

# *Deciding What We Mean: The Philosophy of Conceptual Engineering*

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## *Course Topic*

Philosophers often present themselves as engaging in conceptual analysis – the act of analyzing important concepts (such as knowledge, free-will, responsibility, and consciousness) to resolve the philosophical puzzles to which they give rise. But why stop at merely describing our concepts? If our concepts give rise to philosophical problems, should we not be operating with better concepts? Conceptual engineers suggest that instead of merely analyzing our concepts we should aim to improve or replace them. By doing so, they suggest, we can resolve philosophical problems and even promote a more just society. This course will cover arguments for and against conceptual engineering both inside and outside of philosophy. We will also consider the nature of conceptual engineering, together with the practical and normative issues faced by the would-be conceptual engineer.

## *Course Activities*

Your task every week will be to read the set readings, watch the weekly lecture, and engage in class discussion utilizing the discussion forums (specific instructions for discussions will be uploaded on Canvas). The lectures are sometimes a little long - in these cases, it is fine (and recommended) to watch them in more than one sitting. Each week there will also be a number of 'suggested readings'. These are readings that will be useful for you to read if you wish to delve deeper into the topic (especially if you choose to write your essay on the topic). There is no expectation that you read the suggested readings.

## *Assessment*

The primary assessment for this course will be an essay. For undergraduates, the word limit will be 3000 words, for graduate students the word limit will be 4000 words. Discussion forum posts

will not be formally assessed. However, you will need to complete the discussion forum tasks on at least 5 of the 8 weeks in order to receive a passing grade.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Please note that the language for this course is English. The teaching will be conducted in English, and your essays and discussion forum posts should be written in English.

## *Schedule*

*Note: This schedule is preliminary and subject to change.*

### **Week 1: What Is Conceptual Engineering? (2023-08-28 )**

(a) Required Reading:

- i. Cappelen – Conceptual Engineering – The Master Argument.
- ii. Plunkett – Which Concepts Should We use?

(b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Chalmers – Verbal Disputes.
- ii. Haslanger – Race and Gender: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?
- iii. Cappelen – Fixing Language Ch 2

### **Week 2: Metalinguistic Negotiation (2023-09-04)**

(a) Required Reading:

- i. Plunkett & Sundell – Metalinguistic negotiation & Speaker error
- ii. Armstrong – The Problem of Lexical Innovation (sects 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5)
- iii. Cappelen – Fixing Language – Ch 15 sect 3 & 4 (emphasize critical aspects – don't worry about not knowing about Cappelen's austerity framework)

(b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Armstrong – The Problem of Lexical Innovation sect 6
- ii. Cappelen – Fixing Language – The rest of Ch 15
- iii. Una Stonjic – Non Negotiable Meanings (video)
- iv. Plunkett & Sundell - Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms
- v. Mankowitz – How to Have a Metalinguistic Dispute

### **Week 3: Targets for Conceptual Engineering (2023-09-11)**

(a) Required Reading:

- i. Haslanger: Going On, Not in the Same Way
- ii. Nado: Classification procedures as the targets of conceptual engineering

## (b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Flocke: How to Engineer a Concept.
- ii. Isaac: What Concept of 'Concept' for Conceptual Engineering?
- iii. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Concepts

**Week 4: Hermeneutical Injustice (2023-09-18)**

## (a) Required Reading:

- i. Fricker: Epistemic Injustice, ch 7.
- ii. Fraser: The Ethics of Metaphor.

## (b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Falbo: Hermeneutical Injustice: Distortion and Conceptual Aptness.
- ii. Anderson: Epistemic Injustice and the Philosophy of Race.

**Week 5: The 'Should' of Conceptual Engineering (2023-09-25)**

## (a) Required Reading:

- i. Simion – The 'Should' of Conceptual Engineering.
- ii. Queloz – Function-Based Conceptual Engineering and the Authority Problem.

## (b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Dasgupta – Realism and the Absence of Value.
- ii. Perez Carballo – Conceptual Evaluation: Epistemic.
- iii. Queloz – The Points of Concepts – Their Types, Tensions, and Connections.
- iv. Simion & Kelp - Conceptual Engineering - Function First

**Week 6: The Implementation Challenge (2023-10-02)**

## (a) Required Reading:

- i. Koslow: Meaning Change and Changing Meaning.
- ii. Pinder: Conceptual Engineering, Metasemantic Externalism, and Speaker Meaning.

## (b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Deutsch: Speaker's Reference, Stipulation, & a Dilemma for Conceptual Engineers (+ exchange with Koch).
- ii. Cappelen: Fixing Language ch 7.
- iii. Koch: Externalism, Conceptual Engineering, and the Implementation Challenge.
- iv. Polhaus Jr: Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice – Toward a Theory of "Wilful Hermeneutical Ignorance".

**Week 7: The Strawsonian Challenge (2023-10-09)**

## (a) Required Reading:

- i. Cappelen – Fixing language, ch 9 & 10.
- ii. Sundell – Changing the Subject.

## (b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Cappelen – Fixing Language, ch 11.
- ii. Haslanger – How Not to Change the Subject.
- iii. Brun – Explication as a Method of Re-Engineering.
- iv. Strawson – Carnap’s Views on Constructed Systems Versus Natural Languages in Analytic Philosophy.

**Week 8: Conceptual Disruption (2023-10-16)**

## (a) Required Reading:

- i. Sterken: Linguistic Intervention & Transformative Communicative Disruptions.
- ii. Löhr: Linguistic Interventions and the Ethics of Conceptual Disruption.

## (b) Optional/Suggested Reading:

- i. Kitsik: Epistemic Paternalism via Conceptual Engineering.