of the Earth" is supported by our basic findings addresses this refined question. Moreover, we can offer a story about how water so and so and water such and such relate to ordinary water and hence to our initial question in ordinary water terms. In addition, we can motivate the shift in questions and point out that this question makes more sense if we hope to provide an empirically informed theory of water.

Admittedly, our interests need not shift in this way. Someone could insist that they wish to know whether the fundamental findings support S_1 "Water covers most of the Earth" where water retains its original meaning. Terminological revision does not provide an answer to this question. My point

is that this interest is quite peculiar, especially compared to the interest that we might take in the newly discovered kinds of water. Nevertheless, we sometimes have peculiar interests and it is therefore in order to concede that terminological revision gets us most, but not all, we might want when solving a location problem.

An important aspect of Jackson's solution is that the move from basic to non-basic truths is a priori. Once all basic truths are discovered, everything else can be known a priori, drawing alone on our grasp of the meaning of terms. When revising terms in order to solve a location problem, this aspect is retained. Given the relevant basic truths, we can move to S_1* a priori, drawing alone on our grasp of the meaning of "water so and so". The only difference is that the meaning of "water so and so" has been stipulated beforehand whereas the meaning of "water" has not. The stipulation was sensitive to empirical findings, but this does not change the fact that, once we have settled on a terminology, we can move from basic empirical findings to the truth of S_1* without additional empirical information.

Having said how terminological revision can solve the location problem, let us turn to the difficulties with Jackson's solution and how terminological revision avoids them. It avoids all difficulties that arise from flaws in current folk theory that emerge when we make empirical discoveries. It is precisely part of the project to refine the current meaning of terms in light of empirical findings and our aims. I have already examined the water case and thus cases of ambiguity. The case of a species would be handled analogously.

We would ask what we need the notion of a species for and which referent is the most interesting one given a certain aim. This presumably would lead us to introduce several refined notions of a species that serve different purposes. Part of this could also be to discuss the relative significance of different aims; I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter. Regarding the term "race", eliminativism would not be our only option. If we decided that this would benefit our fight against racism, we could instead introduce a concept of race that is not empty but refers, for example, to people who are discriminated against based on superficial traits.

Moreover, terminological revision does not rely heavily on intuitions and hence largely avoids objections against the use of intuitions as evidence. Intuitions play a very modest role when we revise terms. We typically draw on intuitions to begin with and in order to roughly identify the terms we hope to improve. But as we go along, we should be prepared to give up any intuition about the applicability of a term if this renders the term more suitable for our aims. Thus, faced with a Gettier case showing that knowledge in the ordinary sense is not justified, true belief, the important question is whether retaining this definition of "knowledge" or refining it by adding further conditions is more suitable for our epistemological aims.

Furthermore, my account of terminological revision, as highlighted in Chapter 1, remains neutral on the controversial issue of whether terms have A-intensions that speakers can access a priori.

The last advantage arises from the conjuncture, noted in the last section, that we can typically not give complete, explicit analyses of the current meaning of terms. By contrast, when revising terms, we can always be given an explicit and complete account; if we choose to, we can even give a revisionary definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. This has certain advantages; for example, that it avoids undetected variations in meaning between different speakers and confusions that arise from it. One possible kind of confusion, verbal disputes, will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

A legitimate question is whether terminological revision is the more promising approach to the location problem in all cases. After all, some non-basic terms might be in good shape such that no refinements are required in the light of empirical findings. However, we do not know whether this is the case until we have assessed the case at issue. Therefore, I suggest approaching every case as a case of terminological revision. The cases in which no refinement is actually necessary will be limiting cases in which the attempt to revise only reveals a term's current meaning. Treating it as a case of terminological revision will at least confirm that they are well suited to our purposes. Note that it will presumably be difficult to determine whether some case is a limiting case because giving a complete, explicit analysis is difficult.

2.5 Methodological Naturalism and Why Words Matter

Opponents of conceptual analysis are methodological naturalists of a certain flavour. They reject the use of conceptual analysis in order to solve the location

problem and argue that empirical research is all we need. There are two influential camps. On the one hand, there are those who agree that close attention to the current meaning of terms is required, but claim that we need to do empirical research instead of relying on our own intuitions and those of our colleagues. On the other hand, there are those who argue that attention to terms is not required at all.

I will not discuss the first camp.[28] The core of my argument against conceptual analysis as a solution to the location problem is that what our terms currently mean does not matter much. This speaks likewise against the need for empirical research into the current meaning of terms in order to solve the location problem. Note that this remains neutral on the aptness of such a project in other contexts; for example, where language is itself the subject matter.

Proponents of the second camp argue that reductive explanation of water facts in terms of H_2O facts via the a posteriori identification water=H_2O does not require conceptual analysis (e.g. Block and Stalnker 1999, 13–23; Schroeter 2006; Kornblith 2002, 18). I will not take a stance on whether the objections to conceptual analysis provided in this context are successful. My aim is to argue that they do not apply to terminological revision as a solution to the location problem. Moreover, terminological revision provides something

[28] Views in this camp are defended, e.g., by Knobe (2003) or Nahmias, Morris, Nadelhoffer, and Turner (2005). For an overview, see e.g. Alexander and Weinberg (2007, 61–62).

proponents of this camp neglect, namely, an alternative way to attend to our terms.

Proponents of the second camp reject Jackson's semantic internalism and the view that terms have A-intensions that speakers grasp a priori and that can be made explicit by conceptual analysis. The common core of their arguments against the view that reductive explanation requires conceptual analysis is reminiscent of Willard V. O. Quine's (1951a) arguments in *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*. It goes as follows.

The a posteriori identification water=H_2O does not involve a priori knowledge of semantic facts, namely, the grasp of application conditions or A-intensions that are spelled out or drawn upon when doing conceptual analysis. The reason is that whatever we ascribe to or associate with a referent, including the most central and obvious aspects—what Jackson calls a folk theory—we are ready to revise it if we make relevant empirical discoveries. Hence, these ascriptions do not constitute conceptual truths that are justified a priori, but empirical assumptions that are revised as we go along. Put differently, they do not capture a part of the meaning of our terms—what Jackson calls A-intensions—but our empirical assumptions prior to more thorough empirical investigation.

Moreover, when we revise these assumptions due to empirical findings, we typically do not change the meaning of a term, precisely because these assumptions do not capture an aspect of the meaning. Meaning, thus the externalist assumption, depends on the referent and the referent remains the

same, whether we describe it as H_2O or water. Put differently, speakers can be presented with actual and hypothetical cases and judge whether a term applies as Jackson claims. But their judgement does not reflect an a priori knowledge based on linguistic competence. In light of relevant empirical findings, speakers might revise their judgement. This typically does not indicate a change in meaning; rather, what speakers are revising is their a posteriori theory of the phenomenon in question.

Proponents of this camp also provide an alternative story of what happens when we develop reductive explanations (Block and Stalnaker 1999, 8–9).[29] Thus, we start with some paradigmatic case of water in order to identify the phenomenon we are interested in. However, we are prepared to revise even these initial judgements regarding paradigmatic cases. We then go on to do empirical research into the nature of the phenomenon we are interested in and end up concluding that the phenomenon we ordinarily call water is identical to the phenomenon we describe as H_2O in a scientific context, that is, water= H_2O.

Terminological revision as a solution to the location problem is not liable to the core argument against conceptual analysis because it remains neutral on whether terms have A-intensions that speakers grasp a priori. On the part of speakers, it only requires that they can give some examples and informal explanations regarding the application of a term and all of this can be

[29] Schroeter (2006) provides a more detailed story that includes a certain semantic view, the "jazz" or "improvisational" account of meaning (see Ch. 3 below). However, whether we adopt this more elaborate story does not affect my argument here.

given up in the course of a revision (see also Ch. 1). As noted above, the opponents of conceptual analysis grant this much. Moreover, terminological revision presupposes that we can introduce conditions on application by stipulation for a given context. That we do this all the time in science, philosophy, the law and elsewhere should not be too controversial, especially once we see that we can treat these conditions on application as capturing the referent (or the C-intension) rather than suggesting an A-intension and that these stipulations are not arbitrary, but typically influenced by empirical findings as well as our aims.

My view is in tension with the methodological naturalism at issue here as regards the view that changes in judgements of actual and hypothetical cases in the context of reductive explanation typically do not indicate a change in meaning. This methodological naturalism assumes that we focus on the same referent or phenomenon throughout and work towards a description of it in more basic terms. Together with the externalist assumption that the referent is all there is to the meaning of a term, this implies that there is typically no change in meaning. What changes in most cases is only our theory of the phenomenon in question as we learn more about it.

However, if my considerations in section 2.3 are on the right track, there are a significant number of cases in which this argument does not apply. These are the cases in which the referent changes because we discover, for example, that there are two phenomena rather than one in the vicinity of how we apply an ordinary term like water. I have argued above that, if we do not

have a special interest in ordinary terms, the most natural reaction in such a case would be to introduce two new water terms that are stipulated to refer to the two newly discovered kinds. Once we acknowledge this possibility, a need to care for terms emerges that is independent of the need to analyse folk or pre-theoretic terms. Rather, the question is how to adapt our non-basic terms in the face of basic empirical discoveries. My account of terminological revision is a proposal on how to approach this question. How much this question and our approach to it matters will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters, especially Chapters 3 and 5.

Another tension between my approach and the methodological naturalism outlined above concerns the a priori. I have argued that if we do terminological revision in the context of reductive explanation, we retain an a priori aspect. Methodological naturalists reject the idea that any a priori aspect is involved together with the need for conceptual analysis. However, the a priori aspect that I acknowledge does not seem to be liable to their criticism. Their arguments are against a priori knowledge that draws on speakers' grasp of a term's A-intension. The a priori aspect that I acknowledge does not presuppose A-intensions. Rather, the idea is that once we explicitly introduce application conditions for a term within a context, we can move from basic findings to certain non-basic claims drawing on these application conditions alone and without further empirical support.

I should highlight that this section has focused on a specific form of methodological naturalism. There are other variants of methodological

naturalism at which my arguments are not directed. As noted in the introduction, my own approach is a form of methodological naturalism in the sense that something very similar to it is used in the sciences.

2.6 Terminological Revision and Chalmers's Scrutability Framework

Earlier, I have outlined projects in which the location problem arises. David Chalmers's scrutability framework, developed in *Constructing the World* (2012), is primarily a variant of the epistemological project. The location problem that arises in the context of this project is solved via a special form of conceptual analysis that is even weaker than Jackson's. The aim of this section is to show that terminological revision is not only compatible with this solution to the location problem, but a natural addition to it that has the potential to strengthen the scrutability framework. In order to illustrate the last point, I will consider Chalmers's (2005, 2012, ex. 15) anti-sceptical argument to the matrix scenario and argue that, if we adopt the tool of terminological revision into the scrutability framework, we can answer a quite natural objection to it.

The A Priori Scrutability Thesis is at the heart of the framework (2012, Ch. 4): There is a compact class of truths from which all truths are a priori scrutable. A sentence S (in non-basic terms) is a priori scrutable from C (conjunction of sentences in basic terms) for a subject s if s is in a position to a priori know the material conditional if C then S.

For my purposes, it will not be necessary to go into more detail about many intriguing aspects of this thesis—for example, what the compact truths

are or why we are talking about sentences rather than propositions. My focus will be on the role of conceptual analysis and how it solves the location problem. Jackson's form of conceptual analysis is weaker than the traditional idea. It does not require that we can make the definition fully explicit; approximations suffice. Moreover, the definitions in questions are not supposed to take the form of a small number of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, but the form of a (potentially infinite) Ramsey sentence. The analysis that matters for a priori scrutability is even weaker. Definitions in any sense are not required; not even a bi-conditional is involved. Scrutability only requires that a competent speaker a priori knows material conditionals with a description of a scenario in non-F terms in the antecedent and a judgement on whether this would be a case of F in the antecedent. This is precisely the ability we rely on in attempts to develop explicit analyses or criticise them, for example, in the debate about Gettier cases (see Chalmers 2012, Ch. 1.3).

According to Chalmers (2012, Ch. 1.4), this conditional ability reflects a term's primary intension, which shares certain important features with what Jackson calls a term's A-intension. What matters in the given context is that primary intensions are not definitions or descriptions of any form, but functions from, roughly, epistemically possible scenarios (ways the world could be that we cannot rule out a priori) to extensions.

This case-by-case conditional analysis solves the location problem in that it allows us to identify descriptions in a basic vocabulary as water

descriptions. How could this be compatible with my idea that we often revise terms in the course of solving the location problem? The answer to this question emerges from Chalmers's (2012, ex. 9) answer to the objection that the scrutability framework cannot accommodate conceptual dynamics, that is, the way concepts or the meaning of terms develop and change over time. Thus, what matters for a priori scrutability is that, at any point in time, we can move from basic truths in the compact class to non-basic truths. For this aim, it suffices that at any given time, a competent speaker has the conditional ability to judge a priori whether a scenario described in non-F terms is a case of F. By contrast, it does not pose a problem if these judgements change over time due to terminological changes (or, for semantic externalists, changes in what a speaker associates with a referent). Terminological revision is simply an intentionally induced form of conceptual dynamic. The conditional ability required for a priori scrutability is preserved at any time. Before the revision, speakers rely on their grasp of the initial term and after the revision, they rely on explicitly stipulated application conditions. Notably, in a paper on verbal disputes that started as an additional chapter of *Constructing the World*, Chalmers (2011, 564) mentions explicitly that some of his considerations support the use of Carnap's method of explication, the traditional forerunner of my method of terminological revision.[30]

[30] He makes further remarks pointing in this direction in *Constructing the World* (e.g. 2012, Ch. 8.2, ex. 9).

Terminological revision is not only compatible with the scrutability framework, it might even prove to be a fruitful addition to it. In order to support this suspicion, I will consider Chalmers's (2005, 2012, ex. 15) argument against the sceptical Matrix Hypothesis and show how the idea that it can be fruitful to revise terms in the course of inquiry allows us to answer a natural objection to it.

The Matrix Hypothesis is in effect a version of the well-known sceptical hypothesis that I might be a brain in a vat, shown in colourful detail in the film *The Matrix*. If the Matrix Hypothesis turns out to be true, I am and always have been in a matrix; my brain receives inputs from and sends outputs to a computer system that simulates everything I see, feel and experience, including my body. This is commonly seen as a sceptical scenario because it seems that, if it turned out to be actual, I would be massively deluded; most of my beliefs about the world including myself would be false. I would not have a body, I would not be going to the office, I would not be drinking juice, sitting in the sun etc. Instead, I would be a brain in a lab connected to the matrix.

Chalmers (2005, 4–13) argues that the Matrix Hypothesis is not a sceptical hypothesis at all but instead a metaphysical hypothesis about the underlying nature of reality. If I came to accept this hypothesis, I should not conclude that I do not have hands or that I am not sitting in the sun. Instead, I should conclude that the world around me including my own body has a very different nature from what I thought. The statement "I have hands" would not be false; the referent of "hands" would just be very different in nature from

what we thought. After all, we have discovered many surprising things about the nature of reality around us: for example, that material objects are composed of tiny particles like atoms and molecules, and none of it has led us to conclude that all these things were illusions; we have simply acquired more knowledge and corrected our mistaken views about their nature. The Matrix Hypothesis is comparable to these cases, only larger in scale.

A quite natural objection to this argument is to insist that if the Matrix Hypothesis is true, I do not have hands, at least not in the ordinary sense of "having hands". We can hold on to the statement "I have hands" as true, but only if we accept that this statement means something else than it normally does. We are, in some sense, changing the subject.

For semantic externalists, it seems easy to resist this objection. They can simply highlight that the meaning does not change so long as the referent remains the same. In the case at issue, the referent of "having hands" remains the same before and after the discovery. All that changes is what speakers think about the referent, the properties they associate with it.

However, this answer is less convincing if we accept primary intensions as part of the meaning of an expression that is a priori accessible to speakers. If we accept this assumption, the meaning changes even if the primary intension alone changes without a change in referent. That "having hands" undergoes a change in meaning of this sort in the matrix scenario cannot clearly be ruled out. It is not entirely clear whether the matrix scenario actually conflicts with part of the primary intension of "having hands", that is, with how speakers

judge scenarios they cannot rule out a priori. However, we cannot clearly rule out that this is the case. If it was the case, we could only hold on to the claim "I have hands" as true on pain of changing its meaning, namely, its primary intension.

In fact, Chalmers (2012, Ch. 5.5–5.7) provides a test for changes of meaning, that is, primary intension, across time. In my view, this test cannot clearly rule out the possibility that if we hold on to the claim "I have hands" as true on the supposition that the Matrix Hypothesis is true, the primary intension of this sentence changes. Chalmers's test goes as follows (I simplify somewhat). The initial assumption is that the intension of a sentence S is true at a scenario w for a subject s if s's conditional credence in S given D (a canonical specification of w) is 1. We can then formulate the following criterion for a change in meaning: A subject s's intension for S changes between t_1 and t_2 if and only if there is a scenario w with canonical specification D such that s's credence in S given D changes from 1 to 0 or vice versa. Let us apply this test to the case at hand. Take the statement "I have hands" and your credence in this statement given a description of the matrix scenario when it was first introduced. Most people's credence seems to be low; they are inclined to think that if this scenario is actual, I do not have hands. The scenario strikes them as sceptical. Now compare this to your credence in the statement S given a description of the matrix scenario after you have decided, as per instruction, to hold on to this statement as true. Your credence will now be high. This change from low to high indicates a change in meaning.

Chalmers's answer to this objection (in conversation) was that our initial intuitive judgements are not always right; we sometimes make up our mind upon reflection. His anti-sceptical argument and his analogies are supposed to enable such reflection. This reflection should lead us to have a high credence in S given D to begin with, that is, at t_1.

I am not sure how convincing I find this answer. However, this does not matter very much. If we allow for terminological revision in the light of new findings, we have an alternative answer to fall back on. We simply accept that, after confirming the Matrix Hypothesis, we can hold true "I have hands" only if we revise the meaning of "having hands". "Having hands" now means to receive certain simulations from the matrix. This might involve a subject change in the sense developed in Chapter 1. However, it would be a beneficial subject change. The change in meaning would be well motivated by our findings. Moreover, we would not lose anything we really care about.[31] After all, the matrix scenario is qualitatively indistinguishable from my present situation. I would just as well use my hands to write this chapter, stroke my dog's soft fur or make handstands and it would not feel or look any different to me.

[31] Chalmers (2012, Ch. 8.2) himself makes a similar point regarding the potential use of revisionary definitions.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on what Frank Jackson ([1998] 2008, 2–5) has termed the location problem, another problem that raises the question of how important it is to study the meaning of words in first-order inquiry.

The location problem concerns the question of how we can move from claims in a preferred, basic vocabulary to claims regarding the macro-phenomena that often interest us in philosophy like liberty, causation or knowledge. This problem arises in the broader context of an attempt to give a complete, but sparse description of reality or to identify a class of compact truths that put us in a position to know all other truths.

I have identified difficulties with Jackson's solution via a certain form of conceptual analysis and I have argued for the advantages of terminological revision. In answer to opponents of conceptual analysis who claim that special attention to language is not required in order to solve the location problem, I have suggested that they neglect important terminological issues. Moreover, terminological revision of the form I advocate might be an acceptable terminological endeavour for them. Finally, I have explained how the solution I recommend is compatible with and even a fruitful addition to Chalmers's scrutability framework even if this framework includes a form of conceptual analysis. In order to illustrate my point, I have argued that Chalmers's argument against a sceptical reading of the Matrix Hypothesis can be defended against a natural objection if we allow for terminological revision in the course of philosophical inquiry.

These considerations provide further support for the view that emerged in Chapter 1. Attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, to analyze the current meaning of terms is not the best way to do so. It is more fruitful to revise ordinary or pre-theoretic terminology in light of our aims and findings and thus determine the subject matter we ought to focus on.

Chapter 3

Clarifying Evaluative Terms: The Case of Terrorism

Normative inquiry is often not about words; it is about liberty or justice rather than "liberty" or "justice". However, when the terms used in these inquiries are unclear to an extent that hinders fruitful debate, they seem to require attention. In this chapter, I take up the methodological challenge posed by these terms as another case that raises the question of how much words matter in first-order inquiry.

Like in the other chapters, my focus is terms rather than concepts. However, since many relevant discussions refer to concepts—for example, discussions about "essentially contested concepts" (Gallie 1956)—I will sometimes refer to "concepts" for the sake of terminological continuity.

The main example to illustrate my considerations will be "terrorism", which has been said to be "one of the *most* contested concepts" (Held 2004b, 62).[32] The standard approach to clarify this and other evaluative concepts or terms is traditional conceptual analysis or a cognate descriptive method. Thus, the aim is to provide an account that captures the actual meaning of the term based on intuitions about its application to actual and hypothetical cases. The qualification "traditional" should mark the difference to the more recent

[32] Coady (2004b, 37, Fn 1) cites a source from 1984 that estimates over one hundred definitions.

variants of conceptual analysis defended by Frank Jackson and David Chalmers as discussed in Chapter 2.

I will not rehearse notorious objections against traditional conceptual analysis in any detail. Instead, I will present the Carnapian form of terminological revision developed in earlier chapters as an alternative way to clarify evaluative terms that avoids these objections; in particular, objections concerning the reliance on intuitions as evidence and the vulnerability to counterexamples. This approach is revisionary rather than descriptive. The core question is not so much what terms like "terrorism", "liberty" or "discrimination" really mean, but what they ought to mean given certain aims.[33] Some of the considerations in this part of the chapter will be familiar from Chapter 2 and I will simply apply them to the special case at hand.

As noted in previous chapters, my revisionary approach admits of language pluralism to some extent, namely, where different aims require different revisions of the same initial term. Nevertheless, as I will argue, it does not vindicate the idea that some evaluative concepts are "essentially contested" (Gallie 1956).

A further advantage of my revisionary approach is that it provides terms that are better suited for our aims. This advantage is prima facie also reason for serious concern, namely, that terminological revision violates an uncontroversial requirement of neutrality. My approach seems to promote

[33] Even though a descriptive approach to evaluative terms is the standard, revisions of some evaluative terms have recently been defended. For example, James Griffin (2008) proposes a revision of the notion of a human right and Philip Kitcher (2007) suggests a revision of the notion of race.

terms that are biased towards certain aims and hence lends itself to opportunist exploitation. I attempt to answer this concern and refine the account of terminological revision developed in previous chapters in a way that is responsive to the concern at hand. Thus, the real problem does not seem to be a lack of neutrality, but potential dubious aims and a lack of transparency. The resolution of the first problem ultimately depends on the very general issue of how to assess the respectability and significance of theoretical aims and practical endeavours.

I will also provide reason to think that the idea to study the phenomenon rather than the words we use to talk about it, advocated for example by proponents of the "jazz account of meaning" (e.g. Haslanger 2010; Schroeter and Schroeter 2009), will in the cases at issue not avoid terminological issues, but support the need for terminological revision instead.

The focus of this chapter is evaluative terms. The class of what I call evaluative terms does not have very clear boundaries. What I have in mind are terms that carry a positive or negative assessment like the terms "liberty", "beauty", "peaceful", "murder", "cruel", "discrimination". Whether they are thin or thick—purely evaluative or with descriptive aspects—does not matter for my purposes. Moreover, I will not take a stance on whether the evaluative aspect is part of their semantics or pragmatics. What motivates my classification is that the clarification of these terms seems to raise some worries that do not arise in the same way for non-evaluative terms.

When is an evaluative term unclear to such an extent that it requires special attention? Terminological clarity is a matter of degree and there is most likely not a clear-cut boundary. Tentatively, an evaluative term is unclear to an extent that hinders fruitful debate when it is either highly indeterminate or contested. I will assume that a term is indeterminate when there are cases for which it is not determined whether the term applies. I will say that a term is contested when several accounts are on offer that propose conflicting conditions on application.

The upshot in this chapter will be that the view developed in previous chapters applies to the case of contested evaluative terms as well. Attention to words can be required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, it is more promising to revise terms in light of our aims than to analyze their current meaning.

3.1 Clarifying the Concept of Terrorism: Revision Instead of Analysis

The term "terrorism" is evaluative in the sense outlined above; it carries a negative assessment of cases thus classified. Moreover, it is unclear to such an extent that it is a hindrance to fruitful debate and therefore requires consideration. As Tony Coady (2004a, 3) puts it, "too many debates about terrorism are at cross-purposes because of radical confusions about exactly what is being discussed". Take, for example, the UN's "Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism" that has been under negotiation for

many years, and the debate is deadlocked; one of the main obstacles appears to be an agreed definition of terrorism (see e.g. Deen 2005).

Despite their differences, parties share at least a rough understanding of what the term in need of clarification means. They agree on some paradigmatic cases like the events of 11 September in New York or the 2006 train bombings in Mumbai. A fairly innocuous informal characterization might be that terrorism is the "use of violence and intimidation, especially for political purposes" (Oxford Student's Dictionary). What parties disagree on is how to further clarify the meaning of this term.

In this section, I will introduce two widely differing accounts of terrorism—Tony Coady's and Virginia Held's—that are both intended to be largely descriptive, and show how they can be reconstructed in the context of a revisionary approach. The task for subsequent sections will be to argue that this reconstruction provides a way out of the impasse the current debate has reached.

Coady defends a rather narrow account drawing on just war theory. According to him, terrorism is "the organised use of violence to attack non-combatants ('innocents' in a special sense) or their property for political purposes" (Coady 2004b, 38). Held (2004b, 68), in contrast, defends a wider account of terrorism as "political violence that usually spreads fear beyond those attacked, as others recognize themselves as potential targets".

Coady and Held are not entirely explicit about their methodology, but they seem to adopt the standard approach and aim for a conceptual analysis of

the term based on intuitions about whether actual and hypothetical cases classify as terrorism. Coady (2004a, 3–4) notes that "there are certain contours to the confused public outcry about terrorism that can give purchase for conceptual analysis" and demands that "the success of any such analysis must be judged […] by its degree of fit with such contours". Held (2004b, 64) criticises definitions that treat the targeting of non-combatants as a necessary condition on the grounds that some incidents "would not be instances of terrorism, and yet they are routinely described as examples". One of the intuitive counterexamples she mentions is that the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon, in contrast to the attacks on the World Trade Centre, would not be a case of terrorism on such an account. The two accounts are thus attempts to better understand what the term actually means in the hope that this resolves indeterminacy and contestation to a sufficient extent.

Alison Jaggar (2005, 205) formulates the standard approach more generally in terms of a desideratum of conservativism according to which "a good account [of terrorism] disturbs existing usage as little as possible".

Admittedly, some philosophers including Coady acknowledge the need for "a dose of stipulation" (Coady 2004a, 3; Jaggar 2005, 205). Others, like Held (2004b, 68), admit at least that their account deviates from current usage in some cases. However, this is typically seen as an unavoidable concession due to ideological, political, and polemical distortions of current usage (see e.g.

Coady 2004a, 3; Rodin 2004, 752–753; Scheffler 2006, 1). The aim remains descriptive.[34]

The approach that I will put forth conceives of the problem differently. In order to clarify the meaning of "terrorism", we need to revise it in a suitable way. Hence, indeterminate and contested cases are decided based on considerations other than fit with intuitions and current usage. As a result, the revisionary approach avoids notorious objections to conceptual analysis, namely, regarding its reliance on intuitions and a vulnerability to counterexamples, and has further advantages. Hence, it opens up new, fruitful ways to defend and criticize different accounts of terrorism and thus provides a way out of the current impasse.

On the revisionary approach developed in earlier chapters, the crucial question is how we should revise a term's current meaning. What motivates and guides terminological revision is the aims one hopes to attain using the term in question. Hence, the first task is to formulate the relevant aims. This then allows us to identify desirable terminological improvements. Philosophers in the debate about terrorism agree what work they want to put the term to. Coady summarizes:

> There are two central philosophical questions about terrorism: What is it? And what, if anything, is wrong with it? Here I propose to deal with the first question, but I do so because of the importance of the second. (Coady 2004a, 3)

[34] An exception is Reitan (2010) who considers the possibility of terminological revision for the limited purpose of policy making.

Thus, the general aim that could guide a philosophical revision of the term "terrorism" is, tentatively, the theoretical aim to address moral issues regarding terrorism such as whether it can ever be morally justified.

The aim guiding a revision or aspects of it can be implicit in (part of) the current use of the term in question; thus, the term "terrorism" is already used in moral inquiry, but it proves to be too unclear for this endeavour. In other cases, a term is put to new work. I discussed an example of this in Chapter 1, namely, John Rawls's (1999) use of the notion of a human right to answer the question of when it is in order for a state to interfere in the political affairs of another. The notion of a human right had not been used before in attempts to answer this question.

At any rate, special care is required in formulating the aims that guide terminological revision (see also Ch. 1). The tentative aim, as I have formulated it, is problematic because it would justify outlandish revisions. Take an account that defines terrorism as the infliction of pain on a person as an unavoidable part in the process of healing them. This revision would plausibly help us attain our aim. For example, the answer to the crucial question of whether terrorism is ever morally justified is obviously yes. But this revision is certainly unacceptable. What the revised term picks out has nothing to do whatsoever with what we currently classify as terrorism. Adopting this terminology would change the subject matter radically and randomly. A subject change due to meaning change is only acceptable if it is well motivated.

As suggested in Chapter 1, a simple move to avoid outlandish revisions is to formulate the aims without using the very term we want to revise. However, it can be helpful to mention the term in order to highlight the desired continuity with our current way of speaking and make the aim specific enough to be helpful. Another helpful way to foster this continuity is to identify the relevant genus; that is, in this case, forms of politically motivated violence. As a result, our aim could be to provide a term that facilitates an assessment of the moral status of that form of politically motivated violence that is somewhere in the vicinity of what we ordinarily call terrorism.[35] As we will see later, not only the more formal aspects of the aims guiding terminological revision require careful attention. The aim that we hope to attain using the term "terrorism" seems perfectly respectable, but not every aim is.

What terminological improvements does the specified aim call for? Generally put, we need to draw a clearer boundary between terrorism and other forms of political violence such as war or political assassination. This is an improvement descriptive approaches hope to attain as well (e.g. Coady 2004a, 3; Jaggar 2005, 205). After all, what motivated a terminological endeavour in the first place was the extent to which the current term is indeterminate and contested. What distinguishes the revisionary from the descriptive approach is how we hope to attain this improvement. On the

[35] Even though this aim should be fairly uncontroversial, some would object that terrorism is a form of violence, but should not be subsumed under forms of politically motivated violence (e.g. Jaggar 2005, 206). I will neglect this complication because it does not affect my overall argument.

descriptive approach, the hope is that a better understanding of the current meaning suffices (maybe together with a minimal dose of stipulation). On the revisionary approach, to give the meaning of the term clearer contours is part of the more general aim to render the term more suitable for moral inquiry. In consequence, it allows for a stipulative decision on how to draw a clearer boundary based on what distinctions are taken to be morally salient.[36] The core question is then not so much what the term really refers to and which distinctions it actually tracks, but whether there is a referent with distinctive moral features in the vicinity that the term should pick out in order to facilitate moral inquiry. The idea is that a clear boundary in terms of morally salient distinctions rather than in terms of whatever distinctions the current term happens to track makes it much easier to assess the moral status of terrorism.

What revision we recommend depends on which distinctions we take to be morally relevant in the cases at issue; for example, whether we accept that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants in the sense of just war theory is a morally relevant distinction in general and applicable in paradigmatic cases of terrorism in particular. If we use Coady's and Held's considerations as a basis for the task of revising our current term in the light of the specified aim, we arrive at radically different proposals.

[36] I will not take a stance on the issue of whether there are any moral properties or the issue of whether moral terms can be fully analysed in non-moral terms. I count any distinction or feature as "morally salient" or "morally relevant" if the moral status of the phenomenon in question supervenes on it. I will sometimes also talk of a "distinct moral profile" and mean a characterization in terms of morally salient distinctions that distinguishes terrorism from other phenomena in its vicinity.

Coady's considerations suggest that there is a form of political violence with a distinct moral profile in the vicinity of what is ordinarily called terrorism: roughly, political violence directed at non-combatants in the sense of just war theory. If he is right, this is what our revised notion of terrorism should pick out. To this aim, we could put forth his account as a revision and defend it on the grounds that it better tracks the distinct moral category in the vicinity of what we ordinarily call terrorism and is thus more suitable for moral theory. This revised notion of terrorism would allow for a straightforward assessment of the moral status of this form of political violence based on its distinct moral profile.

Held's considerations, on the other hand, suggest that there is no form of politically motivated violence with a distinct moral profile in the vicinity of what we currently call terrorism. She claims explicitly that "rather than being uniquely atrocious, terrorism most resembles small war" (Held 2004b, 59) and that the difference between terrorism and war is a matter of scale. If Held is right, this leaves us with two options for a revisionary approach. One option is to reject the possibility of providing a revision that is better suited for moral inquiry on the grounds that there is no morally distinct referent in the vicinity of our current notion of terrorism. If we want to provide a term that picks out a category with a distinct moral profile, it would have to be more encompassing. Moral inquiry would then discuss terrorism as a subcategory of a more encompassing category of political violence whose members share the morally salient features.

The other option is to insist that even though there is no referent with a distinct moral profile, there are morally salient gradual distinctions between terrorism and other forms of political violence that spread fear beyond those attacked. If this view can be vindicated, we could provide a revised term for moral inquiry that picks out a distinct moral category, namely, violence that spreads fear beyond those attacked of a certain, morally distinct scale.

Moreover, it has been argued that the core feature of Held's account—spreading fear beyond those attacked—is, pace Held, a morally salient feature that gives terrorism a distinct moral profile (e.g. Goodin 2006; Scheffler 2006; Waldron 2004). If this is right, we could propose Held's account without additional clause as a revision.

The revisionary approach admits of a language pluralism of some form. In particular, it admits that different aims might require different revisions of the same initial term. Philosophers use the term "terrorism" in moral inquiry. In contrast, legal theorists focus on legal issues such as how to deal with terrorism in international or national law. Other theoretical interests would be historical or sociological questions. These different theoretical interests might well call for somewhat different specifications of the phenomenon because the distinctions that are relevant for moral assessments do not necessarily coincide with those that are relevant for other theoretical concerns.[37] A legal theorist might, for instance, place more emphasis on whether terrorism classifies as an ordinary crime, an organised crime or a war crime and whether a terrorist

[37] Rodin (2004, 755) makes a congenial suggestion.

necessarily lacks remorse. More generally, this suggests a pluralism according to which there can be several theoretically interesting referents in the vicinity of a pre-theoretic term.[38]

How far this "reasonable pluralism" goes depends on intricate semantic and metaphysical issues that cannot be discussed here.[39] However, at least one important limitation on this language pluralism will become clearer in due course, namely, regarding respectable aims. Moreover, there might be a considerable practical pressure to agree on a revised term across different contexts; for example, different legal systems and maybe even across moral and legal contexts.

This pluralism might appear to suggest an affinity to W. B. Gallie's (1956) much debated idea of "essentially contested concepts".[40] According to Gallie, essentially contested concepts are moral concepts that do not have an agreed general use, but different uses that can be rationally defended. None of these uses should be ruled out according to Gallie because they reflect rationally defensible moral perspectives. Hence, it is not even desirable to "decontest" (Freeden [1996] 1998, 76) the concept. It has been repeatedly suggested that the concept of terrorism might be essentially contested in roughly this sense (Held 2004b, 62; Fletcher 2006, 911; Reitan 2010, 255).

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[38] Kitcher (e.g. 2008; 2007) defends such a pluralism about, among others, the concept of race. Furthermore, Chalmers (2011, 539) ponders such a pluralism about philosophical concepts more generally.

[39] Rawls ([1993] 2005, 54–58) has coined the term "reasonable pluralism" for cases in which there are several reasonable but irreconcilable moral views.

[40] For an overview of the debate, see e.g. Collier et al. (2006).

However, my account does not support the idea that the concept of terrorism or any other evaluative concept is essentially contested. The revisionary approach admits that different revisions of an initial concept can be rationally defensible if these serve different respectable aims. But each of these concepts should be rather precise, consistent and uncontested. Thus, whereas my pluralism has the aim to resolve the tension, Gallie's approach asks us to accept it. Whereas my pluralism aims for clarification, the concept remains messy on Gallie's approach. My pluralism seeks decontestation without silencing respectable perspectives whereas Gallie rejects decontestation altogether.

In the remainder of the chapter, I will argue for the advantages of the revisionary approach over a largely descriptive one and defend it against the concern that it violates the uncontroversial requirement of neutrality. This will also accentuate the differences between these two approaches to clarify evaluative concepts or terms.

3.2 The Advantages of Terminological Revision

The first advantage of the revisionary approach is that it is not liable to notorious objections to conceptual analysis, namely, objections concerning the reliance on intuitions as evidence and the vulnerability to counterexamples. This advantage has been discussed as a general advantage of my methodological approach over traditional and updated forms of conceptual

analysis in Chapter 2. I will briefly recap the points that are relevant to the particular case at issue here.

One of the objections concerns the heavy reliance on intuitions as evidence. Conceptual analysis relies on intuitions about whether a term applies to actual and hypothetical cases. I will not take a stance on whether the arguments against the use of intuitions as evidence are sound. My point is that, given how influential they have been, it is an advantage of the revisionary approach that it largely avoids the problems they might raise. Particularly relevant to the cases at issue here are empirical studies suggesting that intuitions are unreliable as evidence. They are found to be unstable and vary systematically with factors that are irrelevant to the classified cases such as socioeconomic status, cultural background or whether someone considers other examples first (for an overview, see Alexander and Weinberg 2007). In the case of terrorism, this problem, if it actually obtains, is likely to be quite pronounced since, as Waldron (2004, 34) highlights, "linguistic intuitions are entangled with political prejudices".

The revisionary approach is not liable to this problem because it does not place much weight on intuitions. Unlike conceptual analysis, terminological revision does not capture the current meaning of a term, but provides a successor that only has some continuity with the current term. As a consequence, intuitions about actual and hypothetical cases play at most a very modest role. Intuitive counterexamples can only cast doubt on a revision if it cannot be justified by reference to our aims. Suppose that some account of

terrorism applies to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, but not to the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon. This seems counterintuitive. However, this would not necessarily speak against the account understood as a revision of the current term, namely, if it turned out that the attacks on the World Trade Centre share morally distinct features with other cases of terrorism whereas the attack on the Pentagon lacks some of these features. Re-drawing the distinction between terrorism and other forms of political violence, even though counterintuitive, would be advantageous for moral inquiry in this case because it would classify cases of political violence together that actually share morally distinct features.

Another notorious objection against conceptual analysis is that it is a hopeless endeavour because we can find some counterexample to every analysis. Jeremy Waldron (2004, 6) therefore cautions that "it would be wrong to hold out much hope that philosophical inquiry might yield a canonical definition of the term, one that would be generally accepted". The course of the current debate about terrorism supports this pessimism. Waldron (2004, 7) therefore decides to discuss definitional issues, but without the aim of actually arriving at a definition. However, this pessimism loses much of its bite if we aim for a revisionary definition (or a revision of a less ambitious form). As highlighted above, counterexamples do not speak against a revision as long as they can be justified in terms of desirable improvements.

Admittedly, we can also avoid the objection if we settle for a messy, disjunctive analysis that tracks every intuitive judgement. However, a revision

has a crucial advantage over any messy analysis, namely, that it is more suitable for our theoretical purposes.

Firstly, a revision, being designed to serve theoretical aims, is likely to be simple and non-disjunctive and therefore more suitable for our theoretical aims. Secondly, a messy analysis is likely to provide less determinate and consistent application conditions than a revision that is designed to render the term more determinate and consistent. Thirdly, a revision is likely to put us in a better position to attain our aims—for example, the aim to assess the moral status of terrorism. This is precisely what it is designed for. By contrast, a messy analysis that reflects current usage is likely to assemble morally salient as well as not morally salient features and maybe even a variety of morally salient features that do not admit of a unified assessment. This makes it much more difficult to assess the moral status of the phenomenon thus picked out.

At this point, it might be interjected that there is a descriptive approach that does not have the noted disadvantages. This approach aims to describe the phenomenon rather than the meaning of the terms we use to describe it. The important question is what terrorism really is and whether it really has morally distinct features (e.g. Scheffler 2006). The mistake was to focus on language at all. However, if my suspicion can be vindicated and there actually are several theoretically interesting referents in the vicinity of what we currently call terrorism, the question of which of them terrorism really is would seem misguided. Moreover, even if we could establish what terrorism really is, we would still have the terminological problem this chapter is concerned with. We

would still need to agree on a terminology for future debates about terrorism in order to avoid confusion. We would have two options; either we claim that the phenomenon we have identified is what the term "terrorism" should refer to or we argue that it is what we have been referring to all along.

A more general proposal in metaethics that supports the latter option has gained some influence recently. It is based on the so-called "improvisational" or "jazz" account of meaning (e.g. Haslanger 2010; Schroeter and Schroeter 2009). I will not discuss this proposal and its semantic underpinnings in detail. Instead, I will cast some doubt on the support it can lend to a descriptive approach to evaluative terms.

The proposal agrees with Scheffler (2006) that we need to focus on phenomena rather than concepts or terms. In addition, proponents claim that findings about the relevant phenomenon are findings about what we have been referring to all along. The relevant semantic assumptions in the background are (e.g. Haslanger 2010, 178–181; Schroeter and Schroeter 2009, 15–18) that the referent is all there is to the meaning of a term and that reference is established not via a fixed description shared by all speakers, but via a shared practice where everyone has the intention to coordinate with others and with past practice. This bears some resemblance to how the members of a jazz quartet achieve musical coordination when they improvise; hence the label "jazz" or "improvisational" account of meaning. They do not rely on a common score but on a shared commitment to incorporate everyone's individual contribution into a coherent musical structure (see Schroeter and Schroeter 2009, 16). In

this view, the properties speakers associate with a referent are not part of the meaning and evolve with the effort to coordinate with others and as we gain knowledge about the referent. An account of terrorism on this view would be descriptive, but arguably not messy as it would not capture our flawed, shifting and potentially distorted usage, but the underlying phenomenon that we are co-referring to. Gaining knowledge of the actual referent would then presumably resolve linguistic confusions.

My considerations thus far are compatible with the semantic assumptions of the proposal, but they cast doubt on the idea that this proposal supports a descriptive approach to evaluative terms. Our practice with the term "terrorism" is beset by indeterminacy and disagreement to a considerable extent. If I am right, there is more than one interesting referent in the vicinity. Which one is the target of our shared intention to co-refer? Plausibly, our shared practice does not determine reference unambiguously. It seems that once we have discovered several interesting referents, we should disambiguate our notion of terrorism. This would presumably be a quite natural part of our shared effort to make best sense of our past and present practice as well as of new findings. In this case, we would not be merely discovering what we have been referring to all along. Note that this even holds if we adopt a strict externalism and claim that there is nothing else to the meaning of a term than its referent because the referent of the term changes. As a result, the improvisational proposal does not support an alternative descriptive approach to evaluative terms. To the contrary, it seems to be perfectly compatible with

the idea that we need to revise contested or highly indeterminate evaluative terms.

The main aim of this section was to argue for the advantages of the revisionary approach over a descriptive approach to evaluative terms. However, the revisionary approach is not without problems. The task for the next section will be to answer what I take to be the most serious objection.

3.3 From Neutrality to Transparency: A Concern Answered

The advantage that terminological revision fosters our aims is prima facie also cause for serious concern. Revising evaluative terms seems to violate an uncontroversial requirement of neutrality. A revised term is geared towards an aim and hence does not provide a neutral basis for debates about substantive issues. The aim of this section is to answer this concern.

The demand for neutrality manifests itself in different ways. One manifestation is the widespread agreement that how we conceive of terrorism should not foreclose an answer to moral issues (see e.g. Honderich [2002] 2004, 96; Coady 2004b, 41; Meisels 2009, 347; Rodin 2004, 753). Held is particularly insistent:

> A way in which usage and much popular and some academic discussion have been unhelpful in illuminating the topic of terrorism is that they have frequently built a judgement of immorality or non-justifiability into the definition of terrorism, making it impossible even to question whether given acts of terrorism might be justified. (Held 2004a, 65)

The demand for neutrality also finds expression in the uncontested assumption that practical—in particular, political—aims should not influence a

philosophical account of terrorism. No philosophical account is defended on the grounds that it fosters certain political aims, and philosophical accounts are sometimes criticised as fostering a more or less hidden political "agenda". Coady frames the problem in a quite general way and admonishes (2004b, 37) that "much discourse employing the term is highly polemical so that the act of defining becomes a move in a campaign rather than an aid to thought". Meisels (2009, 335) admonishes that a more inclusive term like Held's fosters the political aim to excuse terrorist acts in a narrower sense—e.g. Palestinian suicide bombings of Israeli buses—because it suggests that there is no morally relevant difference to other acts of political violence—e.g. military action of the Israeli State against Palestinians in Gaza. In return, a common charge against narrower accounts is, as Scheffler (2006, 2) puts it, "that it may seem that reliance on a narrow definition would unwittingly import an uncritical pro-state bias". Jaggar (2005, 205) formulates more generally a desideratum of impartiality; thus, any account should resist "moral arbitrariness and bias" and should be "impartial in the sense of not begging moral and political questions".

The requirement of neutrality that emerges from these manifestations demands in its most general form that terminological clarification should not be geared towards any prior substantive—for instance, moral or political—claim. The underlying idea is that terminological clarification is prior to any debate about relevant substantive issues. Igor Primoratz (2004, x) states that the "conceptual question [of what terrorism is] is preliminary to any discussion of terrorism, whether in philosophy itself, in any other scholarly discipline, or

in public debates" (see also Coady 2004c, 772). We can then justify the requirement of neutrality and argue that terminological clarification only provides a fair basis for substantive debate if the resulting term is not distorted by any prior substantive claim. To use a familiar imagery, terms or concepts are our "reasoning instruments" (Williamson 2007, 6) and we need to sharpen them before putting them to work in reasoning about substantive issues—but certainly without bending them in such a way as to manipulate the outcome.

A revision of the notion of terrorism violates this requirement of neutrality because it reflects certain substantive decisions, namely, on what work to put a term to and on what the significant distinctions are that it should capture. It might not be obvious that the decision to revise a term for the aim of addressing moral issues threatens neutrality. However, if the language pluralism pondered above is right, and different theoretical aims require different revisions, then the terms we propose reflect a substantive decision on which things we care to investigate.[41] This does violate neutrality in some way. That a revised term reflects a substantive view on which distinctions are salient is a more obvious violation of neutrality. In the case of terrorism, a revised term will reflect a view on such contested substantive issues as whether the distinction between combatants and non-combatants or between states and non-state groups matter where terrorism is concerned.

[41] This insight is inspired by Kitcher's pragmatic realism about scientific categories (see e.g. Kitcher [2001] 2003, 46–52; 2008).

Can neutrality at least be respected as regards practical, for instance, political, concerns? This is in principle possible so long as we have theoretical aims to guide our revision. However, to abstain from any practical considerations that influence the revision does not seem advisable. This is clearly the case where we aim to provide an improved term for political debates. Some political aims might be respectable; for instance, the aim of developing a coordinated international strategy against terrorism that does not in general favour certain states over others or states over non-state groups. Our revision of the term "terrorism" for the political debate should be designed for these aims if we want to be in a better position to attain them.

It is debatable whether philosophers should provide a term for the political debate. However, there is in any case a minimal way in which a philosophical revision should be influenced by practical considerations. To classify someone as a terrorist can have severe practical consequences depending on who issues this classification and on who is classified—observation, prosecution, detention etc.[42] Even if philosophers do not intend their proposed notion of terrorism to be used in political contexts as such, it is very well possible that their suggestion will influence the notion used outside academia in some way or another. In consequence, when revising the notion of terrorism, philosophers should at least consider what practical consequences adopting their notion could have and whether that might speak against it.

[42] See e.g. also Kitcher (2003, 52–53) and Chalmers (2011, 516) who highlight that our classifications can have important practical consequences.

To sum up, any revision of an evaluative term like "terrorism" violates the requirement of neutrality. It reflects selective theoretical interests or practical endeavours and substantive assumptions on which distinctions are salient in light of these interests or endeavours.

In order to defend terminological revision against this objection, let me first cast doubt on whether the requirement of neutrality in its most general form can be met at all, even if we adopt a descriptive approach. Firstly, as several philosophers have pointed out (see section 3.1), current usage is likely to be distorted by political prejudice. A descriptive approach is likely to capture these distortions (in particular current descriptive approaches that rely heavily on our intuitions) and it is therefore likely not to be neutral. Moreover, even if there is an undistorted meaning behind current usage and the descriptivist is able to capture it, it is unclear whether this meaning would be neutral in the most general sense. The current notion seems to come at least with the moral assessment that terrorism is pro tanto wrong; this is what makes it an evaluative term. Thus, it would seem utterly strange to insist that an act of political violence amounts to terrorism, but nothing whatsoever is even prima facie morally wrong with it.

As concerns terminological revision, I propose that the issue to worry about is not the lack of neutrality, but potential dubious aims and a lack of transparency. First, take the problem of potentially dubious aims. It does not seem objectionable per se to focus on certain theoretical aims rather than others and to pursue political aims. A problem arises where a revision fosters

aims that are not respectable. To use the imagery of terms or concepts as instruments again, it is useful to choose an instrument—for example, a knife that is suited to the task we want to accomplish; for instance, one with a serrated rather than a smooth blade (see Carnap 1963, 938–939). What matters is whether a task – like cutting vegetables or killing someone—is respectable.

There are some political agendas that should certainly not guide our revision of the notion of terrorism; for instance, the aim to depict one's enemies as particularly reprehensible in order to justify extreme actions against them. The same applies to theoretical aims even if this is less obvious. Not every issue is equally significant and not every issue that matters in some context matters in a different context. Even though this basic point raises many controversial issues, it does not seem controversial in and of itself (see Kitcher [2001] 2003, 65). Even though someone might take an interest in how many grains of sand there are on Earth, other issues are more significant because a number of other theoretical issues depend on them or because they have important practical applications. Thus, it can be necessary to account for the significance of those theoretical aims that influence a revision and it is possible to challenge them. Moreover, even if a theoretical issue is significant enough, it is not always obvious whether it should be attained using the term in question. Some doubt, for instance, that the boundaries of international toleration are best settled via the notion of a human right as Rawls suggests.

In order to avoid this problem, we need to further restrict the aims that can guide terminological revision, namely, to respectable aims. This restriction

is not merely formal, but epistemological and moral in character. Note that this is where I part company with Carnap and his principle of tolerance (1937, 52) that "everyone is at liberty to build up […] his own form of language, as he wishes". In my view, which I will discuss again in Chapter 5, linguistic tolerance has limits; in language, there *are* morals. To identify criteria for respectable theoretical aims and practical endeavours is, of course, a very general issue that concerns not only the revisionist, but to some extent everyone who pursues theoretical aims or practical endeavours.

Next, take the problem that arises from a lack of transparency. Suppose the aim guiding a revision of the term "terrorism" is respectable like the aim in the context of moral inquiry identified above. Another issue that greatly influences the revision is what the morally salient distinctions are. This is a substantive question for moral theory and a revision will reflect the answer, that is, an aspect of the moral theory one adopts. However, it is not objectionable per se to adopt a moral theory. A problem arises when relevant moral assumptions are not made explicit and put up for debate. In order to avoid this problem, the revisionist should care about transparency regarding the aims guiding a revision as well as relevant substantive assumptions affecting it.

Let me briefly look at a more particular manifestation of the neutrality concern that might not seem to be covered by the answer given thus far: The revisionist approach paves the way for what Charles Leslie Stevenson has termed a persuasive definition. According to Stevenson (e.g. 1938, 337),

someone gives a persuasive definition if they offer a definition that changes the vague meaning of a notion that has strong negative or positive connotations and claims that this is its real meaning with the primary intention to thus change what people condemn or praise.[43] The notion "terrorism" is, as Waldron (2004, 33) emphasizes, susceptible to persuasive definitions. It has strong negative connotations, a vague meaning and the real meaning is under constant debate. When we revise this notion, we change what exactly it picks out to suit our aims. As a result, we change what exactly we judge as bad when we condemn terrorism in a way that suits our aims. Hence, the revisionist is effectively offering a persuasive definition.

However, this argument disregards two crucial aspects of terminological revision. If these are taken into account, it becomes clear that terminological revision does not lead to persuasive definitions. The first aspect is that it does not make sense to claim that a revision discloses the real meaning of a notion. The strongest possible claim would be that a revision is the most suitable one to foster the most significant aim in a certain context. Hence, one ingredient for a persuasive definition is already missing. The second, less obvious aspect is that the aims guiding a revision are made explicit and put up for debate. I take it that an important part of giving a persuasive definition is to keep your aims hidden and pretend that your definition is disinterestedly representing the world. As a consequence of this difference, a

[43] Stevenson actually distinguishes between a conceptual meaning that is changed and an emotive meaning that remains the same. I formulate his consideration in a more neutral way because I think that it deserves attention even if we do not accept his emotivism.

revision, unlike a persuasive definition, does not tell us what we should truly condemn. Rather, it recommends what we should worry about if we have the proposed aims, which are negotiable.

To close, let me address a last residual worry with the revisionist approach. As quoted above, Held (2004a, 65) criticises that "they [proponents in the debate about terrorism] have frequently built a judgement of immorality or non-justifiability into the definition of terrorism, making it impossible even to question whether given acts of terrorism might be justified". Similarly, many worry that an account of terrorism might decide important moral issues "by definition" (Held 2004a, 66; see also Coady 2004b, 41; Jaggar 2005, 205; Meisels 2009, 335; Rodin 2004, 753). The residual worry emerging from these quotes is that even if we accept that a clarified notion of terrorism is influenced by certain moral assumptions, we should certainly avoid that crucial moral issues concerning terrorism be turned into merely verbal issues. Consider a revision that defines terrorism as that form of political violence that is never morally justified. The crucial issue of whether terrorism is ever morally justified is turned into a merely verbal issue. The answer follows directly from the revised term. As a result, the issue will not be a substantive, debatable issue for a theory that employs this term. The account of terminological revision given thus far does not preclude such a revision.[44]

[44] A similar, more general objection, which I will discuss in Chapter 5, is that the revisionist turns substantive disputes into merely verbal disputes.

I do not think that we can exclude undesirable revisions of this form in general. However, note first that even if this revision seems undesirable, it does not actually trivialize the issue of whether terrorism is ever morally justified or decide it by stipulation. Terminological revision itself is not a trivial issue or a mere matter of stipulation. Defending a revision involves substantive questions and any revision can be criticised as being based on the wrong answers to these questions.

Secondly, we can preclude such a revision in any particular case by formulating our aims accordingly. Thus, we could refine the aim guiding a revision of the term "terrorism" by adding the clause that the question of moral justifiability should not follow from the revised term. The undesirable revision could then be rejected because it does not serve our aim.

Thirdly, even if we do not adjust our aim, we can reject the undesirable revision on the grounds that it does not serve our aim well enough. It does not draw a clearer boundary between terrorism and other forms of political violence because it provides a criterion that is itself unclear, namely, the criterion of moral justifiability. As a result, the undesirable revision merely shifts the problem from the contested issue of whether any instance of the term "terrorism" is morally justified to the equally contested issue of whether potential instances are morally justified and thus do not actually fall under the term. Even though this would make it easier to assess the moral status of terrorism in general, it would be even less clear than it is now which cases fall under the term and thus have this status.

Furthermore, the undesirable revision could be criticized on the grounds that it might have unacceptable practical consequences. The term "terrorism" is already used in politics and public debates. Suppose we adopt the undesirable revision and are therefore committed to the claim that terrorism in the sense of our theory is never morally justified. It is conceivable that this claim would be cited in politics while the theoretic concept from which it follows would not be adopted. The problematic result would be that cases that classify as terrorism on the pre-theoretic notion are automatically judged as morally unjustifiable whereas this is only in order for cases falling under the theoretic notion.

Conclusion

I have defended a terminological endeavour that is important for normative inquiry even where words are not the primary focus. The need for it arises when an evaluative term is indeterminate or contested to an extent that hinders fruitful debate.

I have argued for the advantages of terminological revision over traditional conceptual analysis, the standard approach in these cases. Some of the considerations were applications of considerations in Chapter 2 to the special case at hand. Thus, terminological revision avoids notorious objections against traditional conceptual analysis, namely, regarding its heavy reliance on intuitions and its vulnerability to counterexamples. Moreover, it renders the term in question more useful for our aims. Finally, I have answered the

concern that terminological revision violates an uncontroversial requirement of neutrality because it promotes terms that are biased towards certain viewpoints. The real problem does not seem to be a lack of neutrality, but the potential for dubious aims and a lack of transparency. The revisionist needs to and can avoid both problems. Note that the same problems arise for non-evaluative terms even though it is less obvious. The considerations regarding this concern have led to important refinements of the account of terminological revision developed in previous chapters.

The upshot is that the view developed in previous chapters applies to the case of contested evaluative terms as well. Attention to words can be required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, it is more promising to revise terms in light of our aims than to analyze their current meaning.

Moreover, the considerations in this chapter disclose an important implication of my methodological view. Contrary to a common and natural enough assumption, terminological clarification and settling the subject matter of philosophical inquiry does not and need not happen prior to addressing any substantive issue. Rather, it happens in the course of and is influenced by substantive inquiry.

Chapter 4

Vital Verbal Disputes

Some disputes are merely verbal. Take the following dispute between Peter and Paul. Peter: "Many students meet their supervisor very often. Most of them have supervision meetings biweekly." Paul: "You are exaggerating. It's not the case that most students have supervision meetings biweekly." Let us assume that Peter and Paul both believe that most students have supervision meetings every other week. Intuitively, Peter and Paul do not disagree on the relevant issue, but merely talk past one another, helped by the ambiguity of "biweekly"; Peter uses "biweekly" in the sense of every other week whereas Paul uses it in the sense of twice a week. A merely verbal dispute has roughly two core features: (i) It arises due to some linguistic confusion such that (ii) parties do not actually disagree on the issue at hand, but merely appear to be disagreeing.

That disputes can be merely verbal has sparked some recent interest in philosophy. Even though philosophical disputes are typically not obviously merely verbal like the dispute about supervision meetings, numerous philosophical disputes have at some point been suspected of being merely verbal when properly understood (see Chalmers 2011, 517; Sidelle 2007, 83). Disputes about the ontology of material objects are a case in point. For example, could the dispute between those who affirm that there are tables and those who object that there are no tables, only particles arranged tablewise, be merely verbal? The diagnosis of a dispute as merely verbal has important

methodological consequences. The appropriate treatment for such pointless disputes is to smooth them out and focus on the actual, substantive issues (if any) that remain.

Verbal disputes are another phenomenon that raises the question of how important it is to examine the meaning of terms in first-order inquiry. After all, an obvious suggestion is to clarify the meaning of the terms used in order to resolve a verbal dispute. I will propose a view on verbal disputes and how to resolve them that is informed by my broadly Carnapian methodology and the Lewisian notion of subject matter developed in earlier chapters. The upshot will be that, even if certain philosophical disputes share the core features of merely verbal disputes, this does not automatically warrant the common belittling attitude. Something important can and often does depend on the linguistic confusion involved, namely, how to delineate the subject matters of a more general debate to which the verbal dispute in question belongs. Where this is the case, the dispute is more accurately described as a vital verbal dispute.

I will also argue that, even though David Chalmers's (2011) method of elimination provided certain weaknesses are fixed is a more suitable method to resolve verbal disputes than conceptual analysis, it does not fully resolve vital verbal disputes. The more promising method to resolve vital verbal disputes is the Carnapian method to clarify terms developed in earlier chapters.

These considerations support once more the view of the role of words in first-order inquiry developed in earlier chapters. Attention to words is

important in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, as far as vital verbal disputes are concerned, it is more promising to revise terms in light of our aims than to analyze their current meaning.

In the present chapter, I will discuss the two core features of merely verbal disputes and develop an account that avoids problems with extant suggestions. I will place more emphasis on the one that has been somewhat neglected in the recent debate: the lack of actual disagreement. This will provide the basis to explain what is special about verbal disputes in philosophy and support the idea that they are more accurately classified as vital verbal disputes. The task for the next chapter will be to discuss ways to resolve verbal disputes.

4.1 Verbal Disputes: The Linguistic Confusion

In this section, I will discuss accounts of the linguistic confusion that gives rise to a verbal dispute and identify problems with these accounts. I will propose an account that avoids these problems in section 4.2. Like others (Balcerak Jackson forthcoming, 3; Chalmers 2011, 522; Sider 2011, 46), I will focus on the simple case in which a dispute is about a statement S such that one party utters S and the other not S.[45]

One initially plausible suggestion is that parties use some expression in the statement S with different meaning and hence merely talk past one another

[45] As Jenkins (forthcoming, 5) highlights, this simplification is not without problems. It is easy to imagine cases where it is unclear what the disputed statement is or where we have several ones. Nevertheless, it seems useful to try to start with the simpler cases and tackle more intricate cases once we have a better grasp of the basic features.

(see Chalmers 2011, 519). The dispute about the frequency of supervision meetings fits this account. Peter uses "biweekly" in the sense of every other week and Paul takes it to mean twice a week. As a result, Paul utters that p and Peter objects that not q where p and not q do not conflict; that is, they could both be true.

However, as is commonly agreed, this account only captures merely verbal disputes in a narrow sense. In particular, it does not accommodate deferential cases; that is, verbal disputes in which the linguistic confusion is due to one party making a linguistic error (Balcerak Jackson forthcoming, 6; Chalmers 2011, 519–520; Hirsch 2009, 239–240; 2005, 70–72; Sidelle 2007, 90). Take the following dispute as an example. Muriel, a German native speaker, tells her American friend Hanna that their friend John has bought a beamer. Hanna replies in disbelief: "That's impossible! John certainly hasn't bought a beamer." Muriel insists, puzzled: "But John has bought a beamer. He showed it to me yesterday." Let us assume that Muriel does not believe that John has bought a BMW, but a video projector. She simply makes a linguistic error, being misled by the Anglicism "beamer" that is used in German to refer to video projectors. However, this does not change the expression's meaning in English. As a result, Muriel and Hanna do not use the expression with a different meaning and they do not simply assent to and deny different propositions. Muriel claims that p and Hanna objects that not p.

There are two main proposals on how to specify the linguistic confusion that gives rise to a verbal dispute in order to include deferential

cases. The first one is in terms of charitable interpretations (see Hirsch 2009, 239–240; 2005, 70–72; Sidelle 2007, 91). A charitable interpretation of a statement is, roughly, one under which it comes out true. Thus, the idea is to interpret the problematic expression that gives rise to a verbal dispute in such a way that the statement each party utters, S and not S respectively, comes out true. On this view, each party speaks the truth in their respective language (Hirsch 2005, 67). This proposal accommodates the deferential case. Muriel is strictly speaking making a mistake, but we could charitably interpret her as meaning video projector by "beamer" such that her statement comes out true and does not conflict with what Hanna states.

What proponents of this proposal disagree on is how to settle the boundaries of charitable interpretations (see also Balcerak Jackson forthcoming, 11–12). We can always find a range of interpretations that make the uttered statements true, but most of them are downright unacceptable. Interpreting the sentence Muriel utters as meaning that John bought coffee might make it come out true, but this is certainly an inadmissible interpretation. However, I will not pursue this issue any further because I think that no proposal in terms of charitable interpretations will work. The reason is simply that it is irrelevant for the classification of a dispute as verbal whether the statements parties utter come out true. What matters is that parties do not actually disagree and this is possible even if both parties utter false statements in their own language. Suppose John has neither bought a BMW nor a video projector and Muriel's claim is false no matter how charitably we interpret it.

This does not speak against the dispute with Hanna being merely verbal. What matters is whether Hanna would object once she understands what Muriel really wants to say. If she would accept Muriel's (false) claim that John has bought a video projector, there would be no actual disagreement and the dispute would be merely verbal.

Chalmers specifies the linguistic confusion at issue differently. He (2011, 522) proposes that a verbal dispute arises in virtue of parties having differing (tacit) beliefs about the meaning of one of the expressions involved. This proposal accommodates the deferential case as well. Even if "beamer" means the same in Muriel's and Hanna's mouth when they speak English, their (tacit) beliefs about the meaning differ. Muriel takes it to mean video projector while Hanna believes that it means BMW. Moreover, this specification avoids my objection to proposals in terms of charitable interpretations. The problem is that Chalmers's account comes at the cost of controversial assumptions.

Firstly, the account presupposes that speakers have (tacit) beliefs about the meaning of the terms they use. However, as Chalmers (2011, 523–524) concedes, the assumption that linguistic competence requires speakers to have (tacit) beliefs about the meaning of terms is questionable (see e.g. Pettit 2002).

Secondly, even if we grant that speakers have (tacit) beliefs about the meaning of terms, it is questionable that they have the right sort of beliefs such that these diverge in all and only cases of verbal disputes. Beliefs about whether a term applies to a certain case would not suffice; too many disputes would come out as verbal. For example, a dispute in which parties agree that

"whale" applies to all and only animals with certain biological features, but disagree on whether the animal they see on the horizon is a whale, would come out as merely verbal. This seems to be the wrong result.

Moreover, it does not help to ascribe to competent speakers beliefs of the form "x refers to such and such" where "such and such" describes the nature of the referent. The assumption that competence with a term requires such beliefs is implausibly strong. I do not need to know the biological features of whales or apples in order to be competent with the terms "whale" and "apple". And even if we would grant this assumption, it would not lead to the right results. Too many disputes would classify as merely verbal on Chalmers's account specified in this way. For example, if two speakers agree that "whale" applies to the animals biologists classify as whales, but not knowing the relevant features they have a dispute on whether these animals are mammals, this dispute would be classified as verbal. This seems to be the wrong result.

A more promising option is to ascribe to speakers beliefs of the form "x refers to so and so" or "x means so and so" where "so and so" describes conditions that guide speakers in their application of the term. These conditions do not need to capture the nature of the referent. For the term "water", it might be something like "the stuff in rivers and lakes that falls from the sky when it rains etc." For the term "whale", it could even be just "the huge animals living in the ocean that biologists classify as whales".

Importantly, we would need to assume that these conditions capture part of the meaning of the term. Otherwise, the relevant beliefs would not be

beliefs about its meaning. Hence, this option is committed to the internalist assumption that the meaning of a term is more than its referent. As a result, Chalmers's account of verbal disputes, thus specified, makes another controversial assumption.

If we grant, however, that speakers have such beliefs, a difficulty remains regarding the postulated discrepancy between the semantic beliefs of parties to a merely verbal dispute. What are the conditions for disagreement over meaning? It seems that not every divergence should suffice for disagreement. The whale specialist and I have presumably differing beliefs about the application conditions for "whale", but we do not disagree over the meaning because I believe that the term applies to whatever the specialist identifies as whales.

At any rate, Chalmers's account of verbal disputes seems to be committed to a controversial assumption about what competence with a term requires. As I hope to show, we can account for the linguistic confusion that gives rise to verbal disputes without making this controversial assumption. My proposal will emerge from a discussion of the second core feature of verbal disputes: the lack of actual disagreement.

4.2 Verbal Disputes: The Lack of Actual Disagreement

The aim in this section is to provide an account of the second core feature of verbal disputes: the lack of actual disagreement. Even though this feature has received less attention in discussions of verbal disputes, disagreement is a

matter of much recent interest in epistemology and philosophy of language. As we will see, the lack of actual disagreement in verbal disputes bears some resemblance to an issue that currently concerns contextualists and relativists about judgments of taste.

Parties to a verbal dispute over a statement S appear to disagree because one utters S and the other objects not S. Peter claims that most students have supervision meetings biweekly and Paul objects that most students do not have supervision meetings biweekly. The considerations in the last section on how to interpret parties' utterances suggest a first obvious account of the lack of actual disagreement. Thus, the content of parties' utterances does not actually conflict. Peter and Paul are not actually expressing conflicting propositions. Peter claims that most students meet their supervisor every other week (p). Paul objects that most students do not meet their supervisor twice a week (not q). And p and not q do not exclude each other; they could both be true.

However, this first account does not accommodate deferential cases. In these cases, the contents of parties' utterances actually conflict. Given what "beamer" means in American English, Muriel actually utters that John bought a BMW (p) whereupon Hanna objects that John did not buy a BMW (not p). Nevertheless, Muriel and Hanna are not actually disagreeing. Muriel simply makes a linguistic error with the effect that Hanna misunderstands her. By hypothesis, Hanna would not object if she understood what Muriel actually wants to say, namely, that John bought a video projector.

The problem we are now faced with is the opposite of a challenge to contextualism about judgements of taste. Roughly, relativists criticise that contextualists cannot account for disagreement about matters of taste.[46] Take, for example, a dispute in which Peter claims "This is tasty!" and Paul objects "This is not tasty at all!". On a contextualist account, Peter, in fact, claims that this food is tasty for Peter, and Paul that it is not tasty at all for Paul. These claims do not actually conflict; Peter and Paul are not actually disagreeing. This appears to be the wrong result; actual disagreement about mattes of taste seems possible. Hence, contextualists must explain how far parties actually disagree even though, on a contextualist interpretation, they do not seem to disagree. The problem that I am faced with is the contrary. Parties to a verbal dispute appear to disagree; they sometimes even utter conflicting propositions. We need to explain how far they, nevertheless, do not actually disagree.

It has been argued (e.g. Huvenes 2012) that it is not even necessary for actual disagreement that parties utter conflicting propositions; instead, they could express conflicting attitudes. Deferential cases of verbal disputes suggest that it is not sufficient for actual disagreement that parties utter conflicting propositions. Jenkins (forthcoming, 6) proposes that disagreement "has more to do with what the parties *believe* […] than what their utterances mean in any shared public language". This thought provides a promising starting point; whether a dispute is verbal depends on whether parties' beliefs conflict rather than whether the propositions they utter conflict. The challenge is then to

[46] For a conspicuous presentation of the challenge at issue, see e.g. MacFarlane 2007.

identify the relevant beliefs. Parties to a verbal dispute could have all sorts of conflicting beliefs that are irrelevant to the status of their dispute over S. Whether Paul and Peter have conflicting beliefs about who Hanna's supervisor is is irrelevant to the status of their dispute about whether most students meet their supervisor biweekly. Jenkins's account solves the problem by invoking the subject matters of a dispute. She (forthcoming, 12–13) contends that a dispute is only verbal if parties do not disagree on the subject matters of their dispute. In this view, we can identify the relevant beliefs—those that should not conflict for the dispute to be verbal—as parties' beliefs about the subject matters of their dispute. This leaves open what the subject matters of a dispute are.

Brendan Balcerak Jackson's (forthcoming, 15) proposal can be read as a possible refinement. Thus, parties to a verbal dispute do not actually disagree on any question that both attempt to answer and disagree on. This refinement only works if we individuate questions in terms of their content. If we individuate questions via their linguistic form, we could say that there are questions that parties attempt to answer and disagree on. Muriel and Hanna disagree on whether John has bought a beamer; Peter and Paul disagree on whether most students have supervision meetings biweekly. If we take the content into account, we plausibly have two questions in each of these cases and parties do not disagree on either. Peter and Paul do not disagree on whether most students meet their supervisor every other week or on whether most meet their supervisor twice a week.

At any rate, we can, I contend, account for the lack of disagreement in verbal disputes without reference to the subject matter of a dispute. What we then need to explain in some other way, without reference to subject matters, is how far parties do not actually disagree even if they utter conflicting propositions like in the deferential case. When Jenkins proposes that the disagreement has more to do with what parties believe than with the content of their utterance, she (forthcoming, 6, Fn. 8) mentions in a footnote that it might have something to do with the utterer's meaning in a Gricean sense. I think that this is the key to a simpler account of the lack of disagreement in verbal disputes. Moreover, this account points towards an alternative understanding of the linguistic confusion involved. As a first attempt, we could suggest that parties A and B to a verbal dispute about a statement S do not actually disagree in so far as, even though what S means when A utters it might conflict with what not S means when B utters it, what A means by uttering S does not conflict with what B means by uttering not S.

The distinction invoked here is Grice's (1957; 1968; 1969) distinction between utterer's occasion meaning (for simplicity henceforth called utterer's meaning) and applied timeless utterance-type meaning (henceforth called utterance meaning). A simplified account of this distinction should suffice for my purpose. The utterer's meaning is analyzed in terms of the utterer's intentions und using the scheme "by uttering S, A means that p". Thus, roughly, by uttering "John bought a beamer", Muriel means that John bought a video projector because Muriel meets the following conditions. By uttering

"John bought a beamer", Muriel intends (i) that Hanna believes that John bought a video projector, (ii) that Hanna recognizes this intention, and (iii) that part of the reason why Hanna believes that John bought a video projector is her recognizing Muriel's intention.[47] Hanna, on her part, by uttering "John did not buy a beamer" means that John did not buy a BMW because of what she intends by uttering this statement. Note that these three conditions are the ones Grice suggested first (1957). Exactly what conditions need to be fulfilled remains controversial. I will not take a stance on this issue. My aim is to show that we can use a Gricean notion of utterer's meaning for an account of verbal disputes and this is independent of how exactly we spell out the account.

The utterance meaning is analyzed in terms of the utterer's meanings that are standardly associated with an utterance-type in a linguistic community (members of this community have it in their "repertoire" to utter statements of some type with certain intentions) and using the scheme "When A uttered S, S meant on this occasion '…'". Importantly, utterance meaning in this sense can change from one occasion to the other. Thus, when uttered by Peter, the statement "Most students meet their supervisor biweekly" meant "Most students meet their supervisor every other week". When uttered by Paul, the statement "Most students do not meet their supervisor biweekly" meant "Most

[47] This might sound problematic to someone who understands the content of mental states as closely tied to their description in a shared language. How can Muriel intend that Hanna believes that John bought a video projector if she does not know the expression "video projector"? However, on the Gricean account, the content of utterances is explained by reference to the content of speakers' mental states and not vice versa. Hence, if we adopt this account, we should not understand mental content as tied too closely to their description in a shared language.

students do not meet their supervisor twice a week". However, in deferential cases of verbal disputes, the utterance meaning does not change. When uttered by Muriel, "John bought a beamer" meant "John bought a BMW". When uttered by Hanna, "John did not buy a beamer" meant "John did not buy a BMW". This is why we need to resort to the more basic utterer's meaning in order to account for the lack of disagreement in verbal disputes.

The resulting account of the lack of disagreement characteristic of verbal disputes goes as follows. In a verbal dispute, A and B use the same utterance-type with different utterer's meaning such that what they intend to convey does not actually conflict. By uttering S, A means that p and by uttering not S, B means that not q where p and not q are compatible; they could both be true.

This account needs a further twist because it does not distinguish between what Chalmers calls wholly and partly verbal disputes. To retain this distinction is important since only wholly verbal disputes are merely verbal disputes in the sense that they are pointless and nothing is really at issue. The idea is, very roughly, that a wholly verbal dispute is resolved once we have cleared up the linguistic confusion that gave rise to it, whereas, in partly verbal disputes, a residual disagreement remains (Chalmers 2011, 525–526). The dispute between Peter and Paul is wholly verbal if, for example, once Paul realizes what Peter actually means, he exclaims: "Oh, you mean that most students have supervision meetings fortnightly. In that case, you might be right." The dispute is only partly verbal if Paul says instead: "Oh, you mean

that most students have supervision meetings fortnightly. But I think even this is exaggerated."

The Gricean account of the lack of disagreement suggested above does not distinguish between wholly and partly verbal disputes because it leaves open whether parties have a belief that conflicts with what the other party means by their utterance; that is, the utterer's meaning. The account only requires that what Peter and Paul mean by their utterances does not conflict; that is, that most students meet their supervisor every week (p) and that most students do not meet their supervisor twice a week (not q). This leaves open whether Paul has a belief that conflicts with what Peter means by his utterance, namely, the belief that (p) most students do not meet their supervisor every other week. In consequence, the dispute could be wholly or partly verbal; both of the possible developments sketched above are possible.

In order to capture the lack of disagreement characteristic of wholly verbal disputes, the Gricean account can be amended as follows. Parties A and B to a wholly verbal dispute about a statement S do not actually disagree in so far as what A means by uttering S does not conflict with what B means by uttering not S, and A and B do not have beliefs that conflict with what the other one means. By uttering S, A means that p and by uttering not S, B means that not q such that possibly p and not q. Moreover, A does not hold beliefs whose joint contents could not be true if not q and B does not hold beliefs whose joint contents could not be true if p.

Importantly, this account does not require that parties agree on what the other party means. It is quite possible that one party has never thought about what the other party means and hence has no belief about it. Suppose Hanna, who has the firm belief that John has not bought a BMW, has never thought about John buying a video projector. Once she realizes that this is what Muriel is telling her, she might say: "Oh, really? I didn't know that." To say that Hanna agrees with Muriel that John has bought a video projector seems to be an odd way to describe the situation. Rather, Hanna is about to learn something that she did not have any prior opinion about. Nevertheless, the dispute is clearly wholly verbal.

It might be objected that my account misclassifies certain cases as partly verbal that should come out as wholly verbal. Muriel believes that John has bought a video projector (p); this is what she intends to convey. Suppose that, in addition, she believes that John has bought a BMW (q); that is, she holds a belief that conflicts with what Hanna intends to express, namely, that John has not bought a BMW (not q).

I acknowledge an intuitive difference between this case and the case of a partly verbal dispute discussed above. In the earlier case, the respondent disagrees with what the person initiating the discussion intends to express. By contrast, in the case at issue here, there is no disagreement on the issue the person initiating the discussion intended to raise, but only on the issue that the respondent thought to be under discussion. However, I do not see a good reason to classify the first but not the second case as only partly verbal. In both

cases, a substantive disagreement on an issue raised by some party is involved. To illustrate the point, it is quite possible that something like the following happens in the second case. Once Hanna realizes that Muriel was talking about a video projector, she might say: "Oh, that's what you mean! Then you might be right. I thought you were talking about a BMW!" To this, Muriel could reply: "Actually, now that you bring it up, I think that John has bought a BMW as well."

The Gricean approach to the lack of disagreement points towards an alternative way to explain the linguistic confusion that gives rise to verbal disputes. The linguistic confusion concerns in the first place a certain expression E in S. In his later papers on the topic, Grice attempts to provide an account of how the meaning of complex utterance-types is composed of the meaning of simpler utterance-types. Based on this, we can suggest that parties to a verbal dispute mean different things by uttering E (utterer's meaning). Importantly, this leaves open whether E means the same when uttered by either party (utterance meaning).

I will not take a stance on whether my account of the two core features of verbal disputes taken together amount to an account of verbal disputes that captures all relevant distinctions. But at any rate, an account of verbal disputes along those lines has considerable advantages over extant accounts.

Firstly, such an account does not require that what parties mean by uttering a statement is true, and hence avoids the problem with accounts in terms of charitable interpretations.

Secondly, in contrast to Chalmers's account, my account remains neutral on the controversial issue of whether speakers have in general (tacit) beliefs of any sort about the meaning of the expressions they use. Admittedly, my account has its own, albeit somewhat less controversial commitment, namely, some form of metasemantic internalism. Thus, speakers' mental states give rise to the content of utterances. Even though this commitment is somewhat less controversial, certain issues remain to be clarified. Thus, it can be difficult to identify the relevant intentions and hence the utterer's meaning. This can pose problems when assessing the status of a dispute.

Thirdly, in contrast to Chalmers's account, my account does not make reference to an in-virtue-of relation that remains difficult to specify. On Chalmers's (2011, 522) account, a wholly verbal dispute over a statement S arises "wholly in virtue of" a disagreement over the meaning of a term T in S. The specification "wholly in virtue of" is required in order to exclude relevant disagreements other than the disagreement about the meaning of T which would render the dispute partly verbal. Chalmers (2011, 523–524) makes interesting observations concerning the relevant in-virtue-of relation (e.g. that it is an explanatory relation) and provides a helpful counterfactual gloss. Nevertheless, the nature of the relation remains to some extent unclear. My account gets by without reference to such a relation because it captures the lack of relevant disagreement directly by identifying the relevant beliefs that do not conflict, namely, those that give rise to the utterer's meaning.

To close, note an important feature that an account along the lines that I propose shares with other accounts: it depends to some extent on the context whether a dispute over some statement S is verbal. On my account, this is because whether a dispute is verbal depends on what the utterers mean by uttering S. Hence, we need to be careful when claiming that disputes over certain statements are in general merely verbal as it is usually done when philosophical disputes are diagnosed as merely verbal. Whether they actually are merely verbal depends on what utterer's meanings are in play and this might be different in different contexts.

4.3 Vital Verbal Disputes: Subject Matters under Consideration

The considerations in previous sections prima facie support the belittling adverb "merely" and the deflationary attitude with which disputes are diagnosed as merely verbal. Parties do not actually disagree; they merely misunderstand what the other party is trying to get at. Such disputes seem, indeed, pointless. However, to diagnose a philosophical dispute as merely verbal and thereby denounce it as pointless is always highly controversial. This might be just because philosophers are reluctant to admit that some of their long-cherished disputes are pointless. However, as I attempt to show in this section, there is a more charitable explanation of what is different about verbal disputes in philosophy. I will argue that even though they are verbal, something important is at issue, namely, how to conceive of the subject matter of a more general debate and how to adapt our terminology accordingly. As a

result, such disputes are more accurately classified as vital verbal disputes. For my considerations, I will draw again on the Lewisian notion of subject matter used in previous chapters.

Take a dispute between two philosophers about the statement S, "The victims of terrorism are always non-combatants". Suppose that philosopher A, who claims that S, defends an account on which "terrorism" applies to violence against non-combatants for political purposes (henceforth called "terrorism$_A$"). On philosopher B's account, who claims that not S, "terrorism" applies to violence against some with the intent to spread fear in a wider community for political purposes (henceforth called "terrorism$_B$"). Hence, A means by uttering S that the victims of terrorism$_A$ are always non-combatants (p) and B means by uttering not S that the victims of terrorism$_B$ are not always non-combatants (not q). Let us assume, moreover, that A and B are not actually disagreeing in the sense specified above. What they intend to convey, p and not q, does not conflict; they could both be true. In fact, p is necessarily true and not q seems highly plausible. In addition, B does not believe that the victims of terrorism$_A$ are not always non-combatants (not p) and A does not believe that the victims of terrorism$_B$ are always non-combatants (q).

This dispute is fictitious, but it comes quite close to disputes about terrorism that philosophers are actually engaged in; terrorism$_A$ and terrorism$_B$ are simplified versions of two popular philosophical views on terrorism.[48] The

[48] For an account of terrorism in the spirit of terrorism$_A$, see e.g. Coady 2004a; for an account in the spirit of terrorism$_B$, see e.g. Held 2004a. These account are discussed in Chapter 3 above.

dispute shares the core features of verbal disputes discussed in previous sections, but to diagnose it as merely verbal with the implication that nothing substantive is at issue would certainly be met with resistance. Do we misunderstand how this dispute works or is there a significant difference to the obvious cases of merely verbal disputes discussed earlier?

One initially promising line of thought is that verbal disputes in philosophy are likely to be only partly verbal whereas the obvious cases discussed above are wholly verbal. Recall that parties to a partly verbal dispute misunderstand each other, but there is also a residual actual disagreement. What A and B mean by uttering S and not S respectively does not conflict; A means that p and B that not q such that possibly p and not q. However, at least one party has a belief that conflicts with what the other party means. B believes that not p or A believes that q. If the dispute about terrorism were partly verbal, this would explain why we are reluctant to declare it as merely verbal. There is a residual actual disagreement that needs to be tackled. However, the fictitious dispute is clearly wholly verbal. By hypothesis, A and B do not have beliefs that conflict with what the other party means by their utterance. As a result, even though I suspect that many verbal disputes in philosophy might be only partly verbal, this does not explain the apparent difference between the wholly verbal dispute about terrorism and the obvious cases of wholly verbal disputes discussed above.

The difference, it seems, has to do with the linguistic confusion over the term "terrorism". Like in the obvious cases, parties to the dispute mean

different things by uttering this term, that is, the utterers' meanings diverge. However, the lack of clarity besetting the utterance meaning of "terrorism" is different; more precisely, the lack of clarity besetting the timeless meaning of the utterance-type "terrorism" as opposed to what it means when uttered on a certain occasion (applied timeless utterance meaning) or what a speaker means by uttering it (utterer's meaning). Unlike in the biweekly dispute, there is not a simple and well-known ambiguity involved; and unlike in the beamer dispute, it is not obvious that one party makes a linguistic error. Because A and B make explicit what they intend to refer to with "terrorism", the utterer's meaning is clear. However, it remains unclear what "terrorism" means in their linguistic community in some sense. It is unclear what the linguistic community usually uses the term to refer to and, as I have argued in Chapter 3, the question arises of what it should be used to refer to (timeless meaning of the utterance-type). Expressed in a more Gricean way, it remains unclear what "basic procedure" the linguistic community has and, moreover, should have in their "repertoire" for the term "terrorism".

One might object that this lack of clarity does not pose a problem because the utterer's meaning is made explicit. Hence it is clear what A and B mean by uttering "terrorism". However, what remains unclear due to the unclear utterance meaning is, as I will argue, not just the subject matter of this particular dispute, but of every dispute in which the term "terrorism" is used. A and B suggest different clarifications of the term and thus bring different conceptions of the subject matter of terrorism into play. Therefore, even if it is

clear what subject matter each intends to address, it remains unclear whether any of them addresses the subject matter that generally is or should be addressed under the heading of "terrorism". This issue needs consideration and affects an ongoing more general debate. Hence, the verbal dispute about terrorism is not pointless in so far as it is a manifestation of a more general substantive problem, namely, how to conceive of the subject matter of terrorism.

In order to explain what the subject matter of a dispute is, I will draw again on Lewis's (1988) account of the subject matter of a statement. Jenkins (forthcoming, 12) briefly considers the prospects of using Lewis's notion of the subject matter of a statement for an account of the subject matter of a dispute and predicts a problem that I will address in section 4.4. I have introduced Lewis's account of the subject matter of a statement in Chapter 1 and I will only summarize the main points here.

On Lewis's account, the subject matter of a statement is whatever its truth-value supervenes on. When evaluating the truth-value of statements about the subject matter of knowledge, we only need to consider how things could be with respect to knowledge. All other aspects of reality and how they could be are irrelevant. Therefore, we can lump together all possible ways the world might be that are exactly alike as knowledge is concerned. Because "being exactly alike as x is concerned" is an equivalence relation, this subject matter gives us a partitioning of logical space into mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive regions. The worlds in each region are exactly alike with

respect to knowledge. Every statement about knowledge has the same truth-value at all worlds within the same region.

Recall the consideration that motivates this notion. What do all statements about a subject matter like knowledge share? Obviously, they do not all have the same content or truth-value. Moreover, as I have set forth in Chapter 1, they do not all mention the same thing. However, what all these statements do share is that their truth-value at a world supervenes on how things are with respect to knowledge at this world.

Importantly, a statement always has several subject matters in the Lewisian sense.[49] "Most students meet their supervisor biweekly" is about students, but also about the frequency of supervision meetings, about whether students meet their supervisor biweekly and so on.

We can use the Lewisian notion of the subject matter of a statement for a first attempt at an account of the subject matter of a dispute. Thus, the subject matters of a dispute over a statement S are the subject matters of S. On this account, the subject matter of the dispute between Peter and Paul over "Most students meet their supervisor biweekly" has such subject matters as whether most students meet their supervisor biweekly, the frequency of supervision meetings or supervision meetings. These are aspects of the world or of possible ways the world could be on which the truth-value of S supervenes. That is, if we consider a possible way our world could be, in order

[49] As noted in Chapter 1, Yablo (2012, lecture 1) criticises this aspect of Lewis's account, but he does not provide an argument. He merely insists that a statement must have one unique subject matter. I think that, to the contrary, it is a natural assumption that a statement has several more or less general subject matters.

to determine the truth-value of S, it suffices to know how everything is with respect to supervision meetings or with respect to the frequency of supervision meetings or with respect to whether most students meet their supervisor biweekly.

To say that one of the subject matters is whether most students have supervision meetings biweekly is, in fact, ambiguous due to the ambiguity of "biweekly". Two subject matters could be referred to that partition logical space differently. One divides possible worlds according to whether most supervision meetings take place fortnightly and the other according to whether they happen twice a week. Hence, a statement can also have several subject matters corresponding to different possible interpretations. A dispute about it, it seems, only inherits those subject matters that correspond to interpretations that are relevant in the given context. Thus, we could say that the subject matters of a dispute over S are the subject matters of S given what S means on this occasion (applied timeless utterance meaning).

The deferential case shows, in addition, that the utterer's meaning matters. On the first account, one of the subject matters of the dispute over "John bought a beamer" is whether John bought a beamer. If we only take into account what S means on this occasion, we do not capture the subject matter Muriel actually intends to invoke, namely, whether John bought a video projector. This subject matter arises from the utterer's meaning, that is, from what Muriel meant by uttering the statement. Hence, it seems useful to

distinguish between the utterance subject matters and the utterer's subject matters of a dispute.

We are now in a position to spell out how far parties to a verbal dispute do not disagree on the subject matters of their dispute as Jenkins suggests. As I have argued in the last section, it is not necessary to refer to subject matters in order to account for the lack of disagreement in verbal disputes. However, I will use the idea that parties to a verbal dispute do not disagree on the subject matter at issue in order to explain what is special about verbal disputes in philosophy.

In a substantive dispute, parties disagree on the subject matters at issue. Each expresses a belief that represents the world as being a certain way and these possibilities cannot both be actual. The subject matters raised partition logical space, that is, they divide all possible ways the world might be into mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive regions. The beliefs expressed by parties to a substantive dispute locate the actual world in different regions of these partitions.

For a dispute to be wholly verbal, it is required, as noted earlier, that parties do not actually disagree on the utterer's subject matters of the dispute. Importantly, not all utterer's subject matters are relevant. Parties only need to lack actual disagreement on what might be called, following Yablo (2012, Lecture 1), the smallest such subject matters.[50] The smallest subject matter of a

[50] It might seem prima facie more obvious to talk of the most specific subject matter. However, this is only appropriate as long as we consider the description of the subject matter.

verbal dispute over a statement S is whether S. Accordingly, the smallest utterer's subject matter of the dispute over the statement "Most students meet their supervisor biweekly" is whether most students meet their supervisor biweekly. More precisely, there are two smallest utterer's subject matters in this case. One is whether most students meet their supervisor every other week and the other one is whether most students meet their supervisor twice a week.

Why are only the smallest subject matters relevant? Paul does not believe that most students do not meet their supervisor every other week. Hence, he does not locate the actual world in a different region than Peter in the partition Peter invokes by uttering S. Moreover, Peter does not believe that most students do not meet their supervisor twice a week. Hence, he does not locate the actual world in a different region than Paul in the partition Paul invokes by uttering not S. By contrast, Peter and Paul might have all kinds of conflicting beliefs (in the above specified sense) about bigger subject matters of their dispute; for example, the frequency of supervision meetings. Maybe Peter believes that the frequency of supervision meetings is too high whereas Paul thinks that it is not. This would not affect the status of their dispute over the statement "Most students meet their supervisor biweekly".

The fact that only the smallest subject matter of S is relevant explains why we do not need to refer to subject matters in order to account for the lack of disagreement in verbal disputes. The smallest subject matters partition

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It seems awkward as soon as we consider the partition of logical space it effects and notice that it is a very rough partition into only two regions.

logical space into two regions, one with worlds at which S is true and the other one at which S is false. Hence, they correspond to the propositions parties intend to express by uttering S and not S respectively. Because it only matters whether these proposition conflict with each other or with other beliefs parties hold, the lack of disagreement can be explained by reference to these propositions. To refer to subject matters introduces an unnecessary complication. However, as I will show in due course, this complication is helpful in order to shed light on verbal disputes in philosophy.

We are now also in a position to spell out Balcerak Jackson's idea that there is no question parties to a verbal dispute disagree on. On one popular view, the content of a question is a partition of logical space where the possible worlds in each region agree on the answer to the question.[51] On the Lewisian notion of subject matter, the subject matters partition logical space as well, such that the worlds in each region are exactly alike with respect to the subject matter. Based on these views, we can say that a question introduces a subject matter or that each subject matter corresponds to a question. In consequence, if parties to a verbal dispute do not disagree on any of the subject matters of their dispute, there is no question that they attempt to answer and disagree on. As argued above, this is presumably not the case for all subject matters of a dispute over S. It is only required as regards the smallest subject matters. Notably, these are the subject matters of a dispute that are most easily stated as

[51] Partition semantics for questions have been suggested by, e.g., Higginbotham and May (1981) and Belnap (1982). See also Ch.1.

questions, e.g. whether John has bought a BMW or whether most students meet their supervisor every other week. These questions also appear to be the ones parties attempt to answer. Other subject matters can be expressed as questions as well. However, these questions are more general and parties do not attempt to answer these more general questions. The subject matter of supervision meetings partitions logical space into worlds that are exactly alike with respect to supervision meetings. A question with the same content could be something like "How is everything with respect to supervision meetings?" or "What is the whole truth about supervision meetings?" However, Peter and Paul do not seem to attempt to answer this question in their little dispute.

The foregoing considerations also allow us to explain the widely shared intuition that parties to a wholly verbal dispute talk past one another. This is the case because each party gets wrong which subject matter the other one intends to invoke by uttering S or not S respectively, helped by the fact that they use the same utterance-type S with different utterer's meaning.

Let us now turn to verbal disputes in philosophy. Like in the other cases, parties to the philosophical dispute about terrorism invoke different smallest subject matters by uttering the same utterance-type. Philosopher A invokes the subject matter whether victims of terrorism_A are always non-combatants and philosopher B invokes the subject matter whether the victims of terrorism_B are always non-combatants. Moreover, A and B do not have conflicting beliefs about where to locate the actual world in those two partitions. The difference to the other cases is that it is not a simple ambiguity

or an obvious linguistic error that leads to an unclarity over which subject matter the other party invokes and that is limited to this particular dispute. The utterance meaning of "terrorism" is unclear. As a result, it is unclear for every dispute about terrorism what the partitions are that can or should be invoked.

As suggested in Chapter 1, we could say that the subject matter of our debates about terrorism is unclear because there is a range of partitions corresponding to the range of possible clarifications of the utterance meaning of "terrorism". Suppose that at one of two possible worlds, there were 20 cases of terrorism$_A$, 22 cases of terrorism$_B$, and 19 cases of terrorism$_C$ in 2011. At the other world, there were 20 cases of terrorism$_A$, 20 cases of terrorism$_B$, and 19 cases of terrorism$_C$ in 2011. Are these two worlds exactly alike with respect to terrorism? There are at least three partitions that correspond to the subject matter of terrorism given the three clarifications of the term "terrorism". The two worlds could be in the same region of the partition corresponding to the subject matter of terrorism$_A$ or terrorism$_C$, but they cannot be in the same region of the partition corresponding to the subject matter of terrorism$_B$.

Importantly, it does not suffice to rely for every dispute on the utterer's meaning even if every utterer made their utterer's meaning explicit like philosopher A and B. This could lead to frequent changes in subject matter such that philosophers appear to address the same subject matter, namely, terrorism, but are actually invoking different ones using the same utterance-types. Hence, the more general problem of which the verbal dispute is a manifestation is which subject matters we need to address, given the ongoing

debate and our aims for the future. Put differently, which are the salient features of worlds regarding terrorism; on which features should the truth-value of claims about this subject matter supervene? Note that the question is not so much which particular partition goes with the label "terrorism", but rather more generally which partitions we need to be able to invoke in our shared language and hence need some label for. As a result, the wholly verbal dispute between philosopher A and B does not seem to be merely verbal; something important is at issue and requires consideration. It seems more accurate to classify disputes such as this one as vital verbal disputes.

It might well turn out that there is a sliding scale between vital verbal disputes and merely verbal disputes rather than a sharp boundary. After all, that the meaning of a term is unclear is a matter of degree. Moreover, whether this unclarity is a matter for consideration and hence whether a verbal dispute is vital is likely to depend to some extent on the context, e.g. parties' aims and standards. One factor that seems to be relevant for philosophical verbal disputes is whether the confused expression that gives rise to the dispute is philosophically relevant. Moreover, a need to consider this confusion in the given context arises only if the expression is central to the current dispute. Suppose "semantic" and "pragmatic" are used in a philosophical dispute outside the philosophy of language and that this dispute is wholly verbal due to some confusion regarding the expressions "pragmatic" and "semantic". In this case, it is presumably not a vital verbal dispute even though these terms are of wider philosophical significance. The reason is that they are not central to the

dispute at issue. Put differently, the dispute at issue is not part of the more general debate concerning the semantic/pragmatic distinction.

I mentioned in the beginning that certain disputes over the ontology of material objects are under the suspicion of being merely verbal. This is a difficult case and I will not be able to do justice to it here. However, it is possible to sketch some lines of inquiry that arise from the considerations in this chapter. Take a dispute in which ontologist A claims S "There are tables" and ontologist B objects not S "There are no tables, only particles arranged tablewise". This dispute would be verbal if A and B meant something different by uttering S. A currently debated possibility (e.g. Dorr 2005) is that parties to disputes such as this one use "there are" or the existential quantifier with different meaning. If this is the case and the dispute is merely verbal due to a linguistic confusion regarding the existential quantifier, the dispute is likely to be vital verbal. The existential quantifier is a core metaphysical term. The question of how to use this term and, at the same time, how to conceive of the subject matter of metaphysics would be a core issue of metaphysics.[52]

Before closing, I should mention that verbal disputes outside philosophy can also be vital in my sense. A dispute between two politicians about the statement "Some US attacks on Iraq in the aftermaths of 9/11 were acts of terrorism" might under certain circumstances be a vital verbal dispute.

[52] Note that even if a dispute like this one is not verbal, this does not mean that it could not be flawed in some other way. It could still be the case that even though parties are not talking past each other, what they claim does not actually conflict because there is no fact of the matter whether there are tables or only particles arranged tablewise.

4.4 The Subject Matter of a Dispute: An Objection Answered

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss a problem Jenkins predicts for a Lewisian approach of the subject matter of a dispute. She (forthcoming, 12) cautions that we cannot conceive of the subject matter of a dispute straightforwardly as the subject matter of statements uttered in the course of the dispute for three reasons: (i) Some statements are uttered in order to support or criticise a view, but they are not supposed to introduce new subject matters (even if the subject matters of these statements could be the subject matters of a subsequent dispute). (ii) Some subject matters are taken for granted in a context and not expressed by any statement uttered in the course of the dispute. Jenkins provides the example of a dispute where one party claims "Scepticism is mistaken" and the other one objects "Unless a subject can rule out all not-p possibilities, his position with regard to p is epistemically defective. Scepticism is not mistaken." For the sake of argument, we are invited to assume that this dispute is wholly verbal and only arises due to parties' differing understanding of "knowledge", a term that is notably not used in the dispute. (iii) Parties might well take back statements that, on reflection, do not seem to express their view adequately.

Let me answer each reason in turn. In response to (i), I do not see why we should not simply accept that every statement in support of a view contributes to the subject matters of the dispute. Since these statements are likely to be relevant to the contested statements, they are likely to share some subject matters with them. Supporting statements might even clarify to some

extent what subject matters a party invokes; this point will become clearer when I consider reason (ii) below. If a party utters a statement that is not relevant to the contested statement, she will probably be criticized for changing the subject, for raising a subject matter that does not fit with the ones under debate thus far. These considerations also suggest that reason (iii) does not really pose a problem. It seems fairly natural to assume that what sometimes happens in a dispute is that parties introduce subject matters that appear to be relevant to a more general subject matter or specifications of a subject matter already at issue that they take back on reflection – just as parties sometimes make claims that they later give up.

Jenkins's reason (ii) is more serious. It raises the worry that even though the sketched dispute is verbal, it does not classify as verbal given the Lewisian account of the subject matter of a statement. By hypothesis, the dispute arises because parties use "knowledge" with different meaning. However, this expression is not used in the dispute. As a result, parties invoke the same smallest subject matter, namely, the subject matter of whether scepticism (understood as the view that unless a subject can rule out all not-p possibilities, his position with regard to p is epistemically defective) is mistaken. They locate the actual world in different regions of this partition and hence actually disagree on this subject matter. The dispute appears to be substantive. But this is clearly false. By hypothesis, parties would agree on the truth-value of "Scepticism is mistaken" if they were to mean the same by "knowledge".

However, contrary to first appearances, parties are not invoking the same subject matter (utterer's subject matter). By hypothesis, parties do not mean the same by "knowledge". Let us suppose that the party who thinks that scepticism is not mistaken thinks that "knowledge" only applies to a belief that p if we can rule out all not-p possibilities (henceforth knowledge$_{A)}$. The other party takes "knowledge" to apply to a belief that p even if we cannot rule out all not-p possibilities (henceforth knowledge$_{B)}$. This confusion regarding "knowledge" carries over to "epistemically defective" and "scepticism"; this is how the dispute must be construed in order to be wholly verbal. Hence, what the relevant party means by uttering "Scepticism is not mistaken" is actually that knowledge$_A$ does not require ruling out all not-p possibilities. The other party, by uttering "Scepticism is mistaken", means that knowledge$_B$ requires ruling out all not-p possibilities. By hypothesis, neither party has a belief that conflicts with what the other party means by uttering their statement. As a consequence, parties are invoking different partitions and they do not actually disagree on where the actual world is in each of these partitions. Carefully analyzed, the dispute comes out as verbal.

Another problem with Jenkins's reason (ii) is that is seems to presuppose that the subject matters of a statement are limited to those that can be described using the expressions that occur in the statement. Hence, amongst the subject matters of the statement "Scepticism is mistaken" are scepticism and whether scepticism is mistaken, but not how much certainty is required for knowledge or, more generally, knowledge. However, this is not

the case on the Lewisian notion of subject matter. A statement has a certain subject matter if its truth-value supervenes on the relevant aspects of a world; that is, if the statement has the same truth-value at every world within the same region of the relevant partition of logical space. Whether the partition can be characterized using the expressions in the statement is irrelevant. The truth-value of "Scepticism is mistaken" supervenes on how things are at a world with respect to knowledge. Hence, knowledge is a subject matter of this statement and of the dispute about it on the initial Lewisian notion.

Jenkins is right in so far as it is not always obvious that there is a statement S such that one party endorses it and the other rejects it. This simplifying assumption is part of most accounts of verbal disputes, including mine. Many disputes seem more complex and messy. Nevertheless, it seems possible in many cases to extract such an S. Moreover, even if an account is somewhat simplifying and hence does not apply comfortably in more complex cases, it might provide helpful steps towards understanding these cases.

Conclusion

Many disputes in philosophy have at some point been under the suspicion of being merely verbal and hence pointless. In the present chapter, I have first argued for the advantages of a Grice-inspired account of the two core features of verbal disputes: the linguistic confusion that gives rise to them and the lack of actual disagreement. I have, secondly, developed an account of the subject matter of a dispute, drawing on the Lewisian notion of subject matter used in

earlier chapters. On this basis, I have proposed an explanation of what is special about verbal disputes in philosophy. Even though they share the core features of merely verbal disputes, this does not automatically warrant the common belittling attitude. Something of substance can depend on the linguistic confusion involved, namely, how to delineate the subject matters of a more general debate to which the verbal dispute in question belongs. Where this is the case, the dispute is more accurately described as a vital verbal dispute.

These considerations lend further support to the view on the role of words in first-order inquiry developed in earlier chapters. Words matter and need to be studied when the subject matter of a philosophical debate is unclear and needs to be settled. In the case of verbal disputes, we need to resolve the linguistic confusion that gives rise to the verbal dispute in order to settle the subject matter of this dispute or even a more general debate. The task for the next chapter will be to discuss ways to resolve verbal disputes. I will argue that the broadly Carnapian method to clarify terms by revising them, developed in earlier chapters, is the appropriate method to resolve vital verbal disputes.

Chapter 5

Resolving Verbal Disputes

This chapter picks up where the last one left off. The core issue is claims to the effect that some dispute in philosophy—about the ontology of material objects, about free will or about the semantic/pragmatic distinction—is merely verbal and hence pointless. In the last chapter, I offered accounts of two core features of verbal disputes, the linguistic confusion that gives rise to them and the lack of actual disagreement. Moreover, I argued that even though some disputes in philosophy might well display these core features, this does not automatically warrant a belittling attitude. Typically, verbal disputes in philosophy are not pointless in the same way as the obvious non-philosophical examples. Something important is at issue, namely, how to conceive of the subject matter of a more general debate to which the dispute belongs. My notion of the subject matter of a dispute draws on David Lewis's (1988) notion of the subject matter of a statement.

The focus of this chapter is how to resolve verbal disputes. The diagnosis of a dispute as merely verbal has important methodological consequences. The appropriate treatment for such pointless disputes is to smooth them out and focus on the actual, substantive issues (if any) that remain. David Chalmers (2011, 526–534) has recently suggested a "method of elimination" to do just this. However, as I will argue, this method does not suffice to resolve vital verbal disputes because it neglects the more general

problem of how to conceive of the subject matter that this dispute shares with a more general debate. The appropriate treatment for vital verbal disputes is not elimination, but explication, the broadly Carnapian method to revise terms developed in earlier chapters. This method helps settle the subject matter of the more general debate. My considerations in support of this conclusion will also shed light on what considerations are involved in settling the subject matter of a debate that make this issue vital.

The last section will be an addendum that deals with a last objection to the methodological approach defended in this inquiry. Thus, if we adopt the views of a Carnapian revisionist, disputes that are clearly substantive come out as merely verbal.

The results of this chapter will refine and reinforce the view developed and defended in earlier chapters. To revise terms in the light of our aims is a promising way to settle the subject matter of a debate and adapt our terminology accordingly. Moreover, this chapter sheds some light on the substantive issues that are involved.

5.1 The Shortcomings of Chalmers's Method of Elimination

In this section, I will discuss Chalmers's (2011) method of elimination to deal with verbal disputes and identify some shortcomings. The most important shortcoming for this inquiry is that it does not suffice to resolve vital verbal disputes, that is, verbal disputes as they typically occur in philosophy.

In the previous chapter, I have suggested that the linguistic confusion that gives rise to a verbal dispute about a statement S consists of parties meaning different things by uttering the same expression E in S (utterer's meaning). This invites the suggestion that in order to resolve a potentially verbal dispute, parties simply need to explain what they meant by uttering S and not S respectively. If Muriel told Hanna that what she meant was that John has bought one of those devices that can be used to project films onto a wall, their dispute would be resolved. If Peter told Paul that what he meant was that most supervision meetings take place every other week, the dispute would be resolved. Unfortunately, many cases, most notably in philosophy, are not that simple. Even if we grant the controversial assumption (see Ch. 4) that speakers do have (tacit) beliefs about the meaning of the utterances they make, it seems plausible that speakers cannot always explicitly explain the meaning of the utterances they make in other words (see Chalmers 2011, 526; Jenkins forthcoming, 8).

Chalmers (2011, 526–530) has recently proposed a method that avoids this problem: the method of elimination.[53] Elimination can be used to diagnose a dispute as wholly or partly verbal and, at the same time, treat the linguistic confusion that gives rise to it. The key idea is to eliminate the expression that is suspected to be responsible for the verbal dispute and see whether any substantive issue remains to be discussed. This method avoids the problems with the initial suggestion because parties need not spell out what they mean by

[53] The rough idea can also be found in Sidelle (2007, 89).

their utterance. It suffices that they state aspects of their view on the issue at hand without using the potentially problematic expression E. More precisely, the aim is to find a statement S' that parties actually disagree on such that S' does not contain E and the dispute over S' is part of the dispute over S. If there is no such S', the dispute is wholly verbal and can be put to an end. If there is such an S', the dispute is only partly verbal. Parties can now focus on the issue they actually disagree on; the dispute is at least clarified.

It is crucial that the dispute over S' is part of the dispute over S. Only actual disagreement that is directly relevant to the dispute over S counts against the dispute over S being wholly verbal. To specify the relevant sense of "part of" is a difficult matter. Chalmers (2011, 528) offers instead a helpful counterfactual gloss (with the pertinent reservations regarding counterfactual glosses): A dispute over a sentence S' is part of a dispute over a sentence S when (i) if parties were to agree that S' is true, they would, if they are reasonable, agree that S is true, and (ii) if parties were to agree that S' is false, they would, if they are reasonable, agree that S is false.

I will criticise Chalmers's method of elimination in two steps. The first step will be to identify several shortcomings of Chalmers's account of elimination. The second step will be to argue that even if we manage to fix these problems, the method does not suffice to handle vital verbal disputes, that is, verbal disputes as they are likely to present themselves in philosophy.

My example for the first step will be the beamer dispute introduced in the previous chapter. A summary of the main features is thus in order. Muriel

claims "John has bought a beamer" and Hanna objects that this is certainly not true. However, the dispute is verbal. Muriel, a German speaker, erroneously takes "beamer" to refer to video projectors whereas Hanna, an American, takes it correctly to apply to BMWs. This is a deferential case. Just because Muriel takes "beamer" to refer to video projectors does not change this expression's meaning in English. Thus, Muriel and Hanna are actually expressing conflicting views, namely, that John has bought a BMW and that he has not. More precisely, what their utterances mean on the relevant occasion (applied timeless utterance meaning in Grice's sense) conflicts; the propositions they intend to express cannot both be true. Nevertheless, Muriel and Hanna are not actually disagreeing because what they mean by uttering S and not S respectively does not conflict (utterer's meaning in Grice's sense). Moreover, either party holds a belief whose content is incompatible with what the other party means. Muriel means that John bought a video projector, which Hanna does not believe not to be the case. Hanna means that John did not buy a BMW, which Muriel does not believe to be the case.

The first shortcoming of Chalmers's method of elimination is easily fixed. We should drop condition (i) of the counterfactual gloss on the idea that the dispute over S' has to be part of the dispute over S. Thus, the dispute over S' is part of the dispute over S when (i) if parties were to agree that S' is true, they would, if they are reasonable, agree that S is true. This condition is too strong. There could be another sentence S" on whose truth-value parties actually disagree and the dispute over S" could also be part of the dispute over

S. In consequence, parties could agree that S' is true, but still have a reasonable disagreement on whether S is true because they disagree on whether S" is true. Take a partly verbal dispute in which Hanna utters S "John hasn't got a car". Suppose Muriel confuses "car" and "cat" and, by uttering "John does have a car", means that John has a cat. The dispute is only partly verbal because Muriel actually thinks that John has just bought a BMW. If Hanna restates her view and utters S' "John doesn't have his Toyota anymore", Muriel might agree with Hanna that S' is true. And yet it is perfectly rational for her to disagree that S is true even once she corrects her linguistic error because she thinks that John has just bought a BMW. Therefore, a dispute over a statement S' can be part of a dispute over S even if it does not meet condition (i).

The second shortcoming concerns deferential cases and it is more difficult to fix. Suppose the beamer dispute is only partly verbal because Hanna believes that John did not buy a video projector either. Suppose moreover that Muriel and Hanna have found some S' that they actually disagree on such that their dispute over S' is part of the dispute over S, e.g. "John bought one of those devices that allow you to project films onto a wall". It would be wrong to say, as the counterfactual gloss wants it, that if Muriel and Hanna were to agree that S' is true, they would, if reasonable, agree that S "John has bought a beamer" is true. "Beamer" just does not mean video projector in English, but BMW, and Muriel and Hanna do not believe that John has bought a BMW. Hence they should not agree that "John has bought a beamer" is true. We

might be able to fix this problem by speaking about the utterer's meaning of S, but I am not sure about how exactly this would work.

The third shortcoming is again easy to fix. Thus, we should exclude S' that are about the meaning of S or E in S; more precisely, the timeless utterance meaning in Grice's sense. An S' of this sort does not need to give an analysis of S. It could express some simple belief a party has about the meaning of S or E in S. Hanna might clarify her view by uttering S' "A 'beamer' is a kind of car". Muriel would disagree with her and their dispute about S' would be part of their dispute over S. However, this should not count towards the dispute over S being only partly verbal. Otherwise, too many disputes would be wholly verbal, namely, all disputes where the timeless utterance meaning is unclear in some sense, either because one party gets it wrong or because it is unclear to both parties and maybe in general. The beamer dispute would be only partly verbal on this view, no matter whether Muriel and Hanna actually disagree on whether John bought a BMW or a video projector.

Instead, we might want to allow statements S' of a different sort not mentioned by Chalmers, namely, statements S' such that S is part of S'. This seems to be a quite natural and straightforward thing for parties to do. What Muriel is quite possibly able to find is an S' such that S is part of S', e.g. "John has bought stuff for his home cinema". Admittedly, such statements as S' do not allow for a direct diagnosis of a dispute as wholly or partly verbal. However, it might be a helpful heuristics to clarify which subject matter each party takes to be at issue and whether they might be talking past one another.

Note that the account of the subject matter of a dispute developed in the previous chapter might afford a way to specify when a dispute over a statement S' is part of a dispute over S. Thus, we could say something along the following lines. The dispute over S' is part of the dispute over S when the subject matters of S and S' are related in a certain way. Namely, the smallest subject matter of S' has to be part of the smallest subject matter of S. This is the case when all worlds that are in the same cell of the partition invoked by S are in the same cell of the partition invoked by S' but not vice versa.[54]

Let me now turn to the second step of my criticism. Thus, even once we fix the noted shortcomings, the method of elimination does not suffice to fully resolve vital verbal disputes, that is, verbal disputes as they are likely to occur in philosophy.

The claim established in the last chapter is that vital verbal disputes share the core features of merely verbal disputes and they can be wholly verbal. Nevertheless, they are not pointless in the same way because a vital issue is involved. The basic idea is that it is not only unclear which subject matter parties to the dispute at issue intend to invoke. Rather, the subject matter of a more general debate of which this dispute is an instance is unclear. The reason is that the linguistic confusion that gives rise to a vital verbal dispute is of a particular sort. It is not a simple ambiguity or an obvious linguistic error that leads to an unclarity over which subject matter each party invokes in the

[54] On the issue of when one subject matter is part of or included in another, see also Lewis 1988, sec. IX; Yablo 2012, lecture 1.

particular dispute at issue. The utterance meaning of an expression E, for example "terrorism", in the disputed statement S, for example "The victims of terrorism are always non-combatants", is unclear such that the subject matter of every dispute that involves this expression is unclear. Given the unclear meaning of "terrorism", it is unclear which aspects of reality the truth-value of statements that contain this expression supervenes on. Accordingly, there is a range of partitions corresponding to the range of possible clarifications of the utterance meaning of "terrorism" that could be at issue.

As noted earlier, this problem is not resolved if every utterer makes their utterer's meaning explicit like philosopher A and B, that is, if they make explicit what subject matter they intend to invoke on a particular occasion. This could lead to frequent changes in subject matter such that philosophers appear to address the same subject matter, but are actually invoking different ones using the same utterance-types.

This account of vital verbal disputes makes obvious why the method of elimination does not suffice to resolve them. The core of elimination is to get rid of the problematic expression for the context of the dispute and thus avoid any unclarity besetting it. This is a move in a specific interchange between two parties, but not a move in the more general debate of which this verbal dispute, if vital, is a part. Hence, it remains unclear in what terms this debate should be continued and thus the subject matters of this debate remain unclear. As a result, the potential for vital verbal disputes that are part of this general debate remains high.

5.2 The Issue That Renders a Verbal Dispute Vital

The appropriate method to resolve vital verbal disputes depends on our understanding of the unclarity involved. At least two questions regarding the unclear expression could be at issue. One question is what the expression does actually mean and, correspondingly, what the subject matters at issue actually are. The other question is what the expression ought to mean and, correspondingly, what subject matters the dispute ought to target. In this section, I will argue that it is the second question that renders a verbal dispute vital.

Note that most of those who write about verbal disputes concede that words sometimes matter (Chalmers 2011, 516–517; Sidelle 2007, 101; Sider 2011, 73; Sundell 2011, 12–13). Three cases have been pointed out. Firstly, words matter when they are the explicit focus of a debate; for example, in philosophy of language (Chalmers 2011, 516). Secondly, it has been highlighted that there is sometimes an important question about what words ought to mean (Chalmers 2011, 542; Sidelle 2007, 93; Sundell 2011, 12–13). Thirdly, it has been suggested that words matter when they play a role in practical contexts such that whether or not we use a particular word can make an important practical difference (Chalmers 2011, 516–517; Sidelle 2007, 101). What I will suggest is that, in vital verbal disputes, words matter in the sense of the cases two and three.

Let me first turn to the alternative suggestion that the unclarity involved in a vital verbal dispute is what the unclear expression actually means

and, hence, what subject matters are actually at issue. On this view, when parties to such a dispute make their utterer's meaning explicit (what they mean by uttering E) like philosopher A and B, it remains to be settled whether any of the utterer's meanings in play reflect the actual timeless utterance meaning of the expression. It is a matter of current controversy what the appropriate method is to resolve such a problem. Some suggest doing conceptual analysis; others recommend empirical research on how people are inclined to apply expressions when presented with cases. There are further options. However, it does not matter for my argument which option we choose.

Note that this first view fits well with the idea that verbal disputes in philosophy are often vital. After all, the actual meaning of many core philosophical terms appears to be contested. Take again the fictitious verbal dispute between philosophers A and B about the statement S "The victims of terrorism are always non-combatants". Recall that philosopher A who utters "S" uses "terrorism" explicitly to refer to violence against non-combatants for political purposes; for the sake of clarity, I'll use the label "terrorism$_A$". Philosopher B who utters "not S" uses "terrorism" to refer to violence against some with the intent to spread fear in a wider community for political purposes; henceforth labelled "terrorism$_B$". I have construed the dispute such that it comes out as wholly verbal on my account. Thus, A and B do not have beliefs that conflict with what the other one meant by uttering S and not S respectively. B does not believe that the victims of terrorism$_A$ are not always

non-combatants and A does not believe that victims of terrorism$_B$ are always non-combatants.

One might object that this dispute comes out as only party verbal when applying Chalmers's method of elimination. However, this is not actually the case if we take a refinement into account that I have not mentioned thus far. When applying the method of elimination to the dispute between A and B and even if we make the amendments that I have suggested, we are likely to find some S' that fulfils the relevant conditions. A and B might well actually disagree on S' "The victims of 9/11 are all non-combatants". Moreover, the dispute over S' would plausibly be part of the dispute over S. If A and B were to agree that S' is false, they were to agree that S "The victims of terrorism are always non-combatants" is false.[55] This suggests that the method of elimination misdiagnoses this dispute as merely verbal.

However, this is not actually the case. Chalmers (2011, 528) mentions this sort of case and refines his method of elimination accordingly. He (2011, 528) proposes that in such a case the dispute over S' would not count against the dispute over S being wholly verbal because the relation between these disputes is "metalinguistically mediated". Roughly, the dispute over S' does not impact directly on the dispute over S, but mediated via its impact on how A and B decide to use the term "terrorism". If A and B were to agree that S' is

[55] Admittedly, it could also be vice versa such that the dispute over S is part of the dispute over S'. In this case, if A and B were to agree that S "The victims of 9/11 are all non-combatants" is false, they were to agree that S' "The victims of terrorism are always non-combatants" is false. For my argument, it only matters that we can construe the dispute such that the dispute over S' is part of the dispute over S.

false, that is, that the victims of 9/11 are not all non-combatants, they would not use "terrorism" in the sense of terrorism$_A$ and therefore agree that S is false, that is, that the victims of terrorism are not always non-combatants. S' are only relevant for the diagnosis of a dispute as merely verbal if the disputes over S and S' are not linguistically mediated in this sense.

The question of primary concern in this section is what issue renders a wholly verbal dispute like the one between A and B vital. More precisely, in what sense is the expression "terrorism" unclear such that the subject matter of terrorism is in general unclear. The first view, which I aim to reject, is that the actual meaning of "terrorism" is unclear and hence the subject matter that is actually at issue in our debates about terrorism. To be clear, I grant that this unclarity besets the expression "terrorism" and our debates about terrorism. However, I disagree that this is the issue that renders the dispute over S vital and that needs to be resolved.

Suppose that we attempt to resolve this issue by settling what "terrorism" actually means. For the sake of argument, let us assume that we arrive at the conclusion that "terrorism" actually means terrorism$_A$. In consequence, A and B, if rational, would agree that S is true. However, this would not settle a number of important issues. Is terrorism$_A$ actually the most salient subject matter to address? Does it draw the most salient distinctions? Is terrorism$_B$ a more salient or an equally salient subject matter? Is terrorism$_A$ a precise and refined enough subject matter? Is it distorted by prejudice? In short, we are left with the normative question of what "terrorism" ought to

mean and what subject matter we ought to address in the debate about terrorism. Note that the problem is not so much what we ought to attach this particular label to and what subject matter should be discussed under this heading. Rather, the question is what we should be able to refer to in our shared language independently of which label we use, what subject matters we should be able to raise in our shared language.

Admittedly, some might object that such normative questions about language are obsolete. Our actual language does already draw the most salient distinctions; the only problem is our insufficient and flawed understanding of what we refer to. However, as argued in Chapter 1, even someone like Theodor Sider (2011), who would defend such a view as regards some terms, would grant the usefulness to ask normative questions about some terms. Moreover, as I have argued in Chapter 2, it is advisable to ask normative questions if we are not certain that the actual meaning of an expression is already perfect. Because if it is, the method to revise terms that I advocate would likely reveal its actual meaning rather than pointing us towards a less suitable alternative.

As a result, the issue that renders verbal disputes vital and that deserves consideration is the normative issue of what the unclear expression involved ought to mean and precisely what subject matter(s) we ought to address in our debate about terrorism.

Notably, I am not claiming that the question of what "terrorism" actually means in English could not be an important question in certain

contexts; for example, where we are concerned with ordinary language and how it distorts the debate about terrorism. The point is that it is not the question that renders a verbal dispute vital and that needs to be resolved in order to fully resolve the verbal disputes.

5.3 Explicating Away Vital Verbal Disputes

The aim of this section is to argue that the appropriate method to resolve vital verbal disputes is the method to revise terms that I have developed and defended in previous chapters, an heir to Carnap's method of explication.[56] This will also afford a deeper understanding of the vital issues involved in these verbal disputes and what depends on them.

The conclusion so far is that elimination is a remedy for the linguistic confusion in the specific dispute between philosopher A and B, but it is not a move in the more general debate about terrorism to which this dispute belongs. More specifically, what remains to be settled is in what terms this debate should be carried out and, accordingly, how we should conceive of its subject matter. The method of explication or terminological revision that I have developed and defended in previous chapters is designed to answer such normative questions about terms and thereby settle the subject matter of debates to which they are central. Therefore, it is the appropriate method to resolve vital verbal disputes.

[56] This proposal is, in fact, sympathetic to Chalmers's approach; in his "Carnapian conclusion" (2011, 564), he points out that his pragmatism about conceptual frameworks is Carnapian and explicitly mentions Carnap's method of explication.

Recall that explication, as I conceive of it, serves to improve a pre-theoretic term guided by relevant theoretical (and sometimes practical) aims. One useful way to identify relevant aims (see Ch. 1) is to specify the kind of theoretical questions or issues we hope to address using the term in question. In order to avoid unmotivated subject change and exclude outlandish explications (see Chs. 1, 3), we should not use the term we are explicating in our specification. An aim that could guide a philosophical explication of the term "terrorism" could be to assess whether there is a morally distinctive category in the vicinity of cases of politically motivated violence such as 9/11 (see Ch. 3). Such a theoretical aim helps identify desirable improvements. A core improvement is to decide which distinctions a term should track given our aims and adjust its conditions of application to actual and hypothetical cases accordingly. Other common improvements are to render the term more precise by settling unclear cases of application and to specify the term in a way that promotes simplicity of the overall theory (see Ch. 1).

I have also argued (Chs. 1, 2) that explicating a term either precisifies the subject matter of a debate or, where necessary, adjusts it to our (negotiable) aims. On this basis, we can specify the more general challenge underlying a vital verbal dispute: We need to settle what the most salient referents are given the questions that we hope to answer and, accordingly, what subject matters we need to raise in the context of our broader interests.

If this is on the right track, parties to the fictitious dispute about terrorism should ask how to best explicate the term "terrorism" and whether

account A or B might provide good explications. There are a number of possible outcomes depending on a number of issues philosophers A and B would need to address. Examining these issues in more detail will disclose what exactly is at issue in a vital verbal dispute and what depends on it. I will argue that the choice of a terminology and thus of a subject matter has epistemic, ethical and practical aspects.[57] The relevant issues to be considered fall into two groups. One group comprises issues that arise for every explication and impact on it, but they are less directly terminological in character; these should be familiar from discussions in previous chapters. Issues in the other group concern terminology more directly, namely, the choice of a label; they arise for every explication as well, but I have not addressed them so far.

The first group comprises two closely related issues, namely, what aim the term in question should serve and, accordingly, what distinctions it should trace. As regards the term "terrorism", philosophers largely agree that the term should pick out, if possible, a morally salient form of politically motivated violence in the vicinity of such cases as 9/11 (see Ch. 3). In other cases, the aim is more controversial. In the debate about human rights, Rawls and others hope to use the notion of a human right to settle the boundaries of

[57] This might reveal another difference to Carnap's form of explication. Carnap is often read as suggesting that explication is a purely pragmatic matter concerning what is most convenient and useful, whereas I submit that epistemic and ethical considerations matter as well. This reading of Carnap is a starting point for one of Quine's (1951b) notorious criticisms, namely, the one that concerns the distinction between choosing a language and choosing a theory. My considerations suggest this criticism. However, I do not want to take a stance on how to best interpret Carnap (or Quine).

international toleration; others pursue aims that are closer to the historical idea of a right that every human being has simply by virtue of being human (see Ch. 1). Moreover, epistemology has fairly recently rediscovered the significance of asking why we value knowledge (see Pritchard and Turri 2012) and thus a theoretical aim that could guide an explication of "knowledge".

The impacts of this issue on our terminology and the subject matters it invokes is particularly pronounced if, as I have argued in ch 1, different theoretical aims can require tracing different distinctions in the vicinity of how a pre-theoretic term is used. Thus, aims in legal theory might prompt a different explication of the term "terrorism" than moral concerns. If this should turn out to be the case, we would need to split the term. Within moral theory, the aim is fairly uncontroversial (see Ch. 3). Moreover, in the actual debate about terrorism, accounts that are not unlike A and B are discussed as competing accounts of terrorism (see Ch. 3). The main disagreement is on what the morally salient distinctions are in the vicinity of what we ordinarily apply the term "terrorism" to and whether there actually is a referent that differs in morally salient ways from other forms of political violence. These are vital issues for moral theory that impact on our choice of terminology and subject matter.

The second group of vital issues that are involved in an explication are more overtly terminological; they concern the choice of a label. By "label", I mean the sequence of sounds or letters that carry the meaning. I have not addressed these issues so far; hence, what follows will also afford some

refinements of my account of explication. When we eliminate the term "terrorism" in order to resolve the verbal dispute between philosopher A and B, we also dispose of the label.[58] By contrast, an explication of the term "terrorism" forces us to choose a label. In some cases, we keep the initial label and only revise a term's meaning. However, sometimes adjustments are called for. An obvious case is where we split a term because we discover that there is more than one interesting referent in the vicinity. Thus, the question is not so much what to attach the initial labels to. Rather, the question is what we need labels for in our terminology and which labels. Some might think that this is merely a problem of coordination; it does not matter much which label we choose so long as we agree on something. However, I am inclined to think that the choice of labels ideally involves epistemic, pragmatic and ethical considerations.[59]

The first consideration is what we need labels for in our shared language. How we answer this question impacts on what subject matters can easily be raised and made progress on. This has epistemic and ethical relevance.[60] A nice illustration of what I have in mind is Orwell's Newspeak in his *1984*. Newspeak is an impoverished version of English that does not

[58] Admittedly, Chalmers (2011, 532) proposes a convenient interim solution, the "subscript gambit". I have actually been using it above. Thus, we do not simply eliminate the term "terrorism", but introduce replacement terms such as "terrorism$_A$" and "terrorism$_B$" that are stipulated to refer to what A and B use "terrorism" to refer to respectively. However, this is hardly a long-term solution for moral theory and debates about political violence in general.

[59] The idea that what label we choose matters is somewhat inspired by Peirce's idea of an "ethics of terminology" (see also Chalmers 2011, 542). However, it is not entirely clear what Peirce takes the ethics of terminology to be. For some illuminating considerations, see Haack (2009).

[60] Fricker's ([2007] 2010) notion of "hermeneutical injustice" captures a problem that can arise if this issue is neglected or decided in an epistemically and ethically problematic way.

contain labels for such things as freedom or resistance, promoted by the totalitarian state in order to prevent consideration and discussion of contrary political views. This example discloses the difference of this consideration to issues in the first group. The first group of issues concerns what interesting distinctions there are to be drawn. The consideration at issue here is which of those distinctions we want to track with our terminology.

This first consideration has two aspects. Firstly, what distinctions our terminology traces has an impact on what subject matters are easily raised, that is, what partitions are easily invoked. Take the current debate in philosophy about whether we need the label "race" (see also Ch. 2).[61] Eliminativists argue that we should eliminate the label entirely because its traditional extension is empty; there are no fundamental biological differences between the people that allegedly belong to different races. Retaining this label would perpetuate the misguided and discriminating idea that the term refers to something in the actual world. Others argue that we should keep the label and have it trace the distinctions that are actually there—e.g. social roles based on superficial traits such as skin colour—in order to be able to discuss problems due to the misguided idea of human races. Put in terms of subject matters, the argument of the latter group is that, without a convenient label, it will be much harder to raise such a subject matter as racism. The subject matter of racism is a partition of logical space into worlds that are exactly alike with respect to racism. What

[61] Haslanger (2006) provides a good overview of the different methodological approaches that have been proposed.

we mean by "racism" determines which distinctions are relevant for this partition and thus what it is for a statement to be about racism. Put differently, it settles what distinctions we treat as relevant for the evaluation of statements in a dispute. If we do not have a label ready to invoke a certain evaluative background for a dispute, we can describe it instead and thus create an ad hoc label. After eliminating the label "terrorism", we could have used such a label as "political violence against non-combatants for political purposes" in order to initiate a discussion about this form of political violence. However, this makes it much harder and less straightforward to invoke the subject matter, to make yourself understood by others and to convince them that the subject matter you are raising is worth their while.

Secondly, which distinctions our terminology traces fosters progress on certain subject matters. An explication is guided by theoretical or practical aims. Thus, an explication of "race" could be guided by the theoretical aim to examine moral issues concerning racism or the practical aim to reduce racism in different social contexts such as the job market. In the light of these issues, we decide which distinctions the term should trace. Moreover, different distinctions can be relevant for different issues. Hence, the resulting term is particularly useful to address certain issues, but not others that might be relevant in some context and for someone. As I have argued in Chapter 1, the aims that guide an explication also introduce a subject matter that we hope to address. Accordingly, we can say that what distinctions our terminology traces has an impact on what subject matters we can more easily make progress on.

Whether we can raise a subject matter easily and make progress on it easily has epistemic as well ethical relevance. It influences which issues we are more likely to gain knowledge on and whose concerns are more likely to be addressed.

The second consideration when choosing labels is which labels to choose. This consideration has practical, pragmatic as well as epistemic relevance. It has practical relevance because (see Chalmers 2011, 516–517; Sidelle 2007, 101) some labels, such as "terrorism", are intertwined with practices, and the choice of a certain label rather than another can then have important practical consequences. Even if there is no doubt that a patient's brain has stopped working, it is of great practical significance whether or not we use the label "dead"; such decisions as whether to discontinue life-support depend on it (this is in practice the case; the decision need not depend on the use of this label and could be made without invoking it).

It might be objected that these practical concerns are primarily relevant outside philosophy and hence do not support the idea that verbal disputes in philosophy are often vital. Even though philosophers often start with words that are commonly used, they often give them a more specific meaning in the context of their theories. These theoretical terms are not those that are intertwined with our practices. I have provided an answer to this objection in Chapter 3. Thus, philosophical terms might rarely be used as such in practical contexts. Nevertheless, it is well possible (and, as I am inclined to think, desirable) that philosophical considerations and terminology influence the

terminology used in the wider society. If this is the case, philosophers need to keep potential practical consequences in mind where they use labels that are used outside philosophy as well.

The second consideration has a pragmatic aspect in so far as there are more or less convenient labels. It is, for example, preferable to have short labels rather than long-winded descriptions for things that we often refer to. It would be quite inconvenient to use a label like "violence against non-combatants for political purposes" in a theory that focuses on this form of political violence.

There is also an epistemic aspect because labels are not only intertwined with practices, but also with theoretical disputes. If we simply eliminate a label that is central to such a dispute (for example, the label "terrorism") the connection with these disputes might be unclear and we might even appear to have dropped the subject matter altogether.

To sum up, the vital issue involved in vital verbal disputes is what the core terms of a more general debate should refer to and, accordingly, how we should conceive of a core subject matter of that debate. I have argued that this is a task for explication, the method to revise terms in the light of our theoretical or practical aims developed and defended in previous sections. Moreover, I have attempted to show that the task of explicating terms involves pragmatic, epistemic and ethical considerations. What depends on it are such things as what subject matters we can easily raise and make progress on and whose interests are catered for.

Importantly, parties to a vital verbal dispute might not be in a position to resolve the vital issue involved. This is typically difficult, and others who are involved in the more general debate have a say as well. Moreover, parties might not even be in a position to contribute to a resolution. Someone who is involved in composing a law that employs the term "biodiversity" is in a better position to influence the development of this term than a random person who happens to worry about biodiversity. Furthermore, the more general debate might require more or less clarity on the issue at hand. Finally, parties can care more or less about the more general debate and its clarity. However, philosophers are likely to be in a good position to contribute to the resolution of their vital verbal disputes. They typically care about the clarity of their debates and are in a position to propose terminological improvements.

5.4 Addendum: Turning Substantive into Merely Verbal Disputes

The discussion in this chapter allows me now to respond to a last objection to the methodological approach defended in this inquiry. Thus, if we accept the views of a Carnapian revisionist, disputes that are clearly substantive come out as merely verbal (e.g. Cohen MS, 1; Jackson [1998] 2008, 31; Sider 2011, 74–75; Sundell 2011, 14–15; Weatherson 2003, 13). In the following, I will first offer what I take to be a particularly convincing way to spell out the criticism based on Sider's account of mere verbalness. I will then develop a response based on considerations in this chapter.

As discussed in the last chapter, Sider's (2011, Ch. 4) account of mere verbalness—or, as he calls it, non-substantivity—explains the linguistic confusion that gives rise to a verbal dispute in terms of charitable interpretations.

Recall that charitable interpretations are interpretations that render a statement true. In order to exclude random "crazy" interpretations, we need to restrict admissible charitable interpretations. One restriction is typically that an interpretation should accord with the use (suitably understood) of the problematic term by a party or their linguistic community. Sider claims that this does not suffice and that the world, which he argues to be objectively structured, is another limiting factor. Thus, different charitable interpretations of a term that accord with its use in a linguistic community—"meaning candidates" as Sider calls them—are only admissible if none of them is more joint carving than the others. The motivating idea is that objective joints in nature function as reference magnets such that they outweigh errors, variations and indeterminacies in use. Even if the use of two speakers differs to some extent, the term has the same referent provided that there is only one joint carving referent in the vicinity. As a result, a dispute between these speakers might seem to be merely verbal, but it is not because they are not actually referring to different things with the same expression.

This leads Sider (2011, 49) to the following account of non-substantivity[62] (I simplify somewhat): A dispute over a statement S is non-substantive if and only if, for at least one expression E in S, there are different candidate meanings such that S comes out true on some candidate and false on some other, and none of the candidates is more joint carving than the others.

Note two crucial differences between this account and my view developed in the previous chapter. Firstly, I have rejected accounts in terms of charitable interpretations. Hence, in my view, a dispute can be merely verbal even if both parties are making false claims "in their own language". Sider's account excludes this possibility. The core idea of his account is that in a merely verbal dispute, both parties say the truth when charitably interpreted.

Secondly, in my view, what matters is utterer's meaning rather than utterance meaning in a Gricean sense. Hence, even if what the uttered statements mean in a shared language conflicts, the dispute might still be verbal given that what parties mean by their utterances does not conflict with the other parties' beliefs. On Sider's account, charitable interpretations play a role and hence to some extent what parties mean by their utterances. However, admissible charitable interpretations and hence what speakers can mean by their utterances are strictly limited, namely, by the objective structure of the world. In consequence, this account does not allow for the possibility that what speakers mean by an utterance about objective features of the world

[62] Sider's account of non-substantivity is designed to also cover questions etc., but only disputes matter for my purpose.

diverges from what this utterance means in a shared language; for example, because they misunderstand the meaning of a term. Or, at any rate, this does not affect the status of the dispute, presumably because the content of parties' beliefs is taken to depend on the content of their statements and not vice versa like on the Gricean account.

Take the following notorious case in order to illustrate the difference between the two accounts as well as the criticism that I hope to address in this section. In the early nineteenth century, "fish" was still commonly applied to whales. A dispute ensued over the statement "Whales are fish" when some people started to appeal to the emerging scientific taxonomy.[63]

This dispute is clearly substantive on Sider's account. I will call those who applied "fish" to whales traditionalists and those who used the new scientific taxonomy progressivists. Given how traditionalists and progressivists use "fish", there are two meaning candidates for the expression "fish" in the disputed claim such that one (fish including whales) renders the disputed claim true and the other one (fish excluding whales) renders it false. However, one of these candidates is more joint carving, namely, the one on which the claim comes out false. Therefore, in Sider's view, we cannot charitably interpret traditionalists as referring to a different set of animals. They are referring to the very same set as progressivists and simply make more errors when they use the term due to a lack of relevant scientific knowledge. The much greater eligibility

[63] In his *Trying Leviathan*, the historian of science D. Graham Burnett (2007) describes an infamous trial that took place in Manhattan in 1818. At that time, there was a tax on fish oil and a jury had to determine whether a whale was a fish in order to determine whether whale oil was subject to taxes. A sensational pubic debate ensued.

of this referent outweighs the differences in use and, in particular, traditionalists' errors.[64] As a result, the dispute over "Whales are fish" was not verbal, but substantive. Moreover, progressivists were right and traditionalists wrong about this empirical matter. This is an intuitively appealing diagnosis. Whether whales are fish clearly seems to be an empirical matter. How could it fail to be substantive?

However, the views of a Carnapian revisionist seem to render this dispute merely verbal. This revisionist finds it likely that the term "fish" does not have the same referent when used by traditionalists and progressivists. The term progressivists use was revised for scientific purposes upon the discovery that the class of "fish" share much more biologically salient features if we exclude whales. Moreover, the anti-realism often ascribed to Carnap (see Eklund 2013) suggests that this revisionist rejects the idea of joints in nature. She maintains that revisions are guided by pragmatic considerations about usefulness alone. If these revisionist assumptions are true, the dispute between the ancients and us classifies as verbal on my account as well as on Sider's.

On Sider's account, it is verbal because, if the revisionist is right, there really are two meaning candidates involved. Each renders one party's statement true and none is more joint carving than the other. The contents of the uttered statements do not conflict. Traditionalists claim that whales belong to the class

[64] It is important that the traditionalists' and the progressivists' use of "fish" is similar enough such that the same more joint carving referent is in the vicinity and is thus a meaning candidate for the term "fish" as used by traditionalists and progressivists. This allows the Siderian to argue that it is, in fact, the referent of the term for both parties such that their dispute is substantive.

of all animals that have fins and live in the water. Progressivists insist that whales do not belong to the class of animals that science classifies as "fish". On my account, the dispute is verbal because each party plausibly does not have beliefs that conflict with what the other party means by uttering the disputed statement. Thus, progressivists did not believe that whales do not belong to the class of animals with fins that live in the water and traditionalists did not believe that whales have the features scientific theories ascribe to fish; they plausibly did not know or care what scientific theories said about fish.

As a result, if we adopt the views of the Carnapian revisionist, whether fish are whales depends on which terminology we find more convenient to adopt. Matters of truth and facts appear as mere matters of stipulation.

The revisionist can answer this criticism in two ways, depending on what metaphysical and semantic assumptions she adopts. One option is to accept Sider's assumption that the world has a certain objective structure. I have shown in Chapter 1 that revisionism is compatible with Sider's metaphysical assumptions. Such a revisionist, call her the Siderian revisionist, rejects the accusation that the revisionist does not accept joints in nature and that revisions are only guided by pragmatic considerations. If reference magnetism turns out to be true, revisions of such terms as "fish" are not actually terminological revisions; we only revise our understanding of its meaning as we gain more knowledge of the biological nature of its referent. Since the meaning does not change in this case, the Siderian revisionist urges

that the dispute over "Whales are fish" does not classify as verbal on Sider's account.

If reference magnetism turns out to be false, a possibility Sider (2011, 74) acknowledges, the revision of "fish" based on scientific findings is an instance of terminological revision that changes the referent. Whereas whales are in the extension of "fish" as used by traditionalists, they have been excluded from the extension by scientists due to empirical findings suggesting that this would render the term much more useful for science. This revision, the Siderian revisionist highlights, has rendered the term more joint carving.

It is not entirely clear what we should say about the status of this dispute because even though one candidate meaning is more joint carving, there are nevertheless two meanings involved; this is a scenario Sider's account does not envisage. If we decide to classify it as verbal because there are two meanings involved and each party's statement comes out true on one of them, the Siderian revisionist could insist that the dispute is not merely verbal. It is vital verbal in the sense that there is an important question about how to conceive of the subject matter of biology where animals living in the water are concerned. Moreover, progressivists are in a stronger position because they have identified the more joint carving way to conceive of the subject matter and adapted the term accordingly. Hence, even though what traditionalists say might be true given their terminology and conception of the subject matter of fish, progressivists better capture the objective structure of the world and address a more joint carving subject matter.

As regards terms where joint-carvingness is not available even on Sider's view, such as "beautiful" (2011, 57), the Siderian revisionist points out that revisions do not pose a problem. On Sider's account, disputes involving these terms are not substantive anyway.

I am inclined towards a more pragmatic revisionism that needs to be defended in a different way. The more pragmatic revisionist thinks that even if the world is objectively structured on a fundamental level, there is much room for choice on less fundamental levels on where to draw terminological boundaries depending on our theoretical (and sometimes practical) interests. Moreover, she rejects reference magnetism. The world can play a role in determining reference, but only if we decide that this is the case, for example, by deciding that "fish" refers to whatever biologically interesting class there is in the vicinity of the class of animals that live in the water and have fins.[65] Terminological revisions, in this view, are mainly actual revisions where we adjust the meaning of our terms to our theoretical (or practical) aims.

Sider's account of mere verbalness is not acceptable for the pragmatic revisionist because it is based on assumptions she rejects. By contrast, my view of verbal disputes fits well with pragmatic revisionism. As regards the dispute between traditionalists and progressivists, it is not entirely clear whether it classifies as verbal or not. In my view, this depends on what traditionalists and progressivists meant by uttering "Whales are fish" (utterer's meaning). Suppose

[65] In his recent criticism of reference magnetism, Schwarz (forthcoming, sec. 7) calls this "illusions of magnetism".

traditionalists used "fish" to refer to a biologically interesting class of animals that typically live in the water and have fins. On this assumption, they misapplied the term to whales given their own standards due to a lack of relevant empirical knowledge. What they meant by "Whales are fish" is then that whales belong to the biologically interesting class of animals that typically live in the water and have fins. This would clearly conflict with what progressivists believed and the dispute would not be verbal; there would be actual disagreement.

Alternatively, traditionalists might have used "fish" to refer to the class of animals that live in the water, have fins and are profitable goods. On this assumption, what they meant by "Whales are fish" is presumably that whales belong to the class of animals that live in the water, have fins and are profitable goods. This does not conflict with what progressivists believed, namely, that whales do not share certain newly discovered features with other animals that live in the water and have fins. Moreover, traditionalists might not have held any beliefs that conflicted with what progressivists meant by uttering "Whales are fish", namely, that whales do not belong to the class of fish as defined by science. Hence, the dispute comes out as verbal. However, the dispute is plausibly a vital one and hence not pointless.

The dispute is a vital verbal dispute because "fish" was part of an ongoing legal and a scientific debate. Confusion over it affected these ongoing debates and not only one particular dispute between two parties on a given occasion. The question at issue was which distinctions the term "fish" at the

core of these debates should trace given scientific and legal purposes and, accordingly, how to delineate the subject matter of these debates. Answering this question involves substantive issues such as whether the scientifically salient distinctions are also legally salient.

On this interpretation of the dispute between progressivists and traditionalists, it would not have been rational for progressivists to tell traditionalists that they were wrong. However, it would have been rational to urge that they use the term "fish" in a way that cuts across scientifically salient distinctions. The rational reaction for traditionalists would have been to consider whether they had respectable—for example, legal or moral—interests that supported the need for a different terminology. In that case, they could, for example, have settled on splitting the term into "biological fish" and "legal fish" or on describing the relevant legal category not as "fish", but as "fish plus whales".

The upshot is that if we adopt the views of the pragmatic revisionist, some disputes come out as verbal that might appear to be substantive. However, they do not come out as merely verbal, but as vital verbal disputes. As such, they share the structure of merely verbal disputes, but they do not share their pointlessness; substantive issues are involved.

Conclusion

This chapter is complementary to the last one. The core concerns in both chapters were claims to the effect that a certain dispute in philosophy—about

the ontology of material objects, about free will or the semantic/pragmatic distinction—are merely verbal and hence pointless.

In the previous chapter, I have offered accounts of two core features of verbal disputes, the linguistic confusion that gives rise to them and the lack of actual disagreement, and I have argued that disputes in philosophy that have these features are likely to be what I call vital verbal disputes. The vital issues involved concern a more general debate of which the verbal dispute in question is a part, namely, what a core term—such as "terrorism" or "knowledge"—should refer to and, accordingly, how we should conceive of a core subject matter of that dispute—such as the subject matter of terrorism or knowledge.

In this chapter, I have addressed the methodological challenge posed by verbal disputes. If a dispute is merely verbal, the appropriate treatment seems to be to straighten it out and focus on the substantive issues, if any, that remain. Chalmers has recently suggested a method to do so—the method of elimination. I have identified several shortcomings of this method. Moreover, I have argued that, even once these are fixed, the method is ill-suited to resolve vital verbal disputes because it neglects the vital issue involved that concerns a more general debate. My proposal was that the method to revise terms that I have developed and defended in previous chapters, an heir to Carnap's method of explication, is the appropriate method to resolve vital verbal disputes. More specifically, it is not only more suitable than elimination, but also more appropriate than conceptual analysis or empirical research on what a term

actually means. A discussion of considerations that influence terminological revision as I conceive of it has also provided a deeper understanding of what depends on it. As a side product, these considerations have led to a refinement of the account of terminological revision developed thus far, namely, as regards the choice of a label. When revising terms, the choice of a label—whether we keep the initial label, modify it or choose a new one altogether—requires practical, pragmatic and ethical considerations.

The last section was an addendum in which I have addressed a final criticism against my methodological recommendation in this inquiry, namely, that if we adopt the views of a Carnapian revisionist, disputes that are clearly substantive come out as merely verbal. I have argued that the disputes that come out as verbal rather than substantive come out as vital verbal disputes. These share the structure of merely verbal disputes, but they do not share their pointlessness; substantive issues are involved.

The considerations in this chapter reinforce the view defended in earlier chapters. Attention to words is required in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, in a number of philosophically important cases including vital verbal disputes, to examine the current meaning of terms is not the best way to do so. It is more fruitful to revise current terminology in light of our aims and findings and thus determine the subject matter we ought to focus on. As the considerations in this chapter show, this endeavour involves epistemic, ethical as well as pragmatic considerations.

Final Words

How much do words matter in philosophy? Is it necessary to examine what the terms "knowledge" or "terrorism" really mean in order to settle the subject matter of a debate about knowledge or an inquiry into terrorism? I have examined how this question arises in a number of contexts such as the location problem whose resolution, according to Frank Jackson, requires conceptual analysis; contested evaluative terms like "terrorism" that hinder normative debates; and merely verbal disputes in which parties talk past each other.

Approaches to these issues fall roughly into two camps. Some acknowledge the need to examine the actual meaning of terms in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry, either by doing conceptual analysis or using empirical methods. Others argue that studying the phenomena at issue rather than the meaning of terms settles the subject matter; analysing the meaning of terms is therefore unnecessary.

I have argued that an updated version of Carnap's method of explication can be a promising method to settle the subject matter of inquiry. On this approach, we revise pre-theoretic terms guided by our aims. In the contexts considered, this approach is more promising than extant alternatives. The approach has considerable advantages over traditional as well as more recent forms of conceptual analysis. Intuitions play only a very modest role. In consequence, my approach avoids influential objections to conceptual analysis due to its heavy reliance on intuitions. Moreover, it is less vulnerable to

criticism due to counterexamples and it does not make our theories hostage to pre-theoretic language. Finally, it promotes considerations on important terminological matters that are underrated by opponents of conceptual analysis.

The upshot is that it does not matter much what the core terms of philosophical inquiry mean in ordinary or pre-theoretic language. However, it matters what they ought to mean given our aims and, accordingly, how we ought to delineate the subject matter of a debate or theory. How we answer this question is of epistemic, ethical and pragmatic significance.

The account of terminological revision that I have developed is an heir of Carnap's method of explication, updated in order to accommodate recent themes and challenges. In particular, it is not committed to the controversial semantic assumption that terms have intensions or the metaphysical anti-realism often ascribed to Carnap. However, I retain Carnap's pragmatism. How we ought to delineate a subject matter and design our terminology depends on our aims. Notably, I part company with Carnap where linguistic tolerance is concerned. I hold that there are important ethical and epistemic restrictions on what aims are respectable and hence on the freedom to choose a language. I also agree with Carnap's naturalism regarding explication. Explication or terminological revision is commonly used in the sciences; to promote its use in philosophy is to promote a certain continuity with the sciences.

Another important influence for my inquiry was David Lewis's account of the subject matter of a statement. It is the most promising of the few accounts on offer. I have used it to get a clearer view on what the subject matter of a debate is.

From a historical point of view, my inquiry engages with the ideal of clarity that has always been a core value of analytic philosophy. Philosophers who took the linguistic turn in the first half of the twentieth century promoted clarity understood as a thorough understanding of what the terms we use really mean. This was supposed to fully answer or resolve philosophical questions about the world. In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, analytic philosophy developed a new self-image in which the study of concepts and terms plays a bit part. The theme was "Clarity is not enough". In 1998, Frank Jackson revived the idea that close attention to what our terms actually mean is indispensable, even though it is only a first step and does not fully answer philosophical questions about the nature of things. The upshot of my inquiry is that attention to terms is, indeed, crucial in order to settle the subject matter of first-order inquiry. However, it does not matter much what the terms actually mean in ordinary or pre-theoretic language. Rather, the crucial question is what they ought to mean given our aims and findings. The linguistic turn went too far, but it was not a wrong turning altogether.

The scope of my main claim is limited. Terms only require attention when they are unclear to an extent that compromises a debate. The considerations in this inquiry suggest that the problem is not so much an

insufficient understanding of what such terms as "knowledge" or "terrorism" actually mean in ordinary or pre-theoretic language. These terms require special attention because they are not well suited to our theoretical aims of an inquiry. There can be different reasons for this, such as that a term is too indeterminate, contested, ambiguous or does not trace the distinctions that are most relevant for the sort of question that we hope to address. Some of the problems such shortcomings induce are unclear entailments of basic findings, verbal disputes, failure to address the relevant subject matter, contested subject matters and parties to a debate talking past one another.

What are the consequences of adopting my approach for philosophical practice? Intuitions about the application of a term to actual or hypothetical cases play a much more modest role than they often do in practice and despite notorious objections to this practice and conceptual analysis more generally. These intuitions disclose at most a starting point. As we go along, we should be prepared to give up any particular intuition if this promises to make the term more useful for our aims and more suitable in the light of our findings.

Similarly, counterexamples lose some of their power. They are commonly treated as evidence against an account. On my approach, they only pose a problem if they cannot be justified as part of a terminological improvement.

Definitions come within reach. It is commonly agreed that if explicit analyses are attainable at all, they will not take the form of a definition in terms of a small number of necessary and sufficient conditions. Terminological

revisions do not need to take the form of a definition, but they could. The objections to definitions as a result of conceptual analysis do not apply to definitions as a result of terminological revisions.

What gains importance on my approach are questions about our theoretical (and sometimes practical) aims. Which aims are significant? Which ones are respectable? These questions require epistemic, ethical and pragmatic considerations and need to be negotiated within a debate in order to agree on a terminology.

Finally, on my approach, clarifying terms and hence subject matters, somewhat paradoxically, is not a merely terminological issue. It relies on substantive assumptions and decisions. Accordingly, it cannot be done prior to addressing any substantive issue in a debate. Rather, it happens as we go along. Note that this does not imply that the distinction between terminological and substantive issues is in general blurred.

To close, let me sketch some future lines of inquiry that emerge from this study. I have claimed that linguistic tolerance has limits because not every aim that could guide terminological revision is respectable. However, I have not said much about what makes an aim respectable. The answer will be different for theoretical and practical aims. Theoretical aims can be formulated in terms of questions and issues that we hope to address. Whether these aims are respectable will presumably depend on whether a relevant question or issue is significant enough and more significant than rival aims. The very general question arises of which theoretical issues are worth pursuing. The assessment

of practical aims as to their significance and respectability includes considering such issues as what is wrong with the aim to depict the actions of a perceived enemy as particularly reprehensible in order to justify extreme actions against them. This raises intricate ethical as well as practical and often also legal matters.

Another matter for further exploration is the use of explication outside philosophy. One of many interesting examples is the term "mental illness". Which clusters of symptoms and suggested diagnoses should be officially acknowledged as a mental illness is in many cases contested in medical, political and legal contexts. The method of explication might provide a useful framework to discuss relevant political, legal and ethical aims—for example, a right to sick leave or avoiding stigmatisation—their relative significance and how they influence the classification of a suggested diagnosis as a mental illness.

In Chapter 1, I have argued that it is not entirely clear whether we need a hyperintensional account of the subject matter of statements and disputes. This issue needs further consideration.

I have provided a Gricean account of the lack of disagreement in verbal disputes. It would be interesting to consider this suggestion in the broader context of current debates about disagreement in semantics, metaethics and epistemology. Moreover, we could assess whether some disputes in philosophy are actually merely verbal or vital verbal—for example, metaphysical disputes.

Finally, I have focused on a particular role for language in philosophy. This does by no means exclude the possibility that it plays other roles as well. One other possible role has, for example, emerged from my critique of Jackson's solution to the location problem. Thus, a theory of vagueness and ambiguity might be required in order to assess the truth-value of certain substantive statements. Such other roles for language in philosophy should be examined in order to provide a fuller picture of how much language matters almost a century after the linguistic turn.

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