

UBC Department of Philosophy Colloquium

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Conceptual Amelioration: Going on, Not in the Same Way



In this paper I argue that there are two ways to think about conceptual amelioration on a model according to which the content of a concept is to be understood as informational content. On the one hand, we can ameliorate our understanding of the relevant space of worlds – both what worlds it includes and how they should be sub-divided. Such improvement in our understanding may be based on advances in empirical knowledge and technological advances (think of weapons of war, or offspring created by artificial reproductive technologies), on a reinterpretation of the history of the concept, or on information gained by new perspectives that have access to the content from different modes of presentation. On the other hand, we can ameliorate not simply by reinterpreting our past practice, but by correcting it. We have an interest in carving logical space in order to coordinate with each other, to draw distinctions that serve our purposes as social beings and to realize our values. How best to do this changes as we develop new technologies and as we come to appreciate new and different values. When social change happens, there is likely to be controversy and disagreement about how to extend the concepts we've been using to do the work we now need them to do. Such changes should not be held hostage to what we have thought we were doing all along, and how to continue that. Our conceptual frameworks should be forward-looking and give us the tools to envision and create better lives together.

FRIDAY, February 8th BUCH A201 3:00 – 5:00

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