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 Chalmers [18.2] and Elkund [18.3] respectively.

Keywords: Chalmers, Eklund

18.1 The Limits of Conceptual Engineering?

No limit of conceptual engineering. 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' tenative list of bedrock concepts. Chalmers' candidates include: phenomenal concepts, normative concepts, logical or mathematical concepts, spatiotemporal concepts, indexical concepts, cocepts of explanation; furthermore, secondary qualities, intentional states, freedom.

(Chalmers, 2011, p.552)

Asymmetrical structure among the space of disputes. Chalmers observes an asymmetrical structure within the space of disputes. For instance, 'ought' is more basic than 'murder'. Chalmers did not give a conclusive argument but believes his idea is "a promising working hypothesis". (Chalmers, 2011, p.548-549)

Cappelen does not follow Chalmers. [p. 195] Cappelen suggests another conjecture instead of Chalmers's. Cappelen criticizes empirical nature of Chalmers' conjecture. It may capture how disputes end (reaching the bedrock concepts) and how they start (with no bedrock concept). We need more detailed historical evidence to import empirical guesses to (meta?)philosophical disputes.

Cappelen's conjecture. Cappelen suggests: no such a pattern appears in the actual history of philosophy. Also, Cappelen (again!) points out that the very terminology of Chalmers (e.g. the structure of a debate, bottoming out) must confront debate. In conclusion, we shoul adopt the hypothesis: "It's conceptual engineering all the way down" [p. 195].

18.3 Eklund on Normative Limits

Eklund: we cannot engineer normative concepts. According to Eklund, we cannot revise some normative concepts (e.g. 'right' 'good' or 'ought') being used in the process of conceptual engineering. "[O]ur thinnest normative concepts are irreplaceable"[p. 197].

Eklund's dilemma. "Either there is this further ineffable question or we end up embracing a conclusion that is "antithetical to the spirit of realism". Sure. this is wrong, but not wrong*!

Cappelen's responses. Cappelen offers three quick and moderate counterarguments towards Eklund.

1. Realists do not care the second horn of the dilemma.

2. Undetective disagreement?

3. Beyond the semantic values.

Comments by Endo

References

Cappelen, H. (2018). *Fixing Language: An Essay on Conceptual Engineering*.
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