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The Role of Narratives in Conceptual Engineering

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ABSTRACT: Conceptual engineering is a proposed philosophical method that has generated a significant amount of interest in analytic philosophy in recent years. It represents a fast-moving field of research which is of relevance to various other disciplines. However, the connections between the framework of conceptual engineering on the one hand and narratives on the other have been largely left unexplored. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to sketch a starting point for the inquiry into the intersections between conceptual engineering and narratives. To this end the paper will give an answer to the following question: Is there a role that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering? I give an affirmative answer to this question by identifying four roles that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering: a (1) descriptive role, (2) normative role, (3) engineering role, and (4) exploratory role. The prospects for narratives within the framework of conceptual engineering remains to be an exciting idea warranting further examination.

KEYWORDS: concepts, conceptual engineering, conceptual exploration, metalinguistic negotiation, narratives

1. Introduction

Narratives represent a rich field of research in contemporary aesthetics that generates broad interest and significance (McGregor 2023, Moss-Wellington 2019). Besides being an important topic in contemporary aesthetics, inquiry into this field also has potential to produce relevant and interesting outcomes for a significant number of other philosophical branches, such as ethics, political philosophy, epistemology, and metaphysics (Grgić 2024, Nussbaum 1990). In this paper I will discuss the role that narratives can play in philosophical methodology. Specifically, I will try to apply the insights from the literature on narratives to conceptual engineering. Therefore, this paper represents a contribution towards the research at the intersection between narratives and conceptual engineering, a combination that shows great potential but has been largely ignored as of yet. In this work, I consider the following research question: *Is there a role that narratives can play within the*

framework of conceptual engineering? This question is both important and interesting as an affirmative answer would be of benefit to both narratives and conceptual engineering. Conceptual engineering would, on the one hand, benefit from the access to another methodological layer thereby becoming more fine-grained and fruitful. Narratives, on the other hand, would gain even greater significance and recognition in contemporary philosophical discussions due to the interest surrounding conceptual engineering. In this paper I show that there are four roles that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering: a (1) descriptive role, (2) normative role, (3) engineering role, and (4) exploratory role. To this end the paper is structured in the following way: in chapter 2 I give a brief overview of conceptual engineering, its two main components and motivation. Chapter 3 presents the understanding of narratives with which we will work in this paper. Following that, chapter 3.1. points to the descriptive role that narratives have in virtue of their chains of causality. Chapter 3.2. establishes the links between narratives and metalinguistic negotiations, thereby pointing towards a normative role for narratives. Next, in chapter 3.3. I point towards the possibility of an engineering role of narratives which is primarily due to the psychological account of the nature of concepts. Chapter 3.4. presents the exploratory role of narratives in the context of conceptual exploration, where chains of causality again play a key role. Finally, I conclude the paper in chapter 4 by giving an affirmative answer to the research question.

2. Conceptual Engineering

Conceptual engineering is a method that has generated a significant amount of interest in analytic philosophy in recent years. As the name suggests, conceptual engineering takes great interest into our concepts.[1] If we take concepts to be the building blocks of our thought and talk then we have a strong *prima facie* reason to make sure that the concepts we have are the right ones for our specific purposes. The precise nature of concepts remains a disputed and controversial issue.[2] However, I settle here on the following account of concepts, provided by Edouard Machery:

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[1] In contemporary conceptual engineering literature there is a debate regarding the *objects* of conceptual engineering: what exactly are they, how do we go about engineering them? Authors like Herman Cappelen (2018) claim that we should, instead of concepts, talk about representational devices. Others, like Amie Thomasson (2021) argue that the proper objects of our engineering should be words. In this paper I will use the term 'concept' while refering to the objects of conceptual engineering primarily because of the ease of exposition while remaining agnostic regarding the 'true' nature of concepts, words, or representational devices.

[2] See Margolis & Laurence 2023; Machery 2009; Cappelen 2018.

> I take concepts to be psychological entities, not abstract entities (Machery 2005, 2009, 2010).
> A concept of a dog is a way of thinking about dogs (…). Furthermore, I take them to be bodies of information about individuals, classes, substances, or events. That is, a concept consists in a subset of people's belief-like states (which I will call "bliefs" since some of these states are only belief-like) about an individual, a class, a substance, or an event-type. A concept of dog is a body of information about dogs (…) (Machery 2017: 210).

We can, according to Machery, understand concepts to be psychological entities, they are bodies of information about individuals, classes, substances, or events. What exactly do we mean under the label 'bodies of information', how do we understand such information? Machery explains this in the following:

> As noted above, concepts are a subset of people's bliefs. This subset differs from the remainder of people's bliefs about the reference of the concept in that it plays a particular role in thought and in people's understanding of the predicate lexicalizing this concept (…). On my view, a concept is retrieved by default from long-term memory to play a role in cognition and language understanding (Machery, 2009, 2015).
> Bliefs about x that are not part of a concept of x (background bliefs or information) are not retrieved by default. (Machery 2017: 210–211)

Concepts are, under this picture, a type of default information. Another characteristic of default information is that it is *quickly* retrieved from long-term memory (Machery 2017: 211). Following Machery, I take concepts to be bodies of default information about individuals, classes, substances, or events.

Now we turn to conceptual engineering. Manuel Gustavo Isaac, Steffen Koch and Ryan Nefdt think of conceptual engineering in the following way: "Conceptual engineering is a branch of philosophy concerned with the process of assessing and improving our concepts. It is motivated by the fact that, sometimes, our conceptual schema must be ameliorated to attain certain beneficial consequences, which may be social, political, or otherwise" (2022: 1). David Chalmers says of conceptual engineering: "conceptual engineering is the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating concepts" (Chalmers 2020: 2). Finally, Herman Cappelen and David Plunkett, similarly to Chalmers, thinks of conceptual engineering as consisting of the following three parts: "(i) The assesment of representational devices, (ii) reflections on and proposal for how to improve representational devices, and (iii) efforts to implement the proposed improvements" (Cappelen and Plunkett 2020: 3). Thus, conceptual engineering amounts to the practice of assessing and improving our concepts that are defective and/or inconsistent.

Conceptual engineering, as it is construed here, consists both of a descriptive and a normative component. I go over what both components plausibly consist of. Then I show that narratives can substantially contribute to work being done in both components.

One of the reasons why conceptual engineering has generated such an interest in recent literature is to be found in the 'engineering' label. This is because such a label helps to position philosophy as a kind of problem-solving enterprise (Isaac, Koch, Nefdt 2022: 2). Furthermore, this type of problem-solving enterprise promises to be applicable not only in philosophy, but in fields such as law, psychology, biology and others where engineering of key concepts plays a prominent role. Isaac, Koch, and Nefdt (2022: 3) note that we can understand the 'engineering' label figuratively or literally. If we choose the literal characterization of the 'engineering' label, then we must offer an account of the engineering process. We are, in other words, trying to identify the basic components of which the process of conceptual engineering consists of (Isaac, Koch, Nefdt 2022: 3). For instance, Chalmers does this explicitly when he concludes that conceptual engineering consists of the design stage, implementation stage, and the evaluation stage (Chalmers 2020: 2). Take the evaluation stage. Chalmers says that, when we talk about the evaluation stage, "what's key is the evaluation of how good these concepts are in themselves and for certain purposes, to see how well they play key roles" (Chalmers 2020: 2). Isaac, Koch, and Nefdt talk about the assessment component, but they convey a strikingly similar idea: "The assessment component consists of assessing the functional quality of a given representational device, or the degree to which it successfully fulfils its function" (2022: 3). The idea here is simple. Before we can judge a concept to be defective and before we start to engineer it, we must first take stock of the work that the concept under consideration is doing for us (or failing to do for us). When we are engaged in the evaluation stage, we are trying to evaluate the degree to which some concept is fulfilling its intended role (or failing to fulfil its intended role). Once we have identified the way in which a concept performs relative to a certain aim or goal, we can then judge whether the concept needs further engineering. All of this is to be done in the evaluation stage.

Someone who is interested in developing a literal interpretation of the 'engineering' label must therefore offer an analysis of the evaluation stage. The first step in the evaluation stage must consist of a layer of description. Before we can hope to ameliorate certain parts of our conceptual repertoire, we must first provide an accurate and exhaustive description of the ways in which we use our concepts. Before we can judge a concept to be defective, we must engage in descriptive conceptual work, to determine "(...) the contours of our conceptual scheme, the rules that govern our concepts, and/or

relations among our concepts" (Thomasson 2017: 104–105). This would be the kind of work that would be done in the descriptive component of conceptual engineering.

An extremely important part of conceptual engineering is situated within the normative component, i.e. the part in which we are considering the question *What concepts* should *we use?*, as opposed to the descriptive question *What concepts* do *we use?* It is this role that shapes conceptual engineering as a new and exciting methodology in contemporary analytic philosophy. We can outline the normative role of conceptual engineering through the notion of *metalinguistic negotiations*.

What are metalinguistic negotiations? Metalinguistic negotiations are a type of metalinguistic dispute in which the disputants each *use* rather than *mention* a term to convey a view regarding what they think is the proper usage of the term. In other words, a metalinguistic negotiation concerns the question of what a word *should* mean and how it *should* be used, rather than what it *does* mean or how it *is* used (Plunkett 2015: 837–838). Plunkett offers the following example. Imagine we have two speakers, Anna and Dan, who are engaged in a dispute related to golf, where Dan utters (4a) and Anna utters (4b):

> "(4) (a) That hole that we just played together was hard.
> (b) No way. That wasn't hard." (Plunkett 2015: 839)

What should be obvious is the fact that, in this example, the dispute does *not* arise over facts about current usage or any other type of descriptive facts. As Plunkett notes:

> Suppose that Anna and Dan just played that hole together, and that they both are basically equally as skilled at golf. We can also here stipulate that they each played the hole equally well. Given all of that, now ask: what is going on in this dispute? A natural suggestion here is this: they are arguing about how they *should* set the threshold for 'hard' in this context. (Plunkett 2019: 839)

Metalinguistic negotiations represent a normative metalinguistic dispute concerning word usage (Plunkett 2015: 837–838). As such it is of great interest in debates concerning conceptual engineering, as we have already noted the importance of the normative component in said method. For instance, Cappelen explicitly claims that Plunkett and Sundell "(...) present views on conceptual engineering" (Cappelen 2018: 163). The links between metalinguistic negotiations and conceptual engineering consist in the following: both are concerned with the normative question 'Which words *should* we use?', both assume that word meanings can be negotiated or otherwise modified, both would agree that facts about current usage of a

particular word need not weigh heavily on normative considerations regarding that word. We therefore see that metalinguistic negotiations and conceptual engineering are both closely linked because normative issues are at the core of both projects.

An underlying assumption that is present in the above-mentioned definitions is the idea that our concepts can be defective in various ways. If this is so, then we have reason to be alarmed (at least if we subscribe to the view that concepts do indeed represent the building blocks of our thought and language, or if we assign to them at least a minimal degree of importance). There is reason to believe that, if we suspect that a certain part of our conceptual scheme is deficient, then we must ameliorate said deficiencies before we dive into further theorizing (e.g. Cappelen 2018: 47). Therefore, the importance of conceptual engineering consists in the promise that it can offer us ways in which we can identify and ameliorate defective concepts. Thus, it presents a first step prior to any type of serious theorizing.

3. The Role of Narratives in Conceptual Engineering

Before we delve into the potential role that narratives can play in conceptual engineering, we must first offer some general characteristics of narratives. In his book *Narrative Justice* (2020), Rafe McGregor goes over several definitions of narrative representations. First, he mentions Peter Lamarque's who writes that a story[3] is "the representation of two or more events, real or imaginary, from a point of view, with a degree of structure and connectedness" (Lamarque 2014: 1). Similarly, Noël Carroll claims that "most narratives involve at least two, but generally more, events and/or states of affairs which are related or arranged temporally and causally (where the causation in question may include mental states such as desires, intentions, and motives)" (Carroll 2013: 122). Finally, Gregory Currie thinks that narratives "are distinguished from other representations by what they represent: sustained temporal-causal relations between particulars, especially agents" (Currie 2010: 27).

A common denominator of these definitions is Rafe McGregor's notion of *minimal narrative* which sheds light on the most general characteristics of a narrative:

> *Minimal narrative*: the product of an agent that represents (i) one or more agents and (ii) two or more events which are (iii) connected. (McGregor 2020: 3)

[3] Following McGregor, I will take the terms 'story' and 'narrative' to be synonymous.

In this work I will rely on McGregor's definition of minimal narrative. I would like to emphasize the connection that links two or more events together in a narrative as this will be of central importance for the remainder of this paper. If we want to motivate the idea that narratives can play a role in conceptual engineering, then it is important that the connection between the events portrayed in the narrative is a *causal* one. Wyatt Moss-Wellington situates causality in narratives in the following way:

> I take a broad view of story. Story is a communicative act that specifically implies a chain of causality, and story as we popularly know it is any series of descriptors, transmitted via any sensory means, which can be read as causal, or 'a chain of events in cause–effect relationship occurring in time and space'. (Bordwell and Thompson 2003: 69)
> In effect, stories mimic how we think: due to our necessary abstraction of the world into causal patterns, if we receive any communication from another, we intuitively attempt to unpack its concept of causality. (Moss-Wellington 2019: 2)

Here the notion of a "chain of causality" plays a key role. It helps us identify at least one role that narratives can play in the context of conceptual engineering, what I call the descriptive role. Furthermore, these chains of causality will also help us develop a more fine-grained picture of another role that narratives can play (exploratory role) and will also feature in the engineering role.

To conclude, I take McGregor's notion of minimal narrative to be the one that offers us the most general and important characteristics of narrative representation, with the addition that we characterize the connection between the events portrayed in the narrative as being primarily a causal one.

3.1. The Descriptive Role of Narratives

Can we make use of narratives while engaged in the descriptive component of conceptual engineering? I believe the answer to this question is 'yes': it is here that narratives can contribute to developing a more fine-grained picture of the methodology of conceptual engineering.

To see the way in which narratives can offer their contribution in the descriptive component of conceptual engineering we must remember the way in which we have characterized the notion of a 'narrative'. Specifically, we have introduced the notion of a 'chain of causality'. Such a chain of causality is then thought to link together two or more events that are represented in the narrative. Can such a chain of causality give us insight into the contours of our conceptual scheme, the rules that govern our concepts, and/or relations among our concepts? I think the answer is a provisional 'yes'. Consider the following: imagine we interact with a story that employs

a concept of interest. If such a story implies a chain of causality this chain will also capture several other concepts. This could then be equivalent to an insight into the relations among our concepts. For example, suppose you are interested in offering a descriptive conceptual analysis of the concept of DUTY. You might then consider the film series *The Lord of the Rings* for it represents various chains of causality where the concept of DUTY plays a prominent role. First, we are presented with the character of Samwise Gamgee who exemplifies duty through his unwavering loyalty to Frodo Baggins. Sam volunteers to accompany Frodo in his perilous journey to the land of Mordor where they aim to destroy the One Ring. The narrative of the film series then implies a chain of causality that situates the relationship between Sam and Frodo in various difficult situations that pushes Sam's feelings of duty towards Frodo to it's very limits. For example, in one part of their journey they are ascending flights of treacherous stairs carved into a mountain while being led by the creature Gollum, who acts as their guide to Mordor. Gollum falsely accuses Sam of secretly consuming their provisions, prompting Frodo to dismiss him. On his way down the stairs Sam finds the remnants of the food which Gollum previously threw away with the intent of eroding Frodo's trust in Sam. This discovery renews Sam's determination and leads to his decision to return to Frodo and confront Gollum (Jackson 2001). This chain of causality offers us insight into the relationship that holds between the concept of DUTY and the concepts of BETRAYAL, FRIENDSHIP, SUFFERING, TENACITY and others. This then plausibly constitutes a kind of descriptive conceptual analysis which is of crucial importance for the evaluation stage of conceptual engineering. If this analysis is correct, then we have identified the first role that narratives can play in the framework of conceptual engineering: I will call it the *descriptive role*.

3.2. The Normative Role of Narratives

If we can show that narratives can plausibly contribute to conceptual work being done in the normative component then we will give more credence to the idea that we should incorporate narratives into the methodology of conceptual engineering, while at the same time offering a more fine-grained picture of conceptual engineering itself.

How can we establish a role that narratives can plausibly play in the normative component of conceptual engineering? Here we return to the notion of metalinguistic negotiations. Since conceptual engineering and metalinguistic negotiations are closely linked through their shared normative focus, showing that narratives are relevant to metalinguistic negotiations

would also establish their relevance to the normative component of conceptual engineering.

An example will help us illustrate the role that narratives can play in the normative component of conceptual engineering. Consider first the following quote from Moss-Wellington:

> It is evident not just that we can, but that we do use fiction as an inroad to discuss not only truth claims about fundamental workings of the world around us, but also some of the more complex, conceptual and obscured workings of the world. When an audience exits a film arguing about the way women have been represented, for example, they use the film as groundwork to discuss what is and is not real about the fictional world, and gauge how the filmmakers' perspective may or may not match up with their own experience. (Moss-Wellington 2022: 50)

Here Moss-Wellington points out a simple, yet powerful idea. The claim that we use fiction as an inroad to discuss the fundamental nature of the obscured workings of the world should be uncontroversial. Yet it is powerful in the sense that fiction, understood in this way, represents a proxy through which we can undertake metalinguistic negotiations, which by themselves constitute normative conceptual work.

Let us now focus on the example where Moss-Wellington illustrates a situation where "an audience exits a film arguing about the way women have been represented" (Moss-Wellington 2022: 50). This points us to a connection between narratives and metalinguistic negotiations. Consider the following example. The film *The Danish Girl* is a biographical drama which portrays the life of Einar Wegener, a Danish artist who experiences an awakening regarding his true gender identity. Einar makes the discovery that he is a woman and changes his name to Lili Elbe. Lili Elbe then goes on to receive sex reassignment surgery (Chare 2016: 347).

Imagine now the following situation. Anna and Dan went to the cinema to watch *The Danish Girl*. After the screening of the film, they leave the cinema and enter into the following dispute, with Anna saying (4*a) and Dan (4*b):

> (4*) (a) The portrayal of the woman Lili Elbe in *The Danish Girl* was really interesting.
> (b) No way, Lili Elbe is not a woman, he is a man.

Notice that both (4) and (4*) are an example of a metalinguistic dispute. Notice also that what Plunkett says in the following regarding (4) also holds true for (4*):

> In this case, there aren't antecedently settled facts about what the term 'hard' means that will settle the disagreement between Anna and Dan about proper usage of 'hard' in this context. This is because they are not just trying to conform their

> usage of 'hard' to facts about current usage – whether it is their current usage, of the current usage within some community. Rather, they are arguing about different ways of how they should use the term going forward. The dialogue in (4) is thus an example of a metalinguistic negotiation. (Plunkett 2015: 839–840)

Again, what holds for the dispute regarding 'hard' also holds for the dispute regarding 'woman'. It is quite clear that the central issue that is present in (4*) is how we *should* use the term 'woman' going forward. It is also clear that the disputants convey their views about this issue while *using*, rather than *mentioning* the term in question. All of these are hallmarks of metalinguistic negotiations. If this picture is right narratives represent a kind of potent framework within the boundaries of which disputants can engage in metalinguistic negotiations. One reason for this are the already mentioned complex causalities that are portrayed in narratives. Although facts about current usage are of little to no use to us in the context of metalinguistic negotiations, these types of negotiations are still not conducted in a vacuum. What words we use matters, not least of all because of the role they play in our overall conceptual scheme, what inferences they dispose us to draw etc. These are important factors that we must account for. And this is where narratives can excel. They can help us portray complex causalities which feature the contested term on one hand and the rest of our conceptual scheme on the other. In this way we can weigh the candidate meanings for a term against the backdrop of our current conceptual scheme.

It has been shown that conceptual engineering and metalinguistic negotiations are closely linked through their shared focus on normative questions concerning the proper use of concepts. Despite these similarities metalinguistic negotiations and conceptual engineering represent two different projects: the former concerns metalinguistic disputes while the latter represents a systematic framework for assessing and improving our concepts. However, since both projects are closely linked, we can situate metalinguistic negotiations in the normative component within conceptual engineering. The discussion presented so far shows that narratives represent a proxy through which we can undertake metalinguistic negotiations. This points to the fact that narratives can be of importance for the normative component of conceptual engineering in virtue of being a proxy for metalinguistic negotiations. To conclude: if all of this is right, we have identified a *normative role* that narratives can play in the context of conceptual engineering.

3.3. The Engineering Role of Narratives

So far, we have identified a descriptive and normative role that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering. But we have

thereby not yet exhausted the capacity of narratives to feature in conceptual engineering. To see why we must return to the 'engineering' label. We have already mentioned that one of the reasons why the topic of conceptual engineering has generated so much interest is because of the 'engineering' label. This is because this label positions philosophy as a 'problem-solving enterprise'. One of its significant contributions to human endeavours consists of the identification and amelioration of our defective representational devices or other artifacts: "through conceptual engineering, philosophy aims to deliver workable solutions to tangible problems" (Isaac, Koch, Nefdt 2022: 2). Given the importance of the 'engineering' label it is of significant interest to investigate whether or not narratives can contribute to the engineering process.

Given the understanding of concepts in this paper – namely, as psychological entities – could narratives prove useful in engineering them? Consider first the following quote from Moss-Wellington:

> Because storied communication links information causally, it allows us to 'live' through a narrative. Imagining complex causalities between sensations, stories activate parts of the brain not only used for language processing, but also the sensory, motor and frontal cortices, and areas associated with emotional and social memory, the co-stimulation of which may help us remember the narrative substance by causal association to the narrative's sensation (as in the mnemonic link system). Fiction has the potential to exaggerate conflict and produce a *more memorable situation.* (Moss-Wellington 2022: 49, my emphasis)

Moss-Wellington claims that storied communication has the potential to produce a more memorable situation. This would, again, be partly due to the complex causalities that feature in narratives. This claim is important and useful in the current context because of the following. Remember that we are trying to investigate whether or not narratives can be of use to us while trying to actually engineer our concepts. In the second chapter we presented the view that concepts are a kind of default information about individuals, classes, substances, or events, with one of the characteristics of default information being that it is quickly retrieved from long-term memory. I think that narratives have the potential to be relevant in this context. If Moss-Wellington is right, if narratives really can produce a more memorable situation, then we want to ask the following question: does a more memorable situation lead to a faster retrieval of information? If the answer to this question is affirmative then we have identified one plausible way in which narratives can shape our default information in at least one sense, namely regarding the speed of retrieval. If we want to engineer a concept, for instance, then one of the ways in which we could do it is to change people's belief-like states in such a way that we try to manipulate the speed of

information retrieval that is associated with said belief-like states. If this then led to the information being quickly retrieved from long-term memory, then we have managed to engineer one of the key characteristics of concepts. Granted, the feasibility of this proposal is a matter ultimately to be settled by empirical research, but for the present purposes the logical possibility is interesting enough because it points towards a plausible *engineering role* that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering.

3.4. The Exploratory Role of Narratives

In the context of conceptual engineering an interesting project is to be found in *conceptual exploration* or *innovation*. Consider, for example, the following quote from Eklund: "The concepts we have are just some of all the concepts there are. It would be a miracle if they turned out to be the best ones for all relevant purposes. Hence there is a reason to create new concepts" (Eklund 2024: 5). The idea of conceptual exploration is also present in Cappelen's *Master Argument* through which he tries to motivate the project of conceptual engineering as a whole:

> (1) If W is a word that has meaning M, then there are many similar meanings, M_1, M_2,..., M_n W could have.
> (2) We have no good reason to think that the meaning that W ended up with is the best meaning W could have: there will typically be indefinitely many alternative meanings that would be better meanings for W.
> (3) When we speak, think, and theorize it's important to make sure our words have as good meanings as possible.
> (4) As a corollary: when doing philosophy, we should try to find good meanings for core philosophical terms and they will typically not be the meanings those words as a matter of fact have.
> (5) So no matter what topic a philosopher is concerned with, they should assess and ameliorate the meanings of central terms. (Cappelen 2020: 134–135).

Cappelen's Master Argument is not domain specific, and it serves to motivate conceptual engineering as a general research project (Cappelen 2020: 135). The notion of conceptual exploration plays a key role in motivating conceptual engineering in this manner. The idea is also simple and straightforward: if there are concepts that are better suited for certain goals than the concepts we currently have in our possession, theorists might be missing a great opportunity by not trying to explore the available alternatives.

How can narratives be relevant to the project of conceptual exploration? To answer this question, we must first look at the notion of conceptual exploration in more detail. One integral part of conceptual exploration is investigating the relations of the new with the already established concepts. As

we have mentioned in the discussion regarding metalinguistic negotiations, the words we use matter, not least of all because of the role they play in our overall conceptual scheme, the inferences they dispose us to draw etc. Therefore, if we have made a discovery regarding a new concept, we should investigate the ways in which this concept interacts with our established conceptual scheme: for instance, does it generate inconsistencies and tensions that need to be addressed (by re-engineering the new concept or the problematic parts of our current conceptual scheme)? Let us call this part of conceptual exploration *concept testing*.

I think that narratives represent a fruitful framework or testing ground for new concepts. Take for instance the concept of NEWSPEAK introduced by George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Newspeak is the official language of Oceania, a totalitarian superstate that is ruled under the political system of Ingsoc (English Socialism) and features a prominent cult of personality (Connelly 2018: 140). Newspeak was devised in order to render any thoughts that would be in opposition to the principles of Ingsoc impossible: "The goal of Newspeak is to simplify the English language by reducing the number of words, narrowing the range of thought and limiting or even eliminating the ability to engage in thought crime, thinking or expressing disloyal thoughts" (Connelly 2018: 128). Once the newly formed concept of NEWSPEAK is situated in the context of the novel the author then has the opportunity to explore and investigate the links between NEWSPEAK and other concepts that feature in the novel that are also present in our current conceptual scheme, such as: IDEOLOGY, LANGUAGE, FREEDOM, THOUGHT, etc. Thus, the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* represents a kind of testing ground in which the author can explore the ways in which the language of newspeak hinders freedom of thought in citizens, which obviously has consequences on the aforementioned concepts. Again, the reason why narratives represent such a potent testing ground for new concepts is because of the complex causalities that feature in them, in our example the causal relations that hold between ideology, language, freedom, thought, and the corresponding concepts. We have here identified a fourth role that narratives can play in conceptual engineering, namely the *exploratory role*.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to answer the following question: Is there a role that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering? I conclude by answering this question in a positive manner. I have identified four roles that narratives can play within the framework of conceptual engineering: (1) descriptive role, (2) normative role, (3) engineering role, and (4)

exploratory role. There is still a significant amount of work left to be done in exploring the role of narratives in conceptual engineering together with the four roles I have identified. Regardless, I think this is still a fruitful attempt at starting the research regarding the connections between narratives and conceptual engineering. The prospects for narratives within the framework of conceptual engineering remains to be an exciting idea warranting further examination.[4]

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