

Conceptual Engineering: Feasibility & Normativity

e-Workshop ▪ March 10th to 12th 2021 ▪ Bielefeld (Germany) time utc/gmt+1

organized by **Steffen Koch & Christian Nimtz**

[shortlink] bit.ly/3s57XW9

[link] uni-bielefeld.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/ereignisse/workshop_ce_2103/

for participation, you need to register ▪ for registration, please sent an e-mail to [registration\[at\]nimtzt.net](mailto:registration[at]nimtzt.net) before March 7th

Wednesday March 10th

18:00- 20:00	Katherine Ritchie UC Irvine	Essentializing Language and the Prospects for Ameliorative Projects
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Thursday March 11th

09:00- 10:30	Max Deutsch & Jamin Asay University of Hong Kong	Eliminativism and Inconsistent Concepts
10:30- 10:45	<i>coffee break</i>	
10:45- 12:15	Steffen Koch Ruhr-University Bochum	How Words matter. Conceptual Engineering meets Psycholinguistics
12:15- 13:30	<i>lunch break</i>	
13:30- 15:00	Jennifer Nado University of Hong Kong	Intuition's Role on Conceptual Engineering
15:00 - 17:00	<i>hangout</i>	

Friday March 12th

09:00- 10:30	Christian Nimtz Bielefeld University	Engineering Concepts by Engineering Social Norms: Solving the Implementation Problem
10:30- 10:45	<i>coffee break</i>	
10:45- 12:15	Mona Simion University of Glasgow	The Ethics and Epistemology of Meaning Production
12:15- 13:30	<i>lunch break</i>	
13:30- 15:00	Matti Eklund Uppsala University	Conceptual Engineering: A Partial Defense

Abstracts for the Talks

Katherine Ritchie

Essentializing Language and the Prospects for Ameliorative Projects

UC Irvine

Some language encourages essentialist thinking. I argue that psychological propensity to essentialize when nouns are used reveals a limitation for anti-essentialist ameliorative projects. Even ameliorated nouns can continue to underpin essentialist thinking. I conclude by arguing that representational essentialism does not doom anti-essentialist ameliorative projects. Rather it reveals that would-be ameliorators ought to attend to the propensities for our representational devices to essentialize and to the complex relationship between essentialism and prejudice.

Jennifer Nado

Intuition's Role on Conceptual Engineering

University of Hong Kong

One of the attractions of conceptual engineering as an alternative to traditional analysis is that it greatly reduces the weight of intuitive counterexamples. A philosopher analyzing the concept of knowledge is, most would agree, obligated to Gettier-proof her theory; by contrast, a conceptual engineer has the option (at least in principle) to offer up a re-engineered knowledge concept that permits Gettierized knowing. In light of work from experimental philosophy indicating that intuitions are frequently subject to various biases and errors, a novel methodology that allows us to minimize reliance on intuition seems like just what the doctor ordered. But is conceptual engineering an intuition-free method? Or is it just as beholden to intuition as traditional analysis?

Steffen Koch

How Words matter. Conceptual Engineering meets Psycholinguistics

Ruhr-University Bochum

In the narrow sense of 'conceptual engineering' (CE-narrow), such proposals consist of two claims: first, that we should speak and think about a certain (newly identified) category, and second, that we should use a certain pre-existing word to do so. Strikingly, however, this claim is typically not justified explicitly. But from the outset, it isn't clear why we should ever use a given pre-existing word to talk about a newly identified category, instead of simply introducing a new word. Call this the challenge for revisionism. In this talk, I argue (i) that the challenge for revisionism is one of the most fundamental challenges for CE-narrow, (ii) that popular rationales for the importance of conceptual engineering do not address it, but (iii) that relevant evidence about word-learning and word-processing biases studied by psycholinguists put us in a good position to answer it. Here the key will be that terminological choices have cognitive effects beyond semantics and pragmatics and that these effects can either be supportive or detrimental to the goals of conceptual engineers.

Max Deutsch

Eliminativism and Inconsistent Concepts

& Jamin Asay

University of Hong Kong

The idea that some of our concepts are inconsistent plays a major role in motivating various projects of conceptual engineering. An inconsistent concept is one that can lead you to draw false or inconsistent inferences, and as such would seem to be a perfect candidate for a concept that should be replaced, revised, or re-engineered. We believe that the full implications of a concept being inconsistent have not

been fully appreciated. In particular, the metaphysical implications of inconsistent concepts have been misunderstood. We focus on Kevin Scharp's view that the concept of truth in particular is inconsistent. We argue that if a concept is inconsistent, then eliminativism with respect to that concept follows. So if the concept of truth is inconsistent, nothing is true. We go on to show how if the concept of truth is inconsistent, so are most if not all other concepts in philosophy, science, and beyond. If so, then a truly global eliminativism follows: none of our concepts capture anything in reality

Christian Nitz Engineering Concepts by Engineering Social Norms: Solving the
Bielefeld University Implementation Problem

Conceptual engineers envisage a two-stage ameliorating process. First, we assess 'F' and determine what the term should express. Second, we bring it about that 'F' expresses what it should express. This second stage poses a practical challenge. Engineering advocates need to explain by what means they can implement specific conceptual changes in shared natural languages – a feat Herman Cappelen argues to be beyond our understanding and control both on an externalist and on an internalist meta-semantics. I devise a new and direct answer to this implementation challenge. Enlisting the influential theory of norms by Cristina Bicchieri, I argue that engineering social norms in Bicchieri's technical sense amounts to an effective, specific, and feasible means to implement specific conceptual change, at least on internalist premises. I also argue that striving to implement conceptual changes via social norms is superior both to striving to do so via conventions, or via moral norms.

Mona Simion The Ethics and Epistemology of Meaning Production
University of Glasgow

This paper develops the first fully-fledged account of the ethics and epistemology of meaning production in the literature. The account is function-first: I propose that a linguistic community has an obligation to generate a particular concept insofar as there is a categorical need of an increase in expressive power in the community in question, which would thereby be alleviated, there is capacity to generate the concept in question, and there are no overriding reasons against doing so; in turn, categorical needs are unpacked as pertaining to proper cognitive functioning.

Matti Eklund Conceptual Engineering: A Partial Defense
Uppsala University

I respond to Christian Nitz's and Max Deutsch's recent critical discussions of conceptual engineering. Along the way I describe what kind of conceptual engineering I want to defend. This kind of conceptual engineering differs from what seems to have become orthodoxy in discussions of the matter.