

# Conceptual Engineering Online Seminar

**SPRING  
2022  
PROGRAMME**

The **Conceptual Engineering Online Seminar** is co-organized by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Zurich and the Arché Research Centre at the University of St Andrews. The meetings take place every Tuesday at 3-5pm BST/4-6pm CEST from March 29 to June 28, for a total of 14 sessions.

**SESSION #01 | MARCH 29, 2022**

## **KWAME A. APPIAH (NYU) | “Engineering Race”**

I begin, in Part I, with four general observations about engineering that have lessons for conceptual engineering. First, engineering requires a design specification, a rough account of what the innovations in question are aimed at. Second, once we have the specification, we have to ask what's necessary to achieve those aims. Third, there are usually many possible solutions, because (a) the aims are only vaguely specified and (b) there are all kinds of desiderata, each of which can be satisfied to a greater or lesser degree, and it's both (c) unlikely that one solution is best with respect to all the constraints and (d) not clear how to rank them. Fourth, it can be very hard to predict how a proposed innovation might be taken up. This means that very often what's needed is a trial-and-error process, in which proposals are made and we see what happens as they are and are not taken up.

In Part II, I explore three observations we need to bear in mind when it is concepts, in particular, that are being engineered. First, we need to be clear what the aim is: in practice, it is to get people to use some word (old or new) in a particular way. Since what is involved is changing the behavior of large numbers of people in a coordinated way, what is going on is, in effect, a movement for social change. Also, second, because we are working on concepts, we need to be clear about some things about concepts: (a) they are best understood as embedded in theories, so that they come in clusters not one by one, and (b) most interesting concepts have very many conceptions, perhaps, at the finest grain, as many conceptions as users of a certain word. Finally, third, the theories in question are going to be to some degree idealized. This means, I'll argue, that truth isn't all that matters.

In Part III, I'll then explore the reshaping of understandings of race that has been going on in anglophone philosophy for the last half century, with these observations in mind.

### **ZOOM DETAILS**

ID: 632 3422 0568  
Passcode: CEOS22

### **YOUTUBE CHANNEL**

[www.youtube.com/channel/UCconceptualEngineering](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCconceptualEngineering)

### **ORGANIZERS**

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