

**Online Workshop: Conceptual Engineering and Pragmatism**  
**8-9 July 2021**

Time CET	Day 1
10:00- 10:15	Welcome
10:15- 11:00	<p><b>Oscar Westerblad</b>            Conceptual genealogy and conceptual engineering in Dewey's genetic method            and reconstructive pragmatism            Chair: Céline Henne</p>
11:00- 11:45	<p><b>Jonas Raab</b>            Pragmatic elements in explication — and how they help conceptual            engineering            Chair: Céline Henne</p>
11:45- 12:15	Break
12:15- 13:00	<p><b>Neil Gascoigne</b>            Pragmatism, Conceptual Engineering, and the Ethics of Controversy: A            Fragment            Chair: Yvonne Huetter-Almerigi</p>
13:00- 14:30	Lunch Break
14:30- 15:15	<p><b>Tullio Viola</b>            Precedents and open Texture. Genealogical strategies in pragmatism            Chair: Matteo Santarelli</p>
15:15- 16:00	<p><b>Maria Regina Brioschi</b>            Peirce's ethics of terminology, and the pragmatic maxim applied to conceptual            engineering            Chair: Matteo Santarelli</p>
16:00- 16:30	Break
16:30- 17:15	<p><b>Spencer Albert</b>            American pragmatism and conceptual engineering: C. I. Lewis            Chair: Matthew Shields</p>
17:15- 18:00	<p><b>David Hommen</b>            "Perspicuous representation": Wittgenstein and conceptual engineering            Chair: Matthew Shields</p>

Time CET	Day 2
10:00-10:45	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Takaaki Matsui</b>            Inferentialism, conceptual engineering, and the limits of conceptual revision            Chair: Yvonne Huetter-Almerigi</p>
10:45-11:30	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sigurd Jorem and Guido Loehr</b>            An inferentialist account of conceptual engineering            Chair: Yvonne Huetter-Almerigi</p>
11:30-12:00	Break
12:00-12:45	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Katja Stepec</b>            Pragmatist Anti-representationalism and Topic Stability            Chair: Céline Henne</p>
12:45-14:15	Lunch break
14:15-15:00	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Matteo Santarelli</b>            The Pragmatist Theory of Value as a Conceptual Engineering Project            Chair: Oscar Westerblad</p>
15:00-15:45	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Matthieu Queloz</b>            Whence the Authority of Concepts? Cambridge Pragmatism and Genealogical Reverse-Engineering            Chair: Oscar Westerblad</p>
15:45-16:15	Break
16:15-17:00	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Jared Riggs &amp; Elizabeth Cantalamessa</b>            Two pragmatist approaches to conceptual engineering            Chair: Céline Henne</p>
17:00-17:45	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Matthew Shields</b>            Pragmatism, Representationalism, and Conceptual Engineering            Chair: Yvonne Huetter-Almerigi</p>
17:45-18:00	Closing remarks

## Abstracts Day 1

### **Oscar Westerblad (University of Cambridge): “Conceptual genealogy and conceptual engineering in Dewey’s genetic method and reconstructive pragmatism”**

John Dewey was explicitly concerned with reconstruction in philosophy and used a genealogical method to motivate this reconstructive project. In this paper, I aim to do two things: first, make clear what Dewey’s genetic and reconstructive methods are and how they work; and second, show how these methodological views contribute to current issues discussed in relation to revisionary methodologies in philosophy — like conceptual engineering, amelioration, and explication. I begin by giving an overview of Dewey’s methods, showing how he makes use of the genetic method to diagnose the social origins of philosophical problems, warning us to not take this intellectual heritage for granted. This clears the ground for his reconstruction of philosophy. I then look at how Dewey’s views can be useful in thinking about current issues in conceptual engineering. Here, I look at recent discussions of the relation between conceptual genealogy and conceptual engineering, arguing that Dewey demonstrates that these methods are more than complementary: it is only through the lens of the genetic method that reconstruction makes sense in the first place. I make some further suggestions for how Dewey can help us understand these current issues and also how this helps us understand Dewey’s own project in a new light.

### **Jonas Raab (University of Manchester): “Pragmatic Elements in Explication -- and how they help Conceptual Engineering”**

The general idea of this paper is to suggest explication as foundations of conceptual engineering in order to (i) motivate engineering and (ii) resolve issues pertaining to conceptual engineering. In particular, I argue that the pragmatic elements of explication are the driving force behind the resolution of problems regarding conceptual engineering. In particular, I develop my conception of explication, called tolerant explication, which is based on and an improvement of Carnap’s and Quine’s conceptions—both of which have pragmatic elements. Moreover, the pragmatic elements of those two conceptions are quite different as they apply to different parts of the explication process. Tolerant explication is itself pragmatic as its sole adequacy criterion is the preservation of the explicandum’s utility. I argue that explication also needs to be pragmatic in order to resolve problems for conceptual engineering. As such, tolerant explication can serve as foundations of conceptual engineering.

### **Neil Gascoigne (Royal Holloway, University of London): “Pragmatism, Conceptual Engineering, and the Ethics of Controversy: A Fragment”**

This paper is an attempt to reconstruct some of the thinking behind the following anonymous fragment: "Characterising programmes like logical positivism and attempts to reduce the ordinary conditional to an elementary logical operation as driven by the conviction that ‘concepts successful for some purposes must be adequate for others,’ Strawson concludes that ‘From such attempts we may learn much; but not by their succeeding. Part of what we have to explain and free ourselves from, in dealing with them, is the undue fascination exercised by formal systems.’ (1963, p. 514). Pragmatists’ only involvement with self-styled Conceptual Engineers (CEs) should be to name and disdain the “adventitious philosophical puritanism” that motivates their efforts to gather projects of ethical and political amelioration to their banner.

### **Tullio Viola (Maastricht University): “Precedents and open Texture. Genealogical strategies in pragmatism”**

In my talk, I aim to bring out the contours of a hitherto underappreciated pragmatist line of thought about conceptual change. This line of thought emphasizes the value of a genealogical approach to concepts both at the descriptive level (how to study conceptual change) and at the normative level (how to engineer concepts). Following Susan Haack, we can trace the origins of the line of thought in which I am interested to two founding figures of classical pragmatism, Charles S. Peirce and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Peirce focussed on the philosophy of science and Holmes on the philosophy of law. But both insisted on the importance of studying semantic growth both as a normative and as a descriptive enterprise, on account of the “vague” or “open-textured” character of scientific/legal concepts. Moreover, they both advocated a pragmatic definition of concepts. What propels conceptual change, according to them, is the attempt to take into account either the experimental consequences of a concept (Peirce) or the precedents and real-life cases out of which a given piece of legislation grows (Holmes). Finally, I will argue that, while Peirce and Holmes focussed on cultural domains that are agreement- and progress-oriented, we can apply some of their ideas to studying conceptual change in more conflict-laden spheres of culture as well, such as art, religion, and politics. Taking into account both the writings of neo-pragmatist thinkers and the growing literature on conceptual engineering is instrumental to achieving this goal.

**Maria Regina Brioschi (University of Milano): “Peirce's ethics of terminology, and the pragmatic maxim applied to conceptual engineering”**

The present paper aims to clarify on the one hand to what extent Peirce’s pragmatism is compatible with conceptual engineering, and on the other how the pragmatic method may help frame some burning questions of CE. (1) The first part of the paper paves the way for a comparison between Peirce’s pragmatism and CE. It introduces the general concerns shared by CE and Peirce, and focuses on his “ethics of terminology” and his ameliorative strategies for finding exact concepts. (2) On the basis of the results reached in the first part, the paper proposes a specific application of the pragmatic method to CE, in order to make the latter more effective. If the crucial question of conceptual engineering is: “what do we want a concept to be?”, the pragmatic maxim – indicated by Peirce as “method for the analysis of concepts” (Peirce CP 8.191, 1904 c.) – helps determine what kind of conceptual engineering we want to go for. In this regard, I take into account the differences between de novo engineering and re-engineering (among others, cf. Chalmers 2020) and use Peirce’s pragmatic maxim for assessing their (conceivable) practical effects, so that we can figure out what is the most feasible way to become good conceptual engineers.

**Spencer Albert (University of Toronto): American Pragmatism and Conceptual Engineering: C. I. Lewis**

Two different aims will be pursued in this talk - one historical, and one contemporary. The historical project is to explore C. I. Lewis’ conceptual pragmatism as a possible framework for understanding conceptual engineering projects. In the history of philosophy, Nietzsche and Carnap are most frequently associated with conceptual engineering as a philosophical project. American pragmatists, such as Lewis, have often been overlooked. Hopefully, pointing out the similarities between Lewis’ conceptual pragmatism and current theories of conceptual engineering can help link the two traditions more tightly. The contemporary project is to bring insights from Lewis’ conceptual pragmatism to ongoing debates within conceptual engineering. In *Mind and the World Order* (1929), Lewis provides us with a distinctive picture of conceptual revision and its justifiability – including an anti-representational theory of concepts, a replacement account of conceptual change, and a picture of conceptual engineering as reality-construction. Looking at each of these topics in relation to the existing literature, I hope to illuminate how Lewis’ conceptual pragmatism offers us new ways to think about key issues in conceptual engineering today.

**David Hommen (Trier University): “Perspicuous representation – Wittgenstein and conceptual engineering”**

The later Wittgenstein is famous for his credo that, in order to solve conceptual problems, one should dispense with all explanation and resort to a mere description of the workings of our language (Philosophical Investigations, § 109): to achieve clarity of the “depth grammar” (ibid., § 664) of expressions that cause us troubles in philosophy by disentangling the rules that govern their use. This methodological approach is encapsulated in Wittgenstein’s concept of a “perspicuous representation” (ibid., § 122).

In this talk, I argue that Wittgenstein’s methodology of perspicuous representation can be fruitfully regarded as a form of conceptual engineering. Perspicuous representations serve to provide innovative synopses of certain semantic phenomena. To that end, they involve analogical or metaphorical descriptions which are meant to sharpen our eyes for certain internal relations between our concepts, which is closely related to the phenomenon of ‘aspect perception’ (cf. ibid., p. 193) in the contemplation of art.

Perspicuous representations thus have a constructive side to them which is expressive of certain pragmatic ends. They are not merely reflections of an established linguistic practice but constitute integral moves in the language games that define the very concepts under consideration. This endows them with a regulative power that not only enforces the received standard but also transcends the status quo. A perspicuous representation may open up novel fields of application for a given concept, flag boundaries of sense, draw connections to other concepts and, in all this, contributes to the shaping of the relevant conceptual rules.

## **Abstracts Day 2**

**Takaaki Matsui (Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo): “Inferentialism, conceptual engineering, and the limits of conceptual revision”**

In *Fixing Language*, Herman Cappelen raises both philosophical and historical objections to inferentialism with respect to conceptual revision: that inferentialism is a static framework, not constructed to account for constant evolution and revision of concepts; and that there has been little effort in the inferentialist tradition to address the problem of the limits of conceptual revision, i.e., the problem of distinguishing conceptual revision from conceptual replacement. The aim of this talk is to respond to both of these objections to inferentialism by reconstructing Wilfrid Sellars’s account of conceptual change. Sellars well recognizes the importance of taking into account how languages change and does address the problem of the limits of conceptual revision within an inferentialist framework when he discusses conceptual changes in scientific revolutions. His account of conceptual change, I argue, provides a useful basis for the more systematic development of a pragmatist approach to conceptual engineering in general and to the problem of the limits of conceptual change in particular.

**Sigurd Jorem (University of Oslo) & Guido Loehr (Radboud University Nijmegen)**

In recent literature on conceptual engineering, the term ‘representational device’ has been gaining traction as a way of denoting what is being engineered. However, as has long been recognized in the pragmatist tradition, there is more to thought and talk than representation. We make a case for viewing conceptual engineering as a practice of constructing and revising inferential devices. Specifically, we propose to view conceptual engineering through the lens of a Brandomian account of concepts. We thus conceive of a concept in terms of what counts as a reason for applying that concept to a particular, and what applying the concept to a particular counts as a reason for.

We argue that a concept’s having consequences of application is key to our rationale for engaging in its revision. Our rationale for engaging in conceptual engineering is lost if we

assume an austere view of what is being engineered, as something that only has an extension, or only an intension and extension. Only in the light of having consequences of application does it matter what it takes for a concept to apply to a particular. The view offers a plausible interpretation of exercises in conceptual engineering. In addition, it promises to make better sense of the limits of revision and of what it is for a concept to be good; echoed, but not fully spelled out by functionalist approaches.

**Katja Stepec (Independent): “Pragmatist anti-representationalism, topic continuity and holism”**

Successful conceptual engineering aims at improving concepts. In this context, topic continuity is important to provide a benchmark for evaluation or to avoid a semantic drift. Classic approaches in conceptual engineering focus on semantic aspects and often provide topic continuity within a metasemantic framework which is externalist and representational (e.g. Capellen 2018, Sawyer 2020). In contrast, linguistic pragmatists focus on the use of expressions while either questioning or flatly denying representationalist assumptions (Rorty 1979). Robert Brandom's attempts (1984) to rescue representational functions in the context of pragmatism lead to further challenges. Brandom uses a holistic framework which includes a semantic inferentialism and a social holism. Holism seems to be not suitable for conceptual engineering in general and topic continuity in particular. Inferentialism questions the application of concepts, prioritizing sentences as premises and consequences of claims; furthermore semantic holism implies indeterminacy of meaning and meaning fluidity (e.g. Esfeld 2002) which is a threat for topic continuity.

In order to reconcile holism and conceptual engineering, I ask if Brandom's instruments of substitution-inferences and de-re ascriptions might be suitable to pick out single terms and provide a tracking device for quality control in conceptual engineering. The pragmatist challenge for the role of representations in topic continuity leads, via Brandom's approach, to the overall question, if and under what conditions non-foundationalist holism, which implies a subordinate role for single terms and meaning fluidity, allows for conceptual engineering at all.

**Matteo Santarelli (University of Bologna): “The Pragmatist Theory of Value as a Conceptual Engineering Project”**

In this paper, I will discuss pragmatist value theory as a project of conceptual engineering. Specifically, I will discuss Hans Joas' *The Genesis of Values*, i.e., the most ambitious attempt at a pragmatist redefinition of the concept of value. I will focus on two aspects of Joas' work. First, I will attempt to show how Joas' theory primarily fulfils an ameliorative project of a theoretical nature, and how it nevertheless carries important ethical and political consequences. Second, I will propose a comparison between Joas' affirmative genealogy, and the idea of genealogy as conceptual reverse-engineering (Queloz 2021).

**Matthieu Queloz (University of Oxford): “How Pragmatist Conceptual Engineering Solves the Authority Problem”**

In this paper, I identify a central problem for conceptual engineering: the problem of showing concept-users why they should recognise the authority of the concepts proposed by engineers. I argue that this authority problem cannot generally be solved by appealing to the increased precision, consistency, or other theoretical virtues of engineered concepts. Outside contexts in which we anyway already aim to realise theoretical virtues, solving the authority problem requires that engineering should take a functional turn and attend to the functions of concepts. But such a turn then presents us with the problem of how to specify a concept's function. I argue that extant solutions to this function specification problem

are unsatisfactory for engineering purposes, because the functions they identify fail to reliably bestow authority on concepts, and hence fail to solve the authority problem. What is required is an authoritative notion of conceptual function: an account of the functions of concepts which simultaneously shows why concepts fulfilling such functions should be recognised as having authority. I offer an account that meets this combination of demands by specifying the functions of concepts in terms of how they tie in with our present concerns.

**Jared Riggs (University of Toronto) & Elizabeth Cantalamessa (University of Miami):  
“Two pragmatist approaches to conceptual engineering”**

Our aim in this paper is to argue that the kind of straightforward consequentialism which is often endorsed by pragmatist-leaning conceptual engineers ought to be rejected, for reasons familiar from the history of pragmatist approaches to belief. Much as some earlier pragmatists, like James and Rorty, thought that a belief's having good consequences could count in favor of holding it, many contemporary pragmatists about CE think that we ought to use whichever concepts would have the best consequences. However, we argue that settling questions of conceptual choice with such pragmatic criteria both runs counter to ordinary practice and is probably not, in the long run, the best way to achieve our interests. Similar lessons were learned in the case of pragmatism about belief. In ordinary practice, the fact that a belief might have good consequences cannot be cited as a reason in favor of having it; and this general policy of rejecting pragmatic reasons for individual beliefs is probably on the whole best (since, for instance, it helps us coordinate our beliefs, rather than individuals each believing whatever has the best consequences for them personally). In the same way, the fact that applying a concept in one way rather than another would have good consequences cannot ordinarily be cited as a reason to do so. We argue that this general policy of rejecting pragmatic reasons for conceptual choice is also on the whole best, even from a consequentialist point of view.

**Matthew Shields (University College Dublin): “Pragmatism, Representationalism, and Conceptual Engineering”**

Max Deutsch has outlined a formidable challenge to the way many philosophers understand both the project of conceptual engineering and its value as a philosophical methodology. Deutsch argues that prevailing views of conceptual engineering wrongly assume that the target of philosophical analysis are concepts, rather than phenomena themselves. He then argues that conceptual engineers face a related dilemma: either they are unable to implement their vision of changing the meaning of a term (because this project involves acts of stipulation that do not have this capacity) or they are describing an intellectual exercise that is already pervasive but trivial. In this paper, I argue that Deutsch's overall account assumes a representationalist account of language in general and philosophical analysis in particular, and I use Deutsch's account to contrast what I take to be the crucial pragmatist, anti-representationalist dimension of conceptual engineering, drawing on the work of Huw Price. I then criticize various aspects of Deutsch's representationalist approach to philosophical analysis, especially his account of the relevant speech acts and his assumption that our words bear direct reference relations to corresponding phenomena. But I also explain the challenges facing the pragmatist, anti-representationalist understanding of conceptual engineering I outline. What should emerge are two contrasting metaphysical pictures and their corresponding strengths and vulnerabilities: a view of philosophy as consisting in sets of assertions that aim to correctly represent extralinguistic phenomena and a pragmatist view of philosophy as consisting, at least in part, in non-assertoric speech acts that aim to generate more useful ways of talking and thinking.