

Cappelen (2018) — “Note on Ch.1 Introduction of Fixing Language: An Essay for Conceptual Engineering”

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Summarized and commented by Shimpei Endo

In a nutshell...

This introduction outlines what this book is about. The very term *conceptual engineering* is explained as the process(es) of assessing and improving our representational devices (*concepts*) with observing several other terminologies for the seemingly same/similar practice(1.1). Cappelen characterizes his own position as representational skepticist with comparison to representational complacent, who swallow the given concepts without questioning their given concepts (1.2). Cappelen also presents the construction(1.1) and central topics through this book (1.3).

Keywords: conceptual engineering, representational devices, metasemantics, Austerity Framework, representational skepticism, externalism, continuity of inquiry

1.1 Introduction

Representational devices=concepts! This book is about the process of assessing and improving our *representational devices*, which Cappelen calls *concepts*.

How have we called it? Blackburn (1999) and Eklund (2010) already call their job as *conceptual engineering*. Haslanger (2012) labels her own contribution as *ameliorative projects* or *analytical projects*. The term *revisionary project* is adopted by Railton (1993) and Scharp (2013). Carnap's *explication* is a variant of projects which this book is about. Burgess and Plunkett prefer *conceptual ethics*.

Conceptual engineering is not about concept nor is not engineering!

After providing the list of similar practices, interestingly (and disappointingly for some?), Cappelen confesses: “It's important that readers don't take that name as a description: on the view I defend in this book, the project isn't about concepts and there isn't really any engineering.” (p.4)

The construction of this book This book has five parts. Cappelen suggests the Austerity Framework in the middle parts: II through IV.

Part I. Settle down the targets. Chapter 2 offers examples. Chapter 3 and 4 discuss more general issues.

Part II. Build a metasemantic ground for conceptual engineering.

Part III. Argue the limit of engineering. In particular, Cappelen tackles objections saying that conceptual engineering is just changing the subject (cf. *continuity*). The objections are constructed in chapter 9 and the following chapters (10 and 11) respond to it.

Part IV. Complete Austerity Framework.

Part V. Compare with other approaches. This part, for instance, considers metasemantic negotiation, conceptual function, and Chalmers' elimination.

1.2 A Heuristic: representational complacency vs. representational skepticism

People from different backgrounds other than philosophy can join conceptual engineering. Cappelen adopts a heuristic for dividing (roughly) people into two groups: the representationally *complacent* and the representationally *skeptics*. The complacent does not question concepts given to them. Note that skepticism on object-level is possible to execute in complacent in meta-level. The skeptics question concepts given to them and try to improve them. The latter position is what conceptual engineers should belong to.

Look at himself. Cappelen himself is a sample of this skeptic tribe. In fact, Cappelen has argued that concepts such as intuition and *de se* are so defective terminologies that cause philosophical problems. Cappelen mentions that skeptic attitude may also hold to what terminology/concept describes representationally skeptics themselves. An infinite regress? Or we should not talk about them at all because we cannot have a proper language to talk about? Cappelen does not have any conclusive discussion or promising strategy. Cappelen has rather sees this book as a *progress report*.

1.3 Central themes of this book

We will observe several examples in the next chapter 2. Notice that this book does not provide a detailed plan for improvement, which is out of the aim and scope of this monograph. Cappelen sees things more “from above”. To avoid losing track, Cappelen lists the six main themes of this book at the end of this introductory chapter.

1. *A theory of metasemantics works at the foundation of a theory of conceptual engineering.* See part II. We have not reached any consensus of which metasemantic we should adopt.
2. *Conceptual engineering is compatible with externalism.* A reasonable question towards conceptual engineers asks how to keep consistency with *externalism*. Given we the users themselves change our concepts being used, does not it entail *internalism*, implying that concepts are all about our mental activities and it is us which determines concepts? Part II, particularly chapter 6 defends externalisms within the Austery Framework.
3. *In or out of our control?* Relating to the theme 2, Cappelen himself takes quite an unique position insisting “not in our control.” In a nutshell, “being in control is overrated and for the most part an illusion anyway” (p.8).
4. *No systematic theory!* Warning: this book is not a checklist nor a beginner’s guide for successful conceptual engineering. Instead, this book argues there is *no* such a manual. Revisionism works on *meta-levels*

too; the rules governing conceptual engineering also get improved and revised as concepts in object-level do.

5. *Conceptual engineering and continuity of inquiry.* See Part III. Another possible concern is about continuity: can we still keep doing what we have done like arguing, (dis)agreeing on the same thing etc.? Chapter 9, for example, re-constructs Strawson’s worry, which belongs to this line, towards Carnapian explication. And proceeding chapters will successfully respond it!
6. *Conceptual engineering changes the world.* For example, when we improve our concept/word ‘race’, we also improve or change race. Conceptual amelioration (cf. Haslanger) is amelioration of the world.

Comments by me.

Reference

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