

A TACTICAL GUIDE TO CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Many have been taught that concept definition is the “crucial state in the research process in which initial ideas and hypotheses are translated into an operational research design and into real research practice.”² Operationalization requires that concepts and variables are defined precisely in order to ensure clear measurements, comparability, and (inter)coder reliability. Yet others disagree. For them, language does not mirror reality, and therefore definitions and operationalizations are not simply exercises in objectivity.³ For instance in politics, an examination of political terms is not a prelude to but a dimension of politics itself,⁴ and the same can be said for example of history or natural sciences.⁵ With this in mind, this paper discusses conceptual analysis in its own right, not as a prelude to something else.

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² Peter Mair, ‘Concepts and Concept Formation’, in Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 178.

³ See e.g. K. M. Fierke, ‘Links across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (2002).

⁴ William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵ See e.g. E. H. Carr, *What Is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge January-March 1961* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). J. M. Ziman, *Reliable Knowledge: An Exploration of the Grounds for Belief in Science* (Cambridge: Canto, 1991).

This tactical guide is not a recipe or a simple set of instructions which, if followed, lead to certain results. Rather, I provide a selection of tactics I have used in my research on grave humanitarian crises, the international community, and collective responsibility. These tactics have worked in those cases, but they may fare less well in others. Thus, I do not present a theory or a method of conceptual analysis. I provide examples of the kinds of things that are worth considering while leaving the contextual decision whether or not to follow them to prudence. Tactics are, after all, usually about the kinds of maneuvers one can do, but which to employ depends on available resources and context.

By conceptual analysis I do not mean what for instance early Wittgenstein, Moore, Ayer, Carnap, or Ryle may have meant by it.⁶ I do not share their (positivist) claim that most (philosophical) problems were pseudo-problems arising from a mystification of language that could be solved by being clearer about one's meaning by formalizing it; that "philosophers can and must discover and state what is *really* meant by expressions of this or that radical type."⁷ Conceptual analysis should examine what is meant by a concept and its expressions, but I diverge from the above-mentioned authors by leaving the authority of the author behind, by acknowledging that there may be more than one "real" meaning, and by not assuming that meaning is reference but in use (as in later Wittgenstein⁸).

These preliminary remarks provide the backdrop for my discussion. The next section explains briefly my understanding of concepts. The second section outlines some strategies and tactics of conceptual analysis.

The main rewards of conceptual analysis are threefold. First, we gain clarity over *what* we are actually talking about, and what is disputed. Second, we understand *why* we talk about something in the way that we do, and what difference that makes. Third, conceptual analysis is a window to seeing *how and why* the social world is

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1922). G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903/1993). Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952). Rudolf Carnap, 'On the Character of Philosophic Problems', *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1934). G. Ryle, 'Systematically Misleading Expressions', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 32 (1931). I thank Harry Gould for reminding me to clarify this issue.

⁷ Ryle (1931), op. cit., p. 142. My emphasis.

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953/2003).

constructed historically and culturally in the way it is and why, and therefore it is also a window to perceiving how the world could be otherwise.

Conceptualizing concepts and conceptual analysis

What are concepts? A thorough answer is impossible in the limited space here, but one should distinguish between the sounds and signs (or thought, “inner speech”⁹) used in employing a concept and the concept itself. Different languages express same concepts with different means. Note, however, that different grammars force us to express things in particular ways and not in others,¹⁰ while each language and its expression for a concept is historically and culturally loaded. And yet, we have no access to the abstract concepts except through our languages, their words and grammars,¹¹ be those languages natural or constructed.

Second, to consider that concepts are definitions of things “out there” seems as unfruitful as the attempt to find some solid bedrock in language, some semantic primes similar to atoms or subatomic particles.¹² Concepts are, after all, defined by other concepts, and even though this might mean logical circularity, logic is not, however, the main criterion for a language.¹³ *Understandability* is the main criterion in language, for the whole purpose of a language is the communication of something, be that of ideas, reports, political projects, humor, or whatever. Communication, moreover, is not signaling in the sense of sending a “package” that is then received. Rather, we should distinguish at least three dimensions: the saying of something (locutionary dimension), the action which occurs by saying something (illocutionary

⁹ Wilfred Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963).

¹⁰ See e.g. James W. Davis, *Terms of Inquiry: On the Theory and Practice of Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 17-27.

¹¹ See e.g. John G. Gunnell, *Social Inquiry after Wittgenstein & Kuhn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 72ff. Consider e.g. how a deaf man described his thoughts before learning sign language as “darkness.” See Susan Schaller, *A Man without Words* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹² This is clear to me, but all may not agree. See e.g. Uwe Durst, ‘The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Linguistic Meaning’, *Theoretical Linguistics*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2004). Anna Wierzbicka, ‘The Search for Universal Semantic Primitives’, in Martin Pütz (ed.), *Thirty Years of Linguistic Evolution: Studies in Honour of René Dirven on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1992).

¹³ See e.g. Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Ch. 1.

dimension), and the impact a statement has on others (perlocutionary dimension).¹⁴ And all of these, in addition to their historical contexts, require interpretation within a semantic “time-space.” Here, in addition to the historicity of meanings, by a semantic time-space I refer also to the use of concepts in a particular time and in connection with other meanings, which are also historical and contextual. Comprehensibility and the meaning of something may depend for instance on saying it at the right time (“I do” at a wedding), or after something else having been said first (“Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?”).

In this chapter, for reasons of brevity, the key aspect of concepts is the way their *use* structures and gives meaning to the world and to ourselves in the world. The meanings of concepts come out in their use. A concept is used in some historical time and space, both in the physical and semantic sense. Concepts are used by someone – and for some purpose – and it is not irrelevant who invokes which concept and at what time – and to whom.

The above remarks have two corollaries. First, conceptual analysis cannot be limited to a counting operation of a concept’s recurrence. It must analyze also the wider historical context and the agency of a concept’s user within it. To simply observe that “I do” was said twice misses a whole host of things, especially if such utterances were said at the right time at a “wedding.”¹⁵

Second, conceptual analysis is not about the concept *per se* but a means to an end, to insights about the social world and its agents, and their re-construction within a particular historical context. Such a re-construction need not be always identical with the past – consider e.g. “breaks” in law when a familiar concept, say liability, gains a new interpretation and thereby changes how concrete cases are settled – but some connection with the past is maintained. Even a completely novel concept must be connected with existing concepts for it to be meaningful and understandable. Such connections come out in the use of concepts within a historical, semantic time-space.

With these brief remarks this paper considers concepts as tools which are used in the re-construction (and therefore in the potential change) of the world. They are vital both in the social world and in the physical world. Without concepts, there is no

¹⁴ See e.g. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

“trespassing,” “taxes,” or “marriage,” but there are also no “walls,” “GPS,” or “gravity.”¹⁶ We need and use concepts to make sense of the world and of ourselves in it. Thus, when analyzing concepts, we are less interested in definitions and more interested in the manner in which concepts as particular tools are used to re-construct and structure the world with us in it.

Strategies and tactics of conceptual analysis

This section explains strategies and tactics I have used in three research projects. A clear distinction between strategies and tactics is difficult, because the strategies might serve as tactics in some projects and *vice versa*. Below, the first three I identify as strategies, mainly because they formed the backdrop for the individual research projects. The rest I call tactics, because I employed a number of them as means to complete a given strategy. In other projects these roles might be reversed.

Question an assumption. During the 1990s and the turn of the millennium, one locus of the humanitarian intervention debate was on the existence of a right to intervene for humanitarian purposes.¹⁷ Political, legal, and moral arguments were mustered to support both sides, and the discussion seemed entrenched. I realized that a simple yet important question remained unasked: if a right to intervene existed, what kind of a right would it be?¹⁸ The discussions seemed to assume that a right is a right, and the only questions to ask were whether it exists, and if so, who holds it. Yet, there are different kinds of right, and my intuition was to focus on the kind of right in question. Thus, rather than asking whether the right existed, I assumed that it did and proceeded in its analysis in order to see what its existence would entail. Thus, the main strategy

¹⁶ Note the distinction between the phenomenon and the theory of gravity that describes it. For an introduction to conceptual changes and their importance in the sciences, see e.g. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). See also e.g. Torsten Michel, ‘Pigs Can't Fly, or Can They? Ontology, Scientific Realism and the Metaphysics of Presence in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 02 (2009).

¹⁷ See e.g. J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Brian D. Lepard, *Rethinking Humanitarian Intervention: A Fresh Legal Approach Based on Fundamental Ethical Principles in International Law and World Religions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002). Fernando R. Tesón, *Humanitarian Intervention: An Inquiry into Law and Morality* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 1988). R. J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1974). Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ For a revised version of my argument, see Hannes Peltonen, ‘Of Rights and Responsibilities: The Right of Humanitarian Intervention’, *Finnish Yearbook of International Law*, Vol. 19 (2008).

was to *assume something different than normally* and to inquire into what was left unproblematized, namely the right itself.

Use an analogy. The early years regarding the responsibility to protect (RtoP), and its relation and impact on sovereignty were a concern for a number of states and other actors and commentators,¹⁹ although the UN Secretary-General emphasized that RtoP is an ally, not an adversary, of sovereignty.²⁰ Yet, RtoP's novelty arises from its re-characterization and re-conceptualization of sovereignty. By extension at stake may be the wider international order, because a re-characterization of sovereignty entails a re-understanding of international law: sovereignty is a fundament of public international law which is an expression of the wider international order. Rather than argue whether RtoP entails a change in sovereignty, I asked what is the international order envisaged by RtoP; how is the world according to RtoP?²¹ To give an answer I analyzed responsibility, because RtoP advocated for a move away from sovereignty as control to sovereignty as responsibility without being clear what that meant. My analysis led to realizing the importance of sociality or community in the world through RtoP's eyes. To communicate this, I employed an analogy from communal crime prevention and domestic neighborhood watches. My chosen analogy was better than the usual "fire brigade" or "world police" analogies, because the connections and relations between the important elements of those in "neighborhood watches" and in the world envisioned by RtoP seemed to match much better. With the analogy I could then proceed to discuss what changes in the contemporary world, particularly in international law, would be needed for the RtoP vision to materialize. Thus, my main strategy was to *find a better analogy* than was usually employed, to focus on it in its own terms, and ask what would be required for the analogy to actually hold.

Change the question. A decade ago there was a revival of interest in the international community as distinguished from the international society.²² Such interest continued

¹⁹ See e.g. Edward C. Luck, 'Sovereignty, Choice, and the Responsibility to Protect', *Global Responsibility to Protect*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009).

²⁰ United Nations General Assembly. 2009. Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: Report of the Secretary General. A/63/677.

²¹ Hannes Peltonen, 'Sovereignty as Responsibility, Responsibility to Protect and International Order: On Responsibility, Communal Crime Prevention and International Law', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 7, No. 28 (2011).

²² See e.g. Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, 'International Community' after Iraq', *International Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (2005). David C. Ellis, 'On the Possibility of 'International Community'', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009). Frank Schimmelfennig, 'Goffman Meets IR:

distinctions that had been made earlier.²³ My initial examination of existing understandings of “international community” indicated that this concept was heavily used but with very different meanings. Moreover, if the existing accounts were correct, and if one also looked at how the concept was used and understood in theoretical accounts, the implication seemed to be that the international level was populated by a number of international communities. Yet, the concept was (virtually) always used with a definitive article and in the singular: “*the* international community.” I was asking the wrong question. Instead of asking “*what* is the international community?”²⁴ I should have been asking “*who*.” This opened a new path for a dynamic understanding of the international community being a context-dependent, problem-driven *configuration* rather than some relatively stable group of international actors and agents.²⁵ My argument was that the starting position of the discussion, a sociological distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* drawn from Tönnies, led the discussion to think that the concept “international community” referred to or described some actual collectivity “out there,” which in turn resulted in puzzles rather than clarity. Instead, I argued that the function of the concept is to *form* a collectivity context-dependently, not to refer to an already existing collectivity. Thus, my main strategy was to *change the question* and simultaneously to ignore some of the assumptions others had made.

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Below I outline a number of tactics I have used in my projects. This inexhaustive list is meant to illustrate the kinds of tactics one could employ in conceptual analysis.

Keep an open mind. Although impossible in an absolute sense, an open mind is crucial to conceptual analysis. We always approach a concept with some preliminary

Dramaturgical Action in International Community’, *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2002).

²³ See e.g. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887/2001). Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁴ As e.g. in ‘What Is the International Community?’, *Foreign Policy*, Vol. September-October, No. 132 (2002).

²⁵ Hannes Peltonen, ‘In or Out? International Community Membership: Beliefs, Behaviour, Contextuality and Principles’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2014).

knowledge and identities, and we should not pretend “as if” things were otherwise. Rather, an open mind means recognizing that preconceptions affect our interpretations combined with flexibility to try different ideas and assumptions. As an example, consider Jastrow’s duck-rabbit picture.²⁶ Whether we first see a duck or a rabbit depends on our preconceptions. Yet we can see the other image, if we allow ourselves to change the initial assumptions: what if “that” is not “ears” but a “beak”? In this example we know that the picture contains either a duck or a rabbit, but in many cases we have no such prior knowledge. But we also do not know with certainty that no other image is possible. Thus, by trying different preconceptions we might “see” something new.

Assume as little as possible. We must assume all sorts of things in science and in everyday life. Most of our assumptions remain unvoiced and settled (until not). In conceptual analysis, though, it pays off to take for granted as little as possible and to voice one’s assumptions. Without expressing one’s assumptions it is difficult to “test” experimentally what difference changing them makes. Moreover, one’s mind remains open and flexible by keeping one’s settled assumptions as few as possible. That something has been assumed before is by itself insufficient justification to continue to assume it; some additional justification is needed.

Identify key concepts. Concepts are defined and understood through other concepts. Thus, even though conceptual analysis focuses usually on a single concept, it is necessary to consider also the other concepts used for defining and understanding it. Here, infinite regress is a logically implied problem, but the key factor in scrutinizing a concept is understandability, not logic. Understandability, then, is often a practical matter (see James’s squirrel example below). Thus, conceptual analysis should consider concepts used to explain and understand the subject of such inquiry, but understandability does not require that one continues on that path ad infinitum.

Consider but be willing to ignore formal definitions. Formal definitions have their uses in particular projects. For instance a formal definition of “democracy” is necessary for the kind of research done in the Polity Project.²⁷ Yet, as Connelly has

²⁶ Joseph Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1901). The picture was published earlier as *Kaninchen Und Ente*, in *Fliegende Blätter*, vol. 97, no. 2465, 23 October 1892.

²⁷ Polity Project, “Polity IV Project: Home Page”, available: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (accessed May 6 2013).

shown, such definitions are not “outside” of politics,²⁸ and the need for conceptual analysis arises often from there being several formal definitions or from formal definitions not helping us to “go on” but keeping us entrenched in the current debate. For example a formal re-definition of “democracy” would not solve the “outlier” issues in the Polity Project, but instead it solves some issues while introducing others. A more “precise” definition will not give more “accurate” results but *different* results!²⁹ Thus, formal definitions may be the first but not the only port of call, and for instance one should heed Wittgenstein’s advice and examine everyday use.³⁰

Consider etymology. Concepts and their meanings have histories. In addition to etymology being a simple and effective starting position in conceptual analysis, there are also wider (societal) reasons for the evolution of a concept and its meanings. Such reasons may be crucial in contemporary understandings and use.

Consider context. Concepts are used and understood always within a context. Combined with etymology, the contextualization of a concept and its meanings connects the concept to wider societal conditions or narratives. Context may be understood historically (changes over time) and otherwise (e.g. changes from one contemporary context to another). The contextualization of a concept may take a few different forms: 1) examine the concept in its historical context; 2) compare and contrast the same concept in different historical contexts (but take note whether the same word means something else, or the same concept is expressed with different words); 3) place a concept within an unfamiliar context or a context where one would normally not use it and examine why it does not “fit;” and 4) self-reflect on the context within which you examine a particular concept and why it matters.

Consider prototypes, antonyms, and hard cases. Conceptual analysis relies on understanding boundaries: what something is and is not. Prototypes and antonyms are good starting positions for identifying such boundaries. By taking a good, if not best, example of a concept and by comparing and contrasting it with its opposite provides insight into meaning. Yet, to draw a conceptual spectrum between two opposing

²⁸ Connolly (1993), op. cit.

²⁹ For a mathematical demonstration for the reason behind this, see Benoit Mandelbrot, ‘How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-Similarity and Fractional Dimension’, *Science*, Vol. 156, No. 3775 (1967).

³⁰ Wittgenstein (1953/2003), op. cit.

concepts leads to a Sorites puzzle. Where, for example, does a democracy turn into an autocracy?³¹ This change from one to another is fuzzy and conventional. The contemporary conventions behind meaning can be examined through hard cases or unclear examples located along that fuzzy boundary.

Consider (functional) synonyms and neighboring concepts. A concept may be expressed with more than one word. Literal synonyms are different words for the same concept. Functional synonyms are challenging to identify, but the question is whether something functions as a synonym in a particular context, even though it is not a literal synonym. For instance duty and responsibility or international society and international community are not synonyms, but within particular contexts they may function as synonyms. Moreover, “duty” and “responsibility” (and “obligation”) are examples of “neighboring” concepts. Understanding the meaning of a concept can be gained by examining when two words are taken to express the same and when a different concept – and why.

Narrow the focus on legitimate grounds. Some cuts are always necessary, but one must have legitimate justifications for making them. For example, having identified three levels of abstractions for the use and meaning of “international community” I focused only on the lowest level where the international community is considered to have agency. Here, a meaningful question over membership in the international community is possible, unlike in higher levels of abstraction, which then allowed me to proceed in my inquiry.³² Thus, my justification was that otherwise I cannot go on, which by itself did not guarantee interesting results, but it was at least a good bet.³³

Identify key elements and their counterparts. A concept can be understood through its key elements and their opposites. For example the Polity Project understands “democracy” through four main elements (competitiveness of executive recruitment, openness of executive recruitment, constraint on chief executive, and competitiveness of political participation). It then subtracts “autocracy score” (understood through five key elements) from “democracy score” in order to have a combined Polity score for

³¹ See e.g. Monty G. Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Keith Jagers, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2013* Center for Systemic Peace, 2014).

³² Peltonen (2014), op. cit., pp. 478-479.

³³ On good bets, see e.g. Friedrich Kratochwil, ‘Of False Promises and Good Bets: A Plea for a Pragmatic Approach to Theory Building (the Tartu Lecture)’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2007).

each regime.³⁴ Note, however, that a concept's counterpart need not be its antonym. In his study on rights, Hohfeld identifies *opposites* and *correlatives* to different kinds of right.³⁵ For him, "duty" is the correlate of a particular kind of right, whereas "no-right" is that right's proper opposite. Put differently, an examination of antonyms is a useful first cut, but concepts have relations beyond antonyms. By understanding such relations in a semantic time-space we can understand the concept under scrutiny.

Examine the criteria for distinguishing a concept from other concepts. In some sense a concept is understood through boundaries with other concepts. Although such boundaries are fuzzy,³⁶ by examining the criteria why and how those boundaries are drawn informs us about what we consider important. Moreover, conceptual analysis is fruitful when it is not limited to what something means, but when it focuses on *why* something means what it means, and here the center stage should be given to distinguishing criteria.

Note the distinctions others have made. A lodestar question in conceptual analysis should be "why have others made these distinctions?" because conceptual analysis is interested not only in what something is but in why something is understood in a particular way and not otherwise. To see the distinctions clearly, a *typology* or *taxonomy* can be useful. A typology is usually one-dimensional whereas usually taxonomy has two dimensions. In typologies and taxonomies emphasize the reasons for the distinctions made in them, and if no taxonomy or typology can be found, consider making one yourself. Note, however, that such exercises result in Weberian, heuristically useful ideal types, not in clear-cut matchings between concepts and the world.³⁷

Consider whether new elements or factors are needed. An examination of a concept and its key elements through existing accounts and one's own analysis arrives sooner or later at a point, where one must ask whether additional elements or factors are needed in order to explain the concept further. This is an important question, but

³⁴ Marshall, Gurr, and Jagers (2014), op. cit., pp. 14-17.

³⁵ Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld, *Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning* (The Lawbook Exchange: New Jersey, 1919/2010).

³⁶ See e.g. Davis (2005), op. cit. Eleanor H. Rosch, 'Natural Categories', *Cognitive Psychology*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1973). Eleanor H. Rosch and Carolyn B. Mervis, 'Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories', *Cognitive Psychology*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1975).

³⁷ See the discussion just above about fuzzy boundaries and Wittgenstein.

be wary of the temptation to think that more elements and factors equals further accuracy for it is a fallacy. The introduction of more factors need not mean more accurate but *different* results.³⁸ To know whether a result is more accurate than another, we would need to first know that which we are trying to learn, which is exactly what we do not know.

Consider the implications of use in practice. In a sense, concepts exist only through their use, and therefore also their examination should consider their use and the practical implications of their use. Consider William James's example: Imagine you are walking in a park and notice a squirrel on a tree trunk. As you approach it, the squirrel rounds the tree. You also go round, but the squirrel goes farther round the tree. In the end you have circled the tree, but have you gone round the squirrel? Here, one must consider whether "to go round" means first being on the north side of the squirrel, then in its east, followed by south and west, or whether it means to have been in front of the squirrel, then on its right side, followed by its back and left side. All concepts may have similar differences in their practical implications that therefore merit consideration.³⁹

Consider counterfactuals. Examples demonstrating the practical difference a change in meaning may not be readily available, but one can always construct a counterfactual. Such "what if" scenarios that consider meaning and the world through a thought experiment can be useful in giving clues to what were important points in the historical evolution of a concept and in understanding what is entailed in changes in meaning.⁴⁰

Consider who uses the concept and with whom. If the meaning of a concept is in use, one should also pay attention to the people using it. Is there some difference in

³⁸ Mandelbrot (1967), op. cit.

³⁹ Note that one finds many interesting developments in legal history, when a key concept has been understood differently due to a difference in practical implications. See e.g. Allan C. Hutchinson, *Is Eating People Wrong? Great Legal Cases and How They Shaped the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Usually counterfactuals in IR are used for example in relation to important historical events or causation, namely in an analysis of possible worlds. See e.g. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (eds.), *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactual and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Yet, such possible worlds may result not only from actions taken or untaken but also from changes in meaning. See e.g. Peltonen (2011), op. cit.

meaning depending on who uses the concept? Do different people use the same word but refer to a different thing? Do people use different words but refer to the same thing? Consider with or to whom a given expression is used over other possible expressions. For example, in a project I initially observed that theorists and scholars preferred to use “international society” while journalists and practitioners preferred “international community,”⁴¹ but it was unclear whether they meant the same thing. Socialization to particular vocabularies by each group is something to keep in mind in conceptual analysis.

Consider a process of elimination. It may be difficult to determine the meaning of something but easier to say what something is not. A process of elimination in conceptual analysis may not lead to the Truth (à la Sherlock Holmes), but it provides the best possible understanding for the time being. A contingent understanding suffices in many cases, because conceptual analysis is less interested in absolute Truth and more in how and why social truths are being constructed (why something is taken *as the truth*).

Analyze locution, illocution, and perlocution. The analysis part of conceptual analysis should focus on a linguistic expression (locution), whether it was also action (illocution), and what impact it had on others (perlocution). In such analysis, pay attention to understanding *why* something was stated as it was, *why* it constitutes action (or not), and *how* it impacted others and *why*. This task is complicated by a number of things, one being indexicality: the meaning of an expression changes from one context to another. Thus, context matters, and conceptual analysis needs to be placed within wider structures as is well illustrated by landmark cases in law.⁴² For example, how “negligence” is understood depends on the prevalent structure of the legal system and on societal conditions, both of which are historical. Similarly, simply saying “I do” in front of a priest does not constitute marriage, unless it is said at the right time at a “wedding.” Finally, some investors may understand factory layoffs as expected increases in efficiency while other see signs of trouble.

Analyze beliefs, assumptions, and identities. A deeper conceptual analysis goes to the meta-level and considers for instance the beliefs, assumptions, and identities one

⁴¹ Tim Dunne, ‘Sociological Investigations: Instrumental, Legitimist and Coercive Interpretations of International Society’, *Millennium*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2001), p. fn 21.

⁴² Hutchinson (2011), *op. cit.*

must hold in order for something to be intelligible. A good question to ask is whether differences in beliefs or in assumptions account for the differences in meaning, use, or impact, or whether something is differently intelligible depending on one's identity.

Concretize differences with the world. The results of conceptual analysis may remain at the level of conveying the meaning and impact of something and the reasons for it. Yet, since the social world is one of artifice, in which such status function statements as “X counts as Y in context C” are of utmost importance,⁴³ conceptual analysis should aim to show what concrete difference in the world follows from particular meanings and in differences in meaning. What difference does it make whether a concept is understood or employed in “this” rather than in “that” way?

Go “beyond” a.k.a. consider what the conceptual analysis enables. As a final step, conceptual analysis should consider whether it has opened a new path for seeing the world now differently. Has it brought novel issues to the fore, issues that remained hidden because we took meaning for granted? What are those issues, and why should we pay attention to them?

⁴³ John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).