

Cappelen (2018) — “Summary of ch.18 Conceptual Engineering without Bedrock and without Fixed Points”

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Summarized and Commented by Shimpei Endo

In a nutshell...

This section defends the universal nature of conceptual engineering: anything can be a target of conceptual engineering. Cappelen disagrees with two arguments by Chalmers and by Eklund.

Keywords: Chalmers, Eklund

18.1 The Limits of Conceptual Engineering?

You can conceptual-engineer anything. Is there any term so fundamental that we cannot conceptual-engineer? Chalmers and Eklund independently hold their view supporting that “there are specific features of specific meanings that make the idea of evolution problematic” [p. 194]. Cappelen rejects them. His recommended hypothesis is: “*everything is in flux – that all representational devices can be revised, and there’s no natural end point to conceptual engineering*” [p. 194, his emphasis].

18.2 Chalmers on Bedrock Concepts

Chalmers is a supporter of “bedrock concepts” *a la* Cappelen, “expressions that cannot be engineered” [p. 194].

Chalmers’ tentative list of bedrock concepts. Chalmers’ candidates include: phenomenal concepts, normative concepts, logical or mathematical concepts, spatiotemporal concepts, indexical concepts, concepts of explanation; furthermore, secondary qualities, intentional states, freedom.

(Chalmers, 2011, p.552)

How to find? Asymmetrical structure among the space of disputes.

Cappelen does not agree. [p. 195]

18.3 Eklund on Normative Limits

Eklund: we cannot engineer normative concepts. According to Eklund, we cannot allow the very normative concepts (e.g. ‘right’ ‘good’ or ‘ought’) being used in the process of conceptual engineering to be changed. “[O]ur thinnest normative concepts are irreplaceable” [p. 197].

Cappelen’s starting lines. Cappelen hesitatedly offers three quick counterarguments towards Eklund.

Comments by Endo

References

Cappelen, H. (2018). *Fixing Language: An Essay on Conceptual Engineering*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom.

Chalmers, D. J. (2011). *Verbal Disputes*, volume 120.