

Pluralist Approaches to Conceptual Engineering
(December 9-10, 2021)
Titles and abstracts

Delia Belleri, University of Lisbon

Monism and Pluralism in Conceptual Engineering

This talk will explore the many ways in which the 'Monism vs. Pluralism' contrast is relevant for conceptual engineering, starting from the nature of conceptual engineering's objects and covering issues such as the function of concepts in our mental lives, as well as the values and goals to be promoted in conceptual revision or amelioration. Monism and Pluralism also become relevant whenever conceptual revision produces multiple concepts, thus bringing about a situation of local conceptual pluralism. Exploring the ways in which Monism and Pluralism can be articulated in these domains will help better understand the possible theoretical options available to the practitioners of conceptual engineering.

Georg Brun, University of Bern

Varieties of Pluralism in Philosophical Conceptual Engineering

Does a conceptual-engineering approach underwrite conceptual pluralism in philosophy? And what would that exactly mean? In this paper, I first show that there is a surprisingly rich variety of ways in which conceptual engineers can arrive at different proposals. To begin with, the label "conceptual engineering" covers a wide range of projects which share a basic structure but differ in their objectives and consequently have different conditions of adequacy. Focusing on the two philosophically prominent methods of explication and amelioration, I then distinguish a number of ways in which these methods can lead to different target concepts. On this basis, I explore the idea that interesting forms of conceptual pluralism result if the target concepts are different but nonetheless equivalent in some appropriate sense. I discuss a number of scenarios which can produce such a pluralism. It turns out that many interesting forms of pluralism call for an analysis not on the level of rival target concepts but on a more systematic level which also includes the target theories and their objectives.

Matti Eklund, Uppsala University

Conceptual Engineering and Conceptual Innovation

The main focus in much work on conceptual engineering in philosophy falls under the heading of revision of concepts. But another strand is conceptual innovation, the building of new concepts. In this talk, I focus on this second strand, and discuss some problems.

What is billed as the building of new concepts often amounts to no more than the introduction a simple label for what could earlier be expressed only in a more cumbersome way. One may reasonably hold that this is not strictly the building of a new concept. But then there are good questions about when and how genuine conceptual innovation can and does occur.

Mirela Fus, University of Oslo and University of St. Andrews

Disjunctive Pluralism Approach to Objects of Engineering in Philosophy

Recent discussion about the method of engineering in philosophy, that most prominently goes by the name of Conceptual Engineering, has produced a plethora of theories about different objects that this method targets or operates on. However, within the method of engineering in philosophy, these different objects are, more often than not, seen as competitors rather than co-workers. In this talk, I argue that we should embrace a specific version of a pluralistic approach to objects of engineering in philosophy. I develop Disjunctive Pluralism Approach and argue that we should choose this particular approach to objects of engineering in philosophy over its two competitors: Singularism Approach and Pluralism Simpliciter Approach. I outline some benefits of Disjunctive Pluralism Approach for the method of engineering in philosophy and beyond.

Manuel Gustavo Isaac, Swiss National Science Foundation

The Hallmark Problem for Conceptual Engineering

'Conceptual engineering' is the new buzzword in the world of philosophical methods. Yet, on some accounts, it is hard to see what is really new about it — if anything. The present talk tackles this hallmark problem for conceptual engineering through an analysis of the engineering process itself, taking the engineering label at face value. I argue for a monistic reading of the engineering label that leads to pluralization of the methods possibly involved in the engineering process.

Teresa Marques, University of Barcelona

The Moral and Political Limits of Meaning Revisions

By *meaning revision* I will here mean proposals to change the current meaning of an existing word of a language. By *meaning perversion* I will refer to attempts to revise the meaning of a word in current use by speakers of a language, in a way that subverts the value(s) that the extension of the word is presupposed to correctly realize. Various writers (from Victor Klemperer and George Orwell to Hanna Arendt and Masha Gessen) have written about the effects of phenomena that fall under meaning perversions as here

understood: “an impoverished experience”, “a destitute language”, “the loss of a shared reality”, the loss of individual autonomy in the use of a language that ‘thinks for us and dictates our feelings’”, “eviscerating words” while “leaving the thing itself undescribed”. The political dangers of these effects are often the effects autocrats intend, since they diminish a population’s capacity to resist control over social and political reality. In this paper, I want to explore how meaning perversions can undermine people’s capacity for autonomous deliberation, and how we can make sense of this loss of a shared reality.

Mark Pinder, Open University

Is There a Right Way to Tackle Philosophical Problems?

Philosophers take a variety of different approaches to tackling philosophical problems: conceptual analysis, experimental philosophy, conceptual engineering, and so on. So it is appropriate to ask whether any of these is the ‘right’ approach to tackling philosophical problems. However, while such a question is appropriate, it is not obvious how to tackle it. Why? Because philosophers of each stripe can provide coherent motivations for their preferred approach, and it is not easy to find a neutral perspective from which to assess those motivations. In this paper, I develop a theoretical framework for thinking through and tackling these issues more systematically. Along the way, I develop what I call ‘methodological pluralism – ‘the view that there are multiple ‘right ways’ to tackle any given philosophical problem – and discuss some of the implications of the framework for conceptual engineers.

Joey Pollock, University of Oslo

Implementation and Conceptual Endorsement

The implementation challenge for conceptual engineering is often presented as a challenge of bringing about large-scale changes in meaning for an expression or concept within a language community. This has led some authors to suggest that implementation is more or less impossible, or too difficult to be worth attempting. There is a range of responses to this initial challenge in the literature. In this talk, I suggest a new approach to both understanding and addressing the implementation challenge. I argue that implementation does not always require changing the meaning of an expression in a language from one value to another. Rather, for many cases, implementation requires (a) the stipulative addition of a new meaning for an existing term, (b) convincing individuals (groups, institutions) to *endorse* this new meaning over the ‘ancestor’ meaning and (c) convincing them to do so for the right reasons.

There are different (and overlapping) kinds of reasons for which individuals might endorse a new concept – e.g., moral, prudential, testimonial, etc. By considering case studies, I will argue that this presents us with a plurality of potential aims and success conditions for the implementation of engineered concepts, each of which may be more or less appropriate for different kinds of engineering project. These different success conditions can vary with respect to how difficult they are to achieve. On this approach, the implementation of engineered concepts *can* be very difficult indeed, but not (primarily) for the reasons that have been identified in the literature.