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Conceptual engineering

Conceptual engineering is a field in analytic philosophy that focuses on how to best assess and improve our conceptual schemes and repertoires. One of its key features is its normative agenda: conceptual engineers aim to prescribe which concepts we *ought to* have and use, instead of merely describing those we have and use. The most standard reference in the literature is to Rudolf Carnap's notion of explication as a precursory method of conceptual engineering for theoretical purposes.[1][2]

Conceptual engineering can be understood in terms of its three components: design, which is about the normative improvement of our concepts; implementation, which is about the actual uptake of the prescribed concepts via advocacy strategies; and evaluation, which is about the quality assessment of our concepts along different dimensions (explanatory, epistemic, moral, etc.).[3] Current work in conceptual engineering goes in two main directions. Case study research on the one hand, focuses on specific concepts and then advocates for specific ameliorations.[4][5] Metaphilosophical research, on the other hand, explicitly theorizes conceptual engineering as a philosophical method and deals with its foundational issues.[6][7]

A common objection to conceptual engineering argues that instead of revising and improving existing concepts, conceptual engineering creates *new* concepts incongruent with the old ones, and is thus philosophically irrelevant or merely changing the subject.[8] One response to this objection is to take a functionalist view of conceptual engineering, such that so long as the new concepts serve the same *function* as the old concepts, conceptual engineering preserves the relevant subject matter and no problematic discontinuity obtains.[9][10][11] Another response, invoked by Herman Cappelen, argues that the relevant continuity to be preserved in conceptual engineering is that of *topics*; as long as there is continuity in the topics our concepts address, Cappelen argues, there is continuity in our philosophical inquiry even as the intension and extension of concepts change.[6][10]

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External links

- Supplement to Rudolf Carnap: D. Methodology (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/carnap/methodology.html) at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- PhilPapers Entry on conceptual engineering (https://philpapers.org/browse/conceptual-engineering)
- YouTube Channel "Conceptual Engineering" (https://www.youtube.com/c/ConceptualEngineering)
- ConceptLab – University of Oslo (https://conceptualengineering.info)