

Explication as introduced by Carnap (1962) has recently been rediscovered and advocated as a viable alternative to traditional conceptual analysis for the task of clarifying philosophically interesting concepts (cf., e.g., Shepherd & Justus 2015). While analysis remains faced with a number of criticisms – pertaining to issues like the paradox of analysis, the origin, reliability, and significance of linguistic intuitions, or the structure of mental representation – one of the advantages of explication seems to be that it is particularly well-equipped to account for the apparent fallibility and reversibility of our conceptual schemes, thus meeting the externalist's challenge (cf., e.g., Schroeter 2004) to traditional and contemporary conceptual analysis. It is also explicit about its genuinely normative component (its commitment to regulate conceptualization). Defenses of analysis foregrounding the normative aspect of analysis (cf., e.g., Henderson & Horgan 2013) therefore seem to work towards a convergence of the two approaches.

Curiously, a somewhat neglected question both in the debates about analysis and in the recently revived discussion of explication concerns the ontological status of concepts. The fact that this question is sometimes outright ignored, often bracketed and more often declared irrelevant is surprising, since we would, in principle, expect proposed methods of clarification to provide insights into the underlying theory of what it is that is being clarified.

After outlining the differences and a plausible view of an interrelation between analysis and explication, as well as briefly reviewing the core criticisms put forward against each, I will turn to the ontological question about concepts. I will argue that while traditional conceptual analysis seems to relate most closely to a subjectivist account of concepts, the kind of conceptual change that is brought about by Carnapian explication is most naturally framed in terms of a pragmatist/ cognitivist theory.