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Living ethically through our concepts: on the need for conceptual enhancement

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Abstract

Iris Murdoch (1956) famously argued that our moral concepts are not neutral areas but something that determines our vision of the world. They not only shape our moral lives, but also guide and constrain them. Our moral actions depend on our concepts. As Queloz (2025) observes, we cannot act in the name of justice if we do not have the concept of justice. Our moral concepts, therefore, are a necessary determinant of our ethical life. Today, concepts like 'genocide', 'sexism', and 'racism' etc., have become central to how we act and think ethically. However, these concepts have not always been a part of our conceptual repertoire. For instance, the term 'genocide' was coined in 1942 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew who fled the nazi occupation. 'Sexism' was introduced in 1965, and, more recently, the term 'ecocide' was coined to call out the destruction of the environment by human acts such as war and over-exploitation. For most of history, these concepts were not available to us. The development of these concepts and their apparent absence in history show that our present moral vocabulary may not always be the most appropriate for a good ethical life. This raises the question: how can we lead an ethical life in the face of the historical contingency of our moral concepts? And, more importantly. How can we enhance our moral vocabulary? These are the central questions of my paper. In section 1 of this paper, I will examine the contingency of our moral concepts and highlight the need and possibility of conceptual enhancement in the moral domain. Following that, in section 2 of this paper, I will build on these insights to answer the question Why should we care about our concepts at all when it comes to ethical life? And why

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should we care about their contingency? Drawing on Congdon (2024), I will explore how our recent moral concepts have enriched our ethical life while also revealing the need for further enhancement. Finally, in section 3 of this paper, I will examine a way of conceptual engagement called conceptual engineering. In particular, I will aim to explain how this methodology can identify and fix the potential conceptual gaps. For this, I will rely on a functional approach to conceptual engineering. Here, I will also explore the metaphilosophical implications of the same approach and examine the challenges a project like this could face. I aim to address these questions by drawing on recent work in contemporary metaphilosophy and meta-ethics.

Keywords: Moral language, Moral Articulation, Conceptual ethics, Iris Murdoch, Meta-ethics

I.

Our concepts do not originate in nature, nor have they been handed to us by God or some other supernatural being. They are our own creation, created with care or by accident. Their origin lies in our human capacity. As Carey (2011) notes, 'Human beings, alone among animals, come to possess rich conceptual understanding of the world—understanding formulated in terms of such concepts as 'evolution, electron, cancer, infinity, or galaxy.' How do we collectively come to possess them? How do we manage to hand them to our children? These are important and complex questions of cognitive science. Theories differ on these, and their claims span a wide spectrum. However, there is one thing they all largely agree on. That is, Humans have the capacity to create concepts.

Our moral concepts are not an exception to this claim. We have come to create many concepts like that of 'genocide', 'racism', etc. These concepts have enriched our language, vocabulary, and have empowered language users to express what they wish. Terminologies that never existed before have come into the tongue of speakers at various points in history. The reasons and causes for their creation have varied, too. Some of these concepts were created with a clear goal in mind. For instance, consider the concept of 'Sexist'. Sexist as a concept did not exist before mid 1960s, when it emerged on 18th November 1965, in a 'student-faculty forum' at Franklin and Marshall College, an all-male and politically conservative school near Philadelphia (Shapiro, 1985). Addressing her conservative audience, Pauline M. Leet stated that the all-male school's exclusion of female authors, by only focusing on male authors compiled in anthologies by male

editors, is to take a position similar to that of a racist, who excludes coloured authors. This position, she termed, as sexist.

The origin of the concept of sexist, and later, sexism shows our prowess in creating our ethical concepts. But not all concepts emerge so freely. Some concepts have to fight for their recognition. Consider the case of the concept of 'Marital rape'. By definition, it is non-consensual sex performed by one spouse on another. While this definition is widely accepted, the argument against the concept of marital rape is modal. It seeks to argue whether an element with such a definition can exist or not. Its case, in the eyes of its opponents, is like of square-circle. By definition, a square-circle is a shape that is both square and circle at once. Everyone would argue that no such shape could exist. The opponents of marital rape stretch this sort of argument to the corresponding concept as well. Historically, this line of thought has been preferred and proposed. For instance, Sir Matthew Hale, an influential British barrister, in his famous book 'The History of Pleas of the Crown', denies the possibility of its existence. He claims, "[b]ut the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract." (Hale 1736, as quoted in Siegel 1995). The guiding force behind this argument was that by marrying a woman has come into a sort of contract with her husband, which renders her property of her husband. At the same time, historically, the concept of rape had been formulated in terms of theft. A conjunction of these two points would deny the possibility of the existence of marital rape. As one man cannot steal his own property, a husband cannot 'rape' his wife. This is the sort of argument that the opponent of marital rape proposed.

Logically speaking, the form of the argument betrays no inconsistency. Yet, this argument makes one uncomfortable. What is the cause of this feeling? The answer lies in the concepts used to formulate this argument. The content of these concepts, like 'rape', 'marriage', etc., is inadequate and ethically problematic.

The example of Marital rape highlights the contingency of our concepts. Sometimes, as in this case, these concepts are contingent on constitutive concepts, and sometimes they are contingent on other factors as well. An exhaustive list of these factors in fine-grained terms could not be prepared, as they are elusive and beyond our control.

But why should we care about the contingency of our concepts? This question can be addressed by dividing into two parts: 1) why should we care about our concepts at all? And 2) why should we worry if our concepts are contingent? In the next section, I will attempt to answer these questions

II.

Why should we care about our concepts at all when it comes to ethical life? This is the question one can reasonably raise, and accuse the person dabbling with concepts of having analysis paralysis. After all, doesn't ethical living require 'living' in a certain way, and not having or not having some concepts? Why should we be pressed about these concepts?

The answer lies in understanding the power our concepts hold over us. Concepts, as Iris Murdoch (1956) claims, are not 'neutral areas but something that determines our vision of the world'. These are not just abstract entities, but are powerful elements that can modulate and structure our experience. Traditionally, the philosophical literature and that in cognitive science have focused largely on the representative power of our concepts. But now the formative power of our concepts has been appreciated. For good or for bad, our concepts can direct our lives. For instance, as a part of an investigation into the influence of stereotypical association on visual processing, a study was conducted by Eberhardt et al. (2004), where they showed that on activation of the concept of 'crime', the participants were quicker to turn their attention to a black face instead of a white face. Even though the concept of crime, by itself, is race-neutral, the addition of a simple stereotypical assumption that a black man is more likely to be a criminal can cause our concept to direct our actions in a way we usually don't even notice. In another study, when police officers were primed with the concept of 'crime, it was observed that they were more likely to falsely identify a stereotypical black face as the criminal than they were without the concept of 'crime.'

If a concept as neutral as crime can be polluted by external stereotypes. The case is even worse for non-neutral concepts, which have biases embedded in their very conception. Slurs are non-neutral concepts of this kind. In his paper, Slurs as ballistic speech, Stillman argues that slurs are a kind of word that can conjure up painful and oppressive memories in the members of the community they are used to refer to. For instance, the use of the 'n-word' while referring to the members of the black community could result in evoking painful memories and emotions in a black hearer. He demonstrates this point by quoting from Langston Hughes autobiography, where he makes the same point. Hughes demonstrates the burden and impact of the n-word weaponised against the black community by writing

> "The slave-beatings of yesterday, the lynchings of today, the Jim Crow cars, the only movie show in town with its sign up FOR WHITES ONLY, the restaurants where you may not eat, the jobs you may not have, the unions you cannot join. The

> word nigger in the mouths of little White boys at school, the word nigger in the mouths of foremen on the job, the word nigger across the whole face of America! Nigger! Nigger! Like the word Jew in Hitler's Germany. (1940/1993, p. 269, as quoted in Stillman 2020)"

Our moral inquiry inextricably links our moral concepts and our experiences. Sometimes, when we experience something, its meaning eludes us. For instance, consider someone addressing a black child as alligator bait. Alligator bait is a derogatory term that was commonly used in the twentieth century to refer to black people, especially black children in the southern states of America (Herbst, 1997). It aimed to imply that blacks are not good for anything but being used as alligator bait. However, fortunately, this term has largely fallen out of fashion, and it is highly unlikely that a black kid today would be aware of such a term. Suppose then a kid is addressed as such. In this case, he won't register that he has been insulted. Here, the meaning of the term has eluded him.

But sometimes, there are situations where the concept associated with an experience *is elusive*. Consider the example from an episode of 'The American Life' that Sliwa (2024) gives

> "When Kristen was raped a few years later, it took her a while to use that word. He took advantage of me, is what Kristen said at first. When that didn't feel right, she said, "He's an asshole". But that didn't seem right either. She had no word to summarise the experience.
>
> She was at her friend's house for a party. It was late. People were going to sleep, and she climbed up to the top of a bunk bed to get away from an older guy who was creeping her out.
>
> Kristen was drunk. She remembers her face felt numb. She remembers hearing someone banging on the door, which she later found out he had locked before he climbed up into the bunk bed and took her clothes off. She said no, but he had sex with her anyway. Sex - that didn't feel like the right word, either.
>
> Kristen noticed her friends doing the same thing, describing their experiences with boys in different tones and arrangements. And then there was the friend who wouldn't say anything at all about what happened, except she was upset and didn't want to talk about it. And eventually she did explain. He said, can I just put it in you for a second? Her

> friend said, no. He did anyway. That's when Kristen said she felt like she had an understanding to share.
>
> Kristen: All those times when we were mad at those boys because of what they did to us. We were mad because they raped us, you know. And there was like, several of my friends where it took us a really long time to put the word to it. (Joffe-Walt, 2018, as quoted in Sliwa, 2024)"

Here, Kristen finds it difficult to make sense of the experience initially and puts the words to it only later. Initially, she is, what could be said, in a state where her discursive repertoire feels inadequate to describe her experience. She is aware of the experience as something related to sex, but admits that it is not sex. Before she stumbles on the concept of rape that aptly describes her, she finds that her discursive power is limited. She has the sense of feeling that there must be some word that is not 'having sex' or 'taking advantage' that is to describe this particular experience, but she is at a loss for that word. The meaning of the act is elusive.

Congdon (2024) calls this sort of state Kristen is in initially a discursive breakdown. It has revealed the limits of our discursive repertoire. There are certain features of this that he points out. Notice that the second case includes a sense of self-consciousness and reflexivity that is missing in the first. It is not merely a cognitive dysfunction. The higher reflexivity that is involved in such a state can call for transformation. This is an important point to note, as there can be other instances where we fail to put words to our experience, yet the relevant sort of dissatisfaction is not arrived at. An example could be the particular taste of the water we have at home, which differs substantially from the bottled water outside. For many, it is difficult to describe this phenomenon, but the dissatisfaction here does not call for the transformation of our discursive powers. On the other hand, cases like the one mentioned above involve a certain dissatisfaction that calls for transformation. This dissonance or dissatisfaction, under the right conditions, can push for the enhancement of our conceptual repertoire. And this push translates into the betterment of our ethical life. As Murdoch (1961) rightly points out, 'it is through enriching and deepening of our concepts that moral progress takes place.'

How is that 'enriching and deepening of our concepts' possible? In Kristen's case, we already had a concept in the public conceptual repertoire that she grasped later, but it could be the case that the stock of our public concepts does not have the concept we are looking for. Considering the contingency of our concepts, it is very much possible. We could have other close concepts that are simply inadequate to serve our purpose. They are near-relatives of the concept we need, but they just are not what we need.

In such cases, the call for conceptual enhancement rings louder. Here, then, we can enrich our conceptual repertoire by creating a concept like we created sexism. This is considered a case of conceptual innovation, a method of conceptual enhancement and engineering that we will consider in detail in due course.

However, there could be a scenario in which we face an inadequate concept and do not wish to replace it with a new one. Consider the case of Marriage as one such concept. Marriage is a concept that should not only be considered a human right and a matter of individual choice, but something with practical value as well. It comes with a score of legal benefits. Traditionally, however, marriage has sought to include only heterosexual couples and has excluded same-sex couples from its domain. A union of same-sex couples, in many places, is still not recognised as something that falls under the purview of marriage. It still remains the case in India. The narrowing of such a concept is not harmless. Same-sex couples are deprived of many things. If creating a new concept is not desirable, then what must we do? The answer is we must revise them. That would indeed be another way to enrich and deepen our concepts. Therefore, I think it is better to interpret this 'enriching and deepening' of our concepts in normative terms rather than descriptive terms. Of course, it must be noted that, by deepening here, we do not mean that we must know more and more about our concept. It is to formulate them in terms most beneficial for our purposes. In the next section, I will attempt to explain how this can be done.

III.

This normative treatment, in metaphilosophy and contemporary anglophone philosophy, is called conceptual engineering. In a minimal sense, conceptual engineering is metaphilosophical thought that suggests that, instead of only asking what concepts are, we should ask what our concepts should be. Traditionally, Anglophone philosophy has predominantly focused on the former by engaging in conceptual analysis and has ignored the latter question. But there has been a recent surge in interest of conceptual engineering as a domain. For instance, Jorem (2021) points out, "In philosophy, there has lately been a surge of interest and engagement in conceptual engineering. Of the 150 entries in the Conceptual Engineering category on philpapers.org, roughly half are works published in 2020 and 2021, and only one entry is from before 2000." In philosophy, many projects such as Haslanger's ameliorative projects, Scharp's revision of Truth, etc., are subsumed under the broad umbrella of conceptual engineering. Among these, perhaps the most important predecessor of this sort of inquiry is 'Carnapian explication'. Carnapian explication was a

method proposed by Carnap that aimed to take an imprecise concept (explicandum) and replace it with a more precise concept (explicatum). An illustration of this could be provided by using the concept of 'warm'. 'Warm' is a concept that is useful for us in our daily life, but is inadequate for the purpose of science. It is too imprecise. Therefore, it is replaced by the concept of 'temperature'. The virtue of this concept is that it is quantitative, unlike the concept of 'warm'. Like conceptual engineering, Carnapian explication works on the principle of revision (See Brun 2016). However, the scope of the latter is severely limited in comparison to the former. It was only useful for the sciences and formal philosophy. Conceptual engineering, in comparison, has a wider domain. As Cappelen (2018) points out, it could also be applied to moral language. An example he provides is Richard Joyce's revolutionary fictionalism. According to Joyce (2005), our moral statements are inadequate in the sense that they fail to state the truth, but this does not render them useless. Our moral statements could still have some use, as they can confer a variety of benefits. These statements can affect our emotional states, have practical benefits, etc. In other words, Joyce asks us to adopt a fictionalist stance towards our moral statements. This sort of moral fictionalism is 'revolutionary' because it asks us to use an improved version of moral language, keeping these flaws and benefits in mind. This, according to Cappelen, makes it an instance of conceptual engineering.

To further appreciate the power of our concept and conceptual engineering, we can note that the domain of conceptual engineering extends beyond academic philosophy. In law, it is common for courts, theorists, and academics to debate what the extension of a term like 'rape' or 'property' should be. This is also a normative inquiry. The same could be illustrated by our earlier example of marriage. These concepts have real-world effects on the makeup of society and on how we interpret its actions. Here, it shows that conceptual engineering could direct our lives by fixing what our concepts should be.

But how should conceptual engineering be done? To revise a concept, we must have a scale against which we can place it to understand what we must do with it. In other words, we must know the purpose of our concept. According to the proponent of the functionalist approach to conceptual engineering, this could be provided by the function of our concept. On this view, our concepts are supposed to perform a certain function, and the adequacy of a concept is judged by the efficiency with which it performs its function. That is, functions set the success conditions for our conceptual engineering project. Apart from telling what makes a concept good, it also establishes the limit of the revision. Here, clarity about the notion of function is quite important.

Philosophers have provided several responses to the notion of function. For instance, Cummings (1975) defines an entity's function in terms of the role it plays in a larger system. He claims that a larger system has a 'capacity' and the function's job is to contribute to the capacity. Thomasson (2020) uses this account of system function and applies it to conceptual engineering. The relevant systems here could be like a social system or a legal system. Therefore, a concept like 'marriage' could be revised by identifying the function, that is, the role it should play in this system. If one of the roles of 'marriage' in the legal system is to act as a classifier for a certain set of rights, then it is the function of this concept in a legal system. Note that in this example, the plurality of systems has been assumed. Jorem (2022), noting that, rightly asks "which is the relevant system?" It is an epistemic question. Haslanger writes, "social, legal, and religious systems lay claim to the concept of marriage. But the concept has different functions relative to those systems." (Haslanger, 2020, 253, as quoted in Jorem, 2022). If one tries to answer that the system is to be identified in terms of its capacity. We would face the question of what this capacity is. So far, we have had no response to that.

But, according to Jorem, a far more serious objection can also be raised against this account of function. We can have systems with harmful capacities, and a concept's function in such cases would be to contribute to this capacity. Jorem gives the example of the legal system, which can have the capacity for oppression. Then, in this system, a concept could be desirable as long as it fulfils this particular capacity. And, in such a scenario, a successful conceptual engineering project would be the one whose revised concept would be most efficient in contributing to the oppression. This shows that the notion of system functions is not of use to us. We should look for another notion elsewhere.

Perhaps, it could be found in an etiological account of function. According to this account, functions are defined in terms of their evolutionary history. These are called e-functions. Here, the history sets the requirement. The most prominent type of the etiological account of function is Millikan's proper function account. Millikan (1984) defines the proper function of an entity as that feature which explains its sustained use. She writes, "If a copied feature contributes to the survival or proliferation of members of the reproductive established family, then what the copied feature does for that family is the proper function of that member. (Millikan, 1984)" It is not necessary, however, that the entity in question always successfully performs that function. It is not necessary for proper function to lead to success. What matters is that it reaches for it. Millikan gives an example of sperm whose proper function is to fertilise an egg, yet most specimen of sperm fails to do so. Following this, we can define a

concept's proper function as whatever that could explain its sustained use. And, subsequently, we can engage in a conceptual engineering project keeping that proper function in mind. Simion and Kelp (2020) suggest a method of using e-functions for conceptual engineering. For this, they propose the use of d-functions. D-functions, also known as design functions, are functions given to the entity by its designer. An example of a d-function would be the function of an aeroplane's wings, that is, to aid its flight. Similarly, a dishwasher has the design function of washing dishes. These are entities with d-functions. There could be entities with only an e-function, not a d-function. The heart is an example. What Simion and Kelp suggest is that we can perform conceptual engineering by turning such d-functions into e-functions. As they write, "On the present view, conceptual engineers are in the first instance designers. They either develop new d-functions for existing concepts or else new concepts with new d-functions altogether." (Simion and Kelp, 2020)

Jorem (2022), however, argues against this proposal as well. He raises an epistemic challenge against the proper function account. He asks, how can we identify a proper function? It is a highly difficult task. It is also not necessary that there is only one reason for the sustained use of a concept. A concept could be in practice for many reasons. Jorem is right about that. More often than not, our concepts enjoy their survival for more than one particular reason as they perform various roles asked of them. Not only that, it is also not necessary that all communities would employ a concept for the same reason. There could be much divergence on why communities keep using a certain concept. In light of that, it is difficult to see how could we could arrive at a single proper function.

Even in case we assume that we could find a single reason for the sustained use, we would do no better. This is because there could be what we can call an evil reason. For instance, the concept of tipping in the US could be seen as existing so that the capitalist class could get away with underpaying their subordinates. Or consider the case of marital rape. Jorem writes,

> "It is in the interest of actual and potential offenders not to be liable to punishment for sexual violence against their spouses. This can explain why we had a concept of rape that did not apply to acts within the bonds of marriage…But might does not make right, and an explanation is no justification." (Jorem, 2022)

Truly, an explanation is not a justification. What we require is a notion of function that would *justify* our revision of our concepts in their light. The

third notion of function that we could consider for this requirement is the one that appeals to C-functions.

C-functions or concern relative functions suggest that instead of looking at history for our conceptual engineering purposes, we should look at the present. It means we should look at our present needs, desires, goals, etc. For instance, historically, marriage between heterosexual couples may be deemed necessary for the continuation of a certain sort of family, which forms the unit of society. Today, we see that our requirements for the concept of marriage are much different. It is better to look at our present concerns. An appeal to concern-relative functions (c-functions) does that. Queloz (2022) defines c-functions as

> "C-Function: A concept X has the c-function of type C of producing effect E if and only if (1) users of X have among their present concerns—their needs, interests, desires, projects, aims and aspirations—a concern of type C; (2) under propitious circumstances, applications of X produce E; (3) E stands in an instrumental relation to the concern of type C, which is to say that under propitious circumstances, producing E contributes to the satisfaction of a concern of type C" (Queloz, 2022)

Here, 'under propitious circumstances' indicates that our concept need not perform its function in all cases. An appeal to c-functions talks not only in terms of our present concern but also its 'potential satisfaction'. This makes this account forward-looking. It is also forward-looking in the sense that it is also open to novel concepts, i.e., concepts without a case history. An appeal to etiological function would find it difficult to account for the innovative aspect of conceptual engineering. In the absence of a history, the etiological account would fail to guide the engineering process. This, however, is not a problem for the concern-relative account. Here, the guidance could be derived from our needs, our aspirations, our concerns, etc.

The concern-relative account of function also enjoys another advantage over the e-functions account. That is, it can answer to what could be called 'the authority problem.' The authority problem, as raised in Queloz (2022), asks 'why should we grant a novel concept, or even a merely revised one, the power to shape and guide our thought and conduct?' This is to ask for the reason for our use of those concepts. But as Queloz clarifies, it is not asking for the reason for our use of a particular concept at a certain time; it is asking why we should even think in terms of those concepts. Appeal to e-functions fails to address this problem. The effects specified by e-functions are the effects of the past; why should they guide our present?

And, not only that, but we have also seen that sometimes the effects required of an entity in the past are not what we want (e.g., the tipping problem in the USA). A concern-relative account of function can better address this problem. Queloz argues that, on this view, authority follows from our own concerns. In simple words, why should we grant a particular concept the power to guide us is because it is *our concern*.

An appeal to c-function seems to offer a method for a positive engagement with our concepts through conceptual engineering. It has all the virtues of the functional approach to conceptual engineering, and, prima facie, it even appears to answer the authority problem. While the first claim is largely accepted, the second claim could be contested. For instance. Köhler and Velweunkamp (2024) argue that an appeal to c-functions fails to address the authority problem in a complete sense. They claim that the authority problem can be read through two separate readings. They are called (1) the reflective endorsement reading and (2) the good reason reading. On the first reading, the challenge is "offering reasons to those who are urged to adopt a concept that they can reflectively endorse on their own terms." (Köhler and Veluwenkamp, 2024). For the second reading, it is to offer reasons to those who are urged to adopt a concept for which they have good normative reasons. According to Köhler and Veluwenkamp, the c-function account solves the first, that is, the reflective endorsement reading, but fails to provide adequate support to solve the second reading. For *our* reasons to be normative reasons, much more is needed than them being followed from *our* concerns. It could also be the case that our perspectives are clouded with bad reasons, or that our present concerns do not necessarily mean good.

The concern of a capitalist could be to squeeze out and hoard as much wealth as possible. For this well-thought-out purpose, he could engineer a concept to achieve his aim. But this does not make the activity of conceptual engineering any more fruitful for an ethical life. The c-functions account, according to Köhler and Veluwenkamp, is too weak to discard such possibilities. Hence, we need a stronger account.

The stronger account is delivered by the positive aspect of Köhler and Veluwenkamp's discussion on conceptual engineering. This is their own notion of function that aims to provide for the lack of an appeal to c-functions by solving the second reading of the authority problem. This is the appeal to normative function. They define this function as

> "A concept X has the normative function to produce effect E if and only if (1) in a relevant range of circumstances C, applications of X produce E and (2) users of X have normative

> reason to deploy X in thought and language because X produces E in C." (Köhler and Veluwenkamp, 2024)

In their view, the concept's normative function aims to provide a justification for having the concept in one's repertoire. It provides us with reasons to watch the world through its frame. By adding normative reasons that can complement our concerns, this account seeks to address what was lacking in the concept-relative function.

But the commitment of normative reasons is a commitment nonetheless. While this account seeks to advance on the concern-relative account by solving the authority problem in its whole sense, it rests on heavy meta-ethical commitments. First and foremost is the commitment that there *are* normative reasons. This is a highly contestable claim. This is an observation not oblivious to Köhler and Veluwenkamp. They suggest that they assume that we have "normative reasons to adopt concepts because of facts about them, such as what their effects are when used, and that values (which themselves are not (always) grounded in people's concerns) explain which facts are reason-giving" (Köhler and Veluwenkamp, 2024). Whether we have such normative reasons is still up for debate.

While acknowledging that they do have such reasons would make things easier for us, it wouldn't completely vindicate our view. The heavy commitments that the normative function brings are no better than the lack of appeal to the concern-relative function. In such a scenario, I suggest not adopting hard commitments that could make our project difficult and unstable. What we should do instead is to seek what we can complement our concern-relative account with in order for it not to fall into the pits of having no normative reasons. What could that be? That is the question for further research.

Conclusion

In this article, I began my argument by claiming that our moral concepts, like other concepts, are contingent on many factors. Their contingency ensures that these concepts are non-ideal and, in many cases, inadequate. Subsequently, I addressed the question of why we should care about the contingency of our concept and why our concepts should be important for ethical living. The answer to this question lies in Iris Murdoch's idea that our concepts are not abstract entities but rather determine our vision of the world. From this, it follows that our moral concepts can determine our moral vision, which in turn guides our moral and ethical living. With this idea in hand, I claim, it is important for us to engage positively with our moral concepts for an ethical life. A way of such conceptual engagement

that we discussed is conceptual engineering, which seeks to revise our inadequate concepts. In this article, I consider the functional turn in conceptual engineering to determine how must we perform this activity. For this, I consider four notion of function namely (1) Appeal to systems function, (2) Appeal to etilogical function (e-function) (3) Appeal to concern-relative function (c-functions), and, finally, (4) appeal to normative function. After addressing the challenges to each notion of function, I conclude this article by establishing the need for conceptual engagement and by providing a plausible method of doing so and establishing further requirements for the said method.

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