

Neutralism and Conceptual Engineering¹

Patrick Greenough, University of St Andrews.

To appear in: *Conceptual Engineering and Conceptual Ethics*, edited by A. Burgess, H. Cappelen, and D. Plunkett, forthcoming 2018.

1. Paradox and Conceptual Engineering with Concepts.

What is Conceptual Engineering? Conceptual Engineering *with concepts* is the view that philosophical problems are to be properly resolved by revising or replacing our concepts.² With respect to philosophical paradoxes, this prescriptive methodology alleges that the source of such puzzles stems from *inconsistent concepts*. These are concepts which are governed via conflicting rules—rules which, if sufficiently pressed, give incompatible instructions as to when to apply the concept. On a more specific view, these are concepts which are constituted by a set of conceptual principles, not all of which can be true. Philosophical progress consists either in revising such concepts so that they are no longer inconsistent, or in replacing such concepts with consistent concepts. Once we do so, our most intractable philosophical paradoxes will disappear, or so goes the thought.

2. Paradox and Conceptual Engineering without Concepts.

Conceptual Engineering, despite its name, need not invoke concepts to resolve philosophical problems. Conceptual Engineering *without concepts* is the view that philosophical problems

¹ In Greenough (ms1), I argue that prescriptive philosophy does not consist in revising or replacing our concepts and/or the meanings of our words, but merely in revising or replacing our ideas, beliefs, conceptions, and theories about the things picked out by those words. In slogan form: *Conception Engineering* is all we really need. The goal here is not to criticise or defend Conceptual Engineering, but rather show that it can (and should) invoke *Neutralism*—the view that philosophical progress can take place when (and sometimes only when) a thoroughly neutral, non-specific theory, treatment, or methodology is adopted. See Greenough (ms2) for an exploration and defense of Neutralism using various forms of scepticism as case studies.

² See Tarski (1944), Carnap (1950), Deleuze and Guattari (1991), Schiffer (1996, 2003, 2004), Scharp (2007, 2013), Burgess and Plunkett (2013a, 2013b), Burgess (2014), Eklund (2015), Thomasson (2016), Diaz-Leon (2017), Simion (2017). Haslanger (2000, 2005, 2006, 2012) is usually taken to be a paradigm Conceptual Engineer when really she is a paradigm *Conception* Engineer—she is not concerned with changing the meaning of the term “woman” but merely in changing our ideas about what this term really picks out (see esp. her 2005).

are to be properly resolved via revising or replacing the meanings of our words.³ With respect to philosophical paradoxes, this prescriptive methodology alleges that the source of such puzzles stems from *inconsistent words*. These are words which are governed via conflicting rules—rules which, if sufficiently pressed, give incompatible instructions as to when to apply the word. On a specific version of this view, inconsistent words have inconsistent meanings—meanings which are constituted by a set of principles which cannot all be true. Philosophical progress consists in revising or replacing such inconsistent words with consistent words, words which are not governed by conflicting rules of use; or, via giving inconsistent words, consistent meanings. Once we do so, our most intractable philosophical paradoxes will disappear, or so goes the thought.

3. Happy-Face and Unhappy-Face Treatments.

Conceptual Engineers have often invoked a distinction between *happy-face* and *unhappy-face* solutions to philosophical paradoxes.⁴ Happy-face solutions involve identifying and rejecting some particular false or invalid principle (“the culprit”) used in the generation of some paradox (and explaining why we were taken in by such a principle in the first place).⁵ These treatments are thus thoroughly *specific* in that they put their finger on a single, specific, and basic culprit—no further more specific culprit is to blame.

Unhappy-face solutions, in contrast, are to be deployed when we are unable to identify the particular false or invalid principle at work in some paradox. Rather, these treatments are thoroughly *non-specific* in that they merely establish the collective guilt attaching to the group of (conceptual) principles which, taken together, produce the inconsistency. When unhappy-face solutions succeed in suitably revising or replacing one or more of the concepts which are constituted by these conceptual principles then that amounts to a *weak* unhappy-face solution.⁶ Sometimes, a conceptual revision or replacement is out of the question—the cure may well be worse than the disease.⁷ We must then somehow learn to live with the paradox. In such cases, the best that can be hoped for is a kind of palliative conceptual care. The result is a *strong* unhappy-face solution.⁸ (In what follows, I will mostly set aside any consideration of

³ Cappelen (2018) argues that it is the primary job of the Conceptual Engineer to repair and improve our representational devices (words and thoughts). (Inconsistent) concepts drop out of the picture; inconsistent words do not. Such a view may be dubbed *Semantic Engineering*. Conceptual Ethics (see Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, 2013b; Plunkett and Sundell 2013; Plunkett 2015, 2016), which I take to be broader than Conceptual Engineering, can also take place with or without concepts.

⁴ This taxonomy is due to Schiffer (1996, 2003, 2004) and has been co-opted by other Conceptual Engineers such as Scharp (2013). Cook (2013) and Cuonzo (2014) also use this taxonomy in their account of paradox.

⁵ A paradox may involve more than one false or invalid principle. I will ignore this point in what follows. The apt terminology of “culprit” is taken from Eklund (2002).

⁶ The revised or replacement concept(s) should do the work that the original concept was designed to do.

⁷ See Chihara (1979) on Tarski.

⁸ Schiffer (2003) thinks that the problem of free-will may require a strong unhappy-face response, while Scepticism (Schiffer 2004) and the sorites paradox (Schiffer 2003) admit of weak unhappy-face treatments.

strong unhappy-face solutions, and focus on the weak variety.) Crucially, according to the standard way of presenting this taxonomy, Conceptual Engineering can only occur in the context of offering a weak unhappy-face solution.

4. What's the News?

There are seven main items of news in what follows:

News Item One: The happy-face/unhappy-face taxonomy is multiply flawed—at least as it stands. This taxonomy is, at best, incomplete and misleading, at worst, so laden with theoretical baggage that it is of little use to the budding Conceptual Engineer.

News Item Two: We can nonetheless significantly revise this taxonomy so as to allow for both Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering, and two forms of Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering. The first of these is *The Indeterminate Concept View*, whereby it is indeterminate, and so unknowable, just which principle is the culprit.⁹ The second is *The Indiscriminable Concept View*, whereby our limited powers of conceptual discrimination make it infeasible to identify the culprit.¹⁰

News Item Three: It turns out that happy-face treatments of paradox (whether effective or not) are much rarer than you might think. That's because such treatments are maximally specific: they aim to identify a specific, and basic culprit—such that no further more specific culprit is to blame. As such, these treatments represent a kind of limit case which is not all that easy to achieve.

News Item Four: It also turns out that unhappy-face treatments of paradox (whether effective or not) are rather thin on the ground. These treatments are maximally unspecific: they just establish a kind of collective guilt attaching to the set of principles deployed in the paradox. As such, these treatments also represent a kind of limit case.

News Item Five: Between the limit cases of happy-face and unhappy-face solutions are those treatments which are neither maximally specific nor maximally unspecific. Such intermediate, non-specific treatments can nonetheless be *specific enough* to effectively treat a paradox. For example, the solution may be specific enough to tell us that the conjunction of two premises of the paradox is false, but not specific enough to tell us which of these premises is false—they remain silent, and so neutral, on this issue.

News Item Six: Though such non-specific (but specific enough) treatments are neutral in the way just mentioned, they become more thoroughly neutral when they are able to motivate the rejection of some principle at work in a paradox (e.g. the conjunction of two premises) from a theory-neutral perspective—from a perspective which is available to all partisans. So, with respect to various forms of sceptical paradoxes for example, we can give effective treatments which merely use relatively lightweight and uncontentious

⁹ See Schiffer (1996, 2003, 2004); Eklund (2002b).

¹⁰ This represents a new kind of view.

theoretical claims about knowledge (and evidence). One immediate attraction of such thoroughly neutral approaches is that effective treatments of paradox are available in the face of widespread and internecine philosophical conflict. The upshot is *Neutralism*—the broad view that philosophical progress can take place when (and sometimes only when) a thoroughly neutral, non-specific theory, treatment, or methodology is adopted.¹¹

News Item Seven: Neutralism can (and arguably should) be combined with Conceptual Engineering (either with concepts or without).

5. Philosophical Puzzles.

Philosophy, both past and present, has been dominated by puzzles and paradox. Any respectable answer to the question *What is truth?* had better provide good solutions to the various puzzles and paradoxes surrounding truth. Any respectable answer to the questions *What is belief?* *What is knowledge?* had better provide treatments of the various puzzles and paradoxes surrounding belief and knowledge. The same goes for all the other central questions of philosophy: *What is free-will?* *What is a person?* *What is identity?* *What is a material object?* *What is reality?* *What is time?* *What is experience?* *What is consciousness?* *What is meaning?* *What is thought?* *What is justice?* *What is power?* *What is goodness?* And so on. Likewise, for all of the more specialist philosophical questions that arise along the way. Any decent answer to the question *What is vagueness?* had better provide an acceptable treatment of the various forms of the sorites paradox. Any decent answer to the question *What is moral luck?* had better provide good treatments of the various puzzles and paradoxes involving moral luck. Any decent answer the question *What is tolerance?* had better provide good treatments of the various puzzles and paradoxes involving tolerance.

Philosophical puzzles provide us with a kind of test-bed for our philosophical theories. We can usefully adapt some remarks of Russell and go so far as to say that:

A logical [or philosophical] theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing with puzzles, and it is a wholesome plan, in thinking about [philosophical questions], to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since these serve much the same purpose as is served by experiments in physical science.¹²

So, if your favoured philosophical theory of X cannot address the relevant puzzles and paradoxes which centrally involve X, then your theory is akin to a scientific theory which cannot account for the experimental data. To adopt an engineering metaphor: paradoxes function as stress-tests for our philosophical theories.

¹¹ Intimations of Neutralism are to be found in Greenough (2002; 2003). See Greenough (2018) for an application of Neutralism to the Observational Sorites Paradox; for the developed view see Greenough ms2.

¹² Russell (1905), pp. 484-5.

This is important because, on the one hand, there are some prominent Conceptual Engineers (and philosophers more generally) who think that puzzles and paradoxes do not (or should not) play a very important or central role in philosophy.¹³ On the other hand, there are some philosophers who think that paradoxes pretty much exhaust the main business of philosophy.¹⁴ Russell's point is that an intermediate position is called for whereby paradoxes prove to be an essential and central element philosophical practice.¹⁵

6. The ABC of Philosophy.

In one way or another, most philosophical puzzles have the following broad structure: we find ourselves compelled to believe some initially plausible A-claims; we also find ourselves compelled to believe some initially plausible B-claims; and yet the A-claims and the B-claims turn out to be in conflict—that's because they together entail a C-claim: a contradiction. Call that *The ABC of Philosophy*. Sometimes this conflict is mild, and harmony is relatively easy to restore. Sometimes, in contrast, these ABC puzzles erupt when the tectonic plates of thought violently collide—as when science clashes with common-sense. Oftentimes, a collection of our ordinary, folksy, beliefs turns out to be self-inconsistent. The best (or perhaps worst) ABC puzzles emerge when the conflict is deep—when the A-claims and the B-claims are equally hard to relinquish, even after long consideration, even after various sophisticated philosophical theories are on the table before us. The problem of free-will, personal identity, the liar paradox, and the paradox of the heap, for example, all have this intractable character. Any proposed solution feels like a terrible distortion.¹⁶

7. ABC Puzzles and Paradox.

What is the relationship between these ABC puzzles and philosophical paradoxes? The standard account of philosophical paradoxes says that a paradox is an argument that proceeds via seemingly valid reasoning from seemingly true premises to an obviously false conclusion.¹⁷ On a closely related view, a paradox is an argument that proceeds via plausible reasoning from plausible premises to an implausible conclusion. This standard account needs adjusting to bring it into line with the ABC template just given so that a paradox is an argument that proceeds via *initially* plausible reasoning from *initially* plausible premises to an *initially* implausible conclusion. Likewise, a paradox is an argument that proceeds via reasoning that

¹³ This view is widespread amongst more naturalistically minded philosophers.

¹⁴ For example: Sorensen (2003).

¹⁵ See Greenough (ms1, ch.1) for a discussion of the scope of Conceptual Engineering.

¹⁶ Cf. Williamson (1994, p.166): "The truth about vagueness must be strange".

¹⁷ This widespread formulation is from Mackie (1973); cf. Sainsbury (2009) who takes a paradox to be the conclusion of an argument drawn from seemingly true premises via seemingly valid reasoning.

seems *initially* valid from premises which seem *initially* true to a conclusion which seems initially false.¹⁸

This adjustment is no mere quibble. It accommodates the fact that once a subject explicitly notes that the premises of some argument are part of a paradox then they may (but need not) reasonably retract their original judgment that the premises are plausible, the reasoning plausible, and the conclusion implausible—they may reasonably sit on the fence until they have worked out what is going wrong. Still, the argument remains a paradox all the while because they were initially drawn in. Equally, once a subject has been exposed to some promising solution for long enough then they may no longer find, for example, that a certain premise in the proof is plausible (or seems true). Again, the argument remains a paradox all the while because it can still be used to confound someone who has not been exposed to a promising treatment.

An immediate (but rather superficial) difference between ABC puzzles and paradoxes is that not all paradoxes terminate in a contradiction but rather in an absurd proposition such as: there is no knowledge. ABC puzzles, meanwhile, always entail a conclusion in the form of a contradiction (that's just why the A-claims and the B-claims are incompatible). However, an apparently false conclusion to a paradox is just a proposition whose negation is apparently true. So, the negation of such a conclusion can represent the main A-claim in an ABC puzzle (and if there are further considerations backing up this A-claim then they belong to the set of A-claims too). The set of propositions which entails the conclusion can represent the B-claims. Hence, paradoxes can always be transposed into an ABC structure. The upshot, then, is that ABC puzzles and philosophical paradoxes are much the same thing.

8. Treating Paradox: The Standard Account.

It is also part of the standard view of paradoxes that a good solution or treatment must do two things: it must not only isolate (with good reason) the particular (basic) culprit in the paradoxical proof, but also explain how and why we are *initially* taken in by this culprit when first encountering the proof.¹⁹ If the treatment of the paradox involves accepting the conclusion of the proof, then, to be effective, this treatment must properly isolate the false beliefs which misled us into initially thinking that the conclusion was implausible *and* it must give reasons as to why we mistakenly took these false beliefs to be true. In sum, an effective treatment of a philosophical paradox must:

- (1) Provide good reason to: reject some basic premise in the paradoxical proof; or, reject some basic rule of inference; or, reject some basic presupposition(s) of the proof; or, give good reason to “bite the bullet” and endorse the conclusion. Here the culprit is *basic* in the sense that there is no more specific culprit to be found (see below).

¹⁸ Cf. Schiffer (2003) where “a paradox is a set of apparently mutually incompatible propositions each one of which enjoys some non-negligible [or better: high] degree of plausibility when considered on its own”.

¹⁹ See Chihara (1979).

(2) Explain why we were so susceptible to the paradox *in the first place*—despite the faults isolated in (1). That is, explain how and why we found the premises, rules of inference, or presuppositions, so *initially* plausible. Or, if biting the bullet, we must explain why the conclusion struck us as so *initially* implausible despite being true/acceptable after all.

Given this, it is clear that this standard account of how to treat a paradox is an account of (effective) happy-face treatments.

9. Treating Paradox: The Augmented Account.

So far, so fairly familiar. Yet, something important is missing from the standard account. Suppose we have some particularly stubborn, intractable paradox. It's one thing to provide an explanation as to just how and why we were seduced by this paradox *in the first place*; it's potentially quite another thing to provide an answer to the question: why has this particular paradox proved to be so tricky to effectively treat? The suggestion is that we need to distinguish two properties of paradoxical arguments. These are: *contagiousness* (the easy-to-catch property), which is covered by desideratum (2) above, and *intractability* (the hard-to-cure property). These may come apart both ways. Just because it is easy to be (initially) seduced by some paradoxical reasoning does not entail that some potential resolution will be hard to come by—perhaps our faulty thinking is perfectly natural but (relatively) easy to correct once noticed. Equally, just because some paradox is difficult to resolve need not go hand-in-hand with the paradoxical proof being initially seductive—perhaps it takes a while for the paradox to get a grip, but, once it does so, it proves very difficult to dislodge.

Given this, a fully satisfying response to some intractable paradox must also answer the following questions:

(3) Why has this long-standing paradox proved to be so intractable? More generally: Why are intractable paradoxes intractable?

This third feature will come into greater relief once we have understood various Conceptual Engineering approaches to philosophical paradox.

10. Inconsistent Concepts.

The ambitious Conceptual Engineer wishes to provide answers to all the central philosophical questions. To do that they had better be able to furnish adequate responses to all of the main puzzles and paradoxes surrounding these questions. That, in turn, requires a general theory of what paradoxes are, the sources of paradox, and how paradoxes can and should be addressed. To that end, Conceptual Engineers (who deploy concepts) place the notion of an *inconsistent concept* centre-stage.

On the most prevalent conception, inconsistent concepts are concepts whose conceptual

principles cannot all be true.²⁰ Given classical logic, it follows that one or more conceptual principles for the concept is false.²¹ A cartoon example is the concept of *blair* whose conceptual principles include: *x* is a blair if *x* is a chair; *x* is not a blair if *x* is blue. Thus, these conceptual principles entail something contingently false: there are no blue chairs. Other inconsistent concepts have conceptual principles which entail something necessarily false. Take the invented concept *tallster* which has the two conceptual principles: *x* is a tallster if *x* is taller than 2m in height; *x* is not a tallster if *x* is less than 2.1m in height. According to this concept, someone who is 2.05m in height is both a tallster and not a tallster. Since this cannot be true then at least one of these conceptual principles must be false.

11. Concepts and Conceptual Principles.

To allow for inconsistent concepts, conceptual principles can be false. But what are conceptual principles? They may be characterised in the following schematic way: concepts are constituted by conceptual principles, where a principle is a conceptual principle for some concept *C* if and only if *S*'s understanding the concept *C* entails that *S* bears relation *X* to this principle. The epistemic version of this view says that *X* is the knowledge relation; the justificationist version says that *X* is the justified belief relation; the doxastic version says that *X* is the belief relation; the dispositional view says that *X* is the disposed to believe relation.²² We will mostly be concerned with the dispositional version of this view which says that if one is not (initially) disposed to accept some conceptual principle then one does not understand the concept concerned.

12. Why are Some Paradoxes So Contagious and/or Intractable?

When it comes to diagnosing just why we get so caught up in paradoxes, philosophers differ widely. Candidate diagnoses include one or more of the following: easily confusing one principle with another, oversight, ignorance, intellectual prejudice, over-generalisation, and the hasty use of false theory. If we are more alert, less confused, more careful, more adept at articulating and deploying the right kind of philosophical theory, then we shall better avoid getting pulled in by these puzzles, or so goes a natural train of thought.

The Conceptual Engineer, meanwhile, is able to offer a very different kind of diagnosis, at least for the most obstinate ABC puzzles and paradoxes: it's the very concepts used in our philosophical reasoning that is the source of the conflict—the conceptual principles for these concepts cannot all be true together. Moreover, it is our mastery of these concepts that explains why the paradox is both initially seductive (contagious) and hard to treat (intractable).

²⁰ See Eklund (2002), Scharp (2013).

²¹ The most prominent forms of Conceptual Engineering (with concepts) retain classical logic.

²² Eklund (2002) defends a version of the dispositional view. See §15 for Scharp's view.

13. Can the Conceptual Engineer Embrace Happy-Face Treatments?

The happy-face/unhappy-face taxonomy, as was standardly introduced above, is incomplete and misleading: it entails that the Conceptual Engineer cannot avail themselves of happy-face solutions. Here the standard thought is something like: "A happy-face approach to paradox is just the traditional, purely descriptive approach to paradox. Conceptual Engineering, meanwhile, calls for a prescriptive approach. Hence, Conceptual Engineering can only involve unhappy-face solutions". That's a mistake and runs together two independent axes of paradox: the descriptive/prescriptive axis with the happy-face/unhappy-face axis. Conceptual defects can be non-specific (a collective defect) or specific (an individual defect); either way, Conceptual Engineering can be used to fix the problem. Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering is thus an eminently live option.²³

14. Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering.

Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering has the following four components:

Component One: Isolate the basic culprit. Give a sufficient reason to think that some specific premise or rule of inference or presupposition invoked in a proof is false or invalid; or, give sufficient reason to "bite the bullet" and endorse the conclusion. Thus, the derivation of the unacceptable conclusion is blocked (or the conclusion turns out to be acceptable after all). If no more specific culprit is to blame then you have found the basic culprit.

Component Two: Explain contagiousness. This culprit will be a conceptual principle for one (or more) of the concepts invoked in the proof. Mastery of this concept entails that we are initially disposed to accept the culprit—given the dispositional version of conceptual principles given above. More generally, mastery of the concepts deployed in the proof disposes us to accept all the conceptual principles which feature as premises or rules of inference or presuppositions in the proof. This explains why the paradox was so contagious from the outset: our mastery of the words used in the proof pulls us to accept a set of incompatible propositions.

Component Three: Explain intractability. Any (initially) promising solution to a paradox entails that we must give up on some particular conceptual principle deployed in the proof. Since our competence with the relevant concept strongly disposes us to accept such a principle then that makes all promising solutions hard to swallow. Thus, the paradox is tricky to treat. That's why any proposed solution feels like a terrible distortion: what we take to be good philosophical theory is inevitably in conflict with our conceptual competence.

Component Four: Revise or replace. In order to prevent the paradox from returning we need to suitably revise or replace our concepts. In the case of conceptual revision, the Conceptual Engineer needs to revise the concepts deployed in the proof so that the

²³ Though see §32 below.

offending principle is no longer a conceptual principle for one of these concepts.²⁴ If engaging in conceptual replacement, the Conceptual Engineer needs to ensure that the surrogate concepts do not themselves give rise to a (similar) paradox.

15. Who are the Happy-Face Conceptual Engineers?

Has Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering been universally embraced by contemporary Conceptual Engineers? As it turns out: No! No Conceptual Engineer (that I know) explicitly endorses the view as just stated. Eklund (2002a) seems to endorse the first three components of Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering, but not the fourth.²⁵ On Eklund's view, inconsistent concepts are not in need of revision or replacement.²⁶ Eklund thus does not subscribe to Conceptual Engineering.²⁷ Scharp (2013), meanwhile, comes close but he does not accept that mastery of a concept requires that a subject be (initially) disposed to accept the conceptual principles for that concept.²⁸ So, Scharp, does not (it seems) endorse the second and third components of Conceptual Engineering. Rather, Scharp thinks that a subject who is competent with some concept is merely *entitled to believe* the conceptual principles for that concept.²⁹

Scharp's view has an immediate cost: it cannot straightforwardly explain the contagiousness and intractability properties of typical philosophical paradoxes via the notion of conceptual competence. One answer to this worry is to hold that philosophical paradoxes are meant to be formulated so as to apply to some typical or normal or (partly) idealised subject. Perhaps a case can be made that such a subject, if competent with some concept, *is* disposed to accept the conceptual principles for that concept. Such a fix would enable Scharp to count as a Happy-Face Conceptual Engineer.³⁰

Let's now turn to unhappy-face treatments and see if they are needed in addition to, or in place of, happy-face treatments.

²⁴ See Richard, forthcoming, for a view which permits concepts to evolve.

²⁵ Note: "seems". In his (2002b, 2006), he sponsors The Indeterminate Concept View (see below).

²⁶ Alas, there is not space to assess this crucial issue here.

²⁷ Eklund (2015, 2017) is much more amenable to Conceptual Engineering (for moral concepts) but not because such concepts are inconsistent. Spicer (2008) and Weiner (2009) take the concept of knowledge to be inconsistent, but neither recommend revision. Fassio and McKenna (2015), meanwhile, sponsor a mild kind of revisionism for the concept of knowledge.

²⁸ Scharp (2013) accepts the arguments given in Williamson (2006) that competence with a concept does not require that a subject be disposed to accept any candidate conceptual principles for that concept.

²⁹ The notion of entitlement deployed is taken from Burge (1992).

³⁰ But see §32 for why, in the end, there are no Happy-Face Conceptual Engineers.

16. Unhappy-Face Treatments: Schiffer (1996, 2003, 2004).

To get to grips with unhappy-face treatments, and why the Conceptual Engineer might require them, we need to look in some detail at Schiffer's own account of such solutions:

(1) An unhappy-face treatment to a paradox should do two things: "First, it would tell us that there can be no determinately correct complete identification of the odd guy(s) out; and secondly, it would tell us what it is about the concepts involved that explains this." (Schiffer 2003, p.69).

(2) "In each case, the explanation will find a glitch in the concept or concepts involved, a tension in the underived conceptual roles that individuate those concepts." (2003, p.69).

(3) "The glitch is an underived, or basic, feature of the paradox-generating concept, or concepts, that, without making the concept logically inconsistent, nevertheless pulls one in opposing directions without there being anything else in the concept or elsewhere to resolve that tug-o-war." (2003, ch.5). And: "The conflicting aspects of conceptual role don't mean that the concept of free will is inconsistent (it isn't like the concept of a round square), for we don't take the aspects of conceptual role to provide necessary conditions for the concept's application when we learn of their conflict." (2003).

(4) "Thus, the problem of free will doesn't admit of a happy-face solution because it is indeterminate which proposition in the paradox set is false, and this is because of a glitch in our concept of free will." (2003, ch.5).

(5) "The happy-face solution makes it a mystery why one was ever deceived by the false proposition in the first place" (1996, p. 329).

(6) "That no classical philosophical problem, including the sorites, yet has a happy-face solution is attested to by the fact that we are still debating each one of them. The sticking point in each case is in explaining away the plausibility of the selected odd guy(s) out." (2003, ch.5) And: "Philosophers have been debating the problem of free will for centuries, and they are still debating it, with philosophers lined up behind each of the solutions in logical space. If the problem of free will had a happy-face solution, I think we would have heard about it by now." (2004, p.179).

We'll come back to all these features of the view over the next few sections.

17. The Indeterminate Concept View.

It ought to be clear that *glitchy concepts* are similar to, but not quite the same as, what we have been calling *inconsistent concepts*.³¹ The differences are two-fold. Firstly, Schiffer doesn't speak of conceptual principles (or constitutive principles) but rather he speaks of the aspects or elements of the conceptual role of the concept. That's just a terminological difference. The

³¹ What Schiffer means by "inconsistent concept" is something different. Eklund (2002) and Scharp (2013) don't take inconsistent concepts to fix necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept's application.

elements or aspects of the conceptual role that individuate a concept are effectively just conceptual principles (or conceptual rules of inference) that competent subjects are disposed to accept when they are competent with the concept in question.

Secondly, and more importantly, Scharp (2013) thinks that inconsistent concepts have one (or more) false conceptual principles *and* that it is (eminently) feasible to find out just which conceptual principle is false. Schiffer, meanwhile, thinks that it is indeterminate which proposition in the paradox set is false. Given the standard view of indeterminacy, under which indeterminacy precludes knowledge, we cannot, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, find out which of the conceptual principles of some glitchy concept is false.³² Call that *The Indeterminate Concept View*. Before working out just why Schiffer that glitchy concepts work in this way, we should first note two initial worries.

18. The Excess Baggage Worry.

What model of indeterminacy could make sense of the view that glitchy concepts are such that it is indeterminate which of a glitchy concept's conceptual principle is false? One immediate proposal is that *all* the conceptual principles for some glitchy concept (used to derive a contradiction in some paradox) are neither true nor false. This provides a straightforward explanation as why we can't know which principle is false: propositions which lack truth-values cannot be known. This would mean that unhappy-face solutions would carry a considerable piece of baggage: namely, a theory of truth-value gaps. Such a theory is a highly controversial doctrine—not something that every Conceptual Engineer will be happy to take on board as an essential piece of kit from the outset. Conceptual Engineering was supposed to be available to everybody—it was not supposed to be some kind of niche doctrine. Furthermore, one key motivation to introduce inconsistent concepts into a theory of paradox in the first place was that enables is to preserve classical logic and classical semantics. On this particular way of understanding glitchy concepts, that attractive feature is lost. Call that *The Excess Baggage Worry*.

19. The Overkill Problem.

On the Indeterminate Concept View, the fact that no culprit can be singled out leads to a kind of collective guilt: all the conceptual principles deployed in the proof are untrue (because

³² Schiffer (1996, p.330) notes that omniscient beings cannot know which element of a glitchy concept is false.

neither true nor false). Indeed, it is this feature blocks the derivation of the contradiction.³³ However, that's a kind of overkill because nominating just one of these principles would be enough to block the derivation. Such overkill is another significant cost. Call that *The Overkill Problem*.

20. The Symmetry Argument.

Though Schiffer does not spell it out, there is clearly some kind of symmetry argument at work in his advocacy of The Indeterminate Concept View: when the conceptual principles for some glitchy concept jointly entail a contradiction, in some long-standing paradox, then we should treat these principles as relevantly symmetrical. They are all equally guilty, as it were, in the derivation of the contradiction. In the simple case, where an incoherent concept has just two such conceptual principles, then the grounds for accepting one principle (somehow) cancel out the grounds for accepting the other. But that does not mean that both principles are false—just that these grounds are not sufficiently strong to make either principle true. So, both these principles are neither true nor false.

Interestingly enough, such symmetry considerations need not threaten bivalence. An alternative model of indeterminacy allows that some propositions can be either true nor false but nothing grounds the truth-value that they have—they are indeterminate in truth-value.³⁴ This alternative version of the Indeterminate Concept View, entails that glitchy concepts will have at least one false conceptual principle. However, since indeterminacy precludes knowledge, we will never be able to find out just which one is false.³⁵ That goes some way to addressing the Excess Baggage Worry because bivalence is retained. It also addresses the Overkill Problem because only one principle in the set is untrue/false and the rest are true.

21. Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering via The Indeterminate Concept View.

Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering (via the Indeterminate Concept View) can thus be summarised as follows:

³³ Schiffer is pretty quiet about this feature of his view. Perhaps because a further worry soon emerges: if all the conceptual principles for some inconsistent concept are neither true nor false, and so absolutely unknowable, then, to use his own words back at him, "I think we would have heard about it by now." On that score, Schiffer (1996) is very keen to show that contextualism about "knows" is committed to an implausible error theory whereby alert competent subjects fail to see that "knows" is context-sensitive. Given that worry, however, how come alert, competent subjects fail to see that the conceptual principles for some ordinary concept are indeterminate in truth-value? Ironically, Schiffer also seems committed to an implausible error theory. See Kindermann and Greenough (2017) for the idea that everybody has an error-theory of some sort.

³⁴ See Greenough (2008) which builds on Sorensen (2001).

³⁵ Eklund (2002b, 2006) tentatively endorses a version of the Indeterminate Concept View when he says (of the liar paradox): "it is likely that it is indeterminate just where the liar reasoning goes wrong. But still, somewhere there is an untrue assumption or invalid step." (2002b, p. 323).

Component One: Explain why a happy-face solution is not available. A happy-face treatment is not available because there is simply no culprit. That is, there is no single, specific, false/invalid conceptual principle (deployed in some paradoxical proof) which we can identify. Rather, *all* the principles used in the paradox are equi-culpable. As such, they are each indeterminate in truth-value: they are either gappy (on a truth-value gap model), or, they are either true or false but it is indeterminate which is false (on a bivalent model). Since these principles are all not true (on the gappy model) that blocks the derivation; or, since one of these principle is false (on the bivalent model), that also blocks the derivation.

Component Two: Explain contagiousness. Mastery of all the concepts deployed in the proof disposes us to accept all the conceptual principles which feature as premises or rules of inference or presuppositions in the proof. This explains why the paradox was so contagious from the outset: our very understanding of the words used in the proof pulls us to accept a set of incompatible propositions.

Component Three: Explain intractability. The paradox is intractable because we have been looking for a happy-face solution when it is impossible to find one—see Component One.

Component Four: Revise or replace. In order to prevent the paradox from returning we need to suitably revise or replace our concepts. In the case of conceptual revision, the Conceptual Engineer needs to revise the concepts deployed in the proof so that a contradiction can no longer be derived. If engaging in conceptual replacement, the Conceptual Engineer needs to ensure that the surrogate concepts do not themselves give rise to a (similar) paradox.

The basic thought behind this kind of Conceptual Engineering is that even when we are merely able to establish that the complete set of conceptual principles deployed in some proof is inconsistent, a treatment via conceptual revision or replacement is nonetheless still available.

Two questions now arise: Should the Conceptual Engineer choose Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering or choose (some form of) Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering? Or, is a kind of pluralism called for whereby both approaches are available or required?

22. Contagiousness.

One reason to prefer unhappy-face solutions over happy-face solutions is that the former might be thought to give a much better account of contagiousness. Schiffer (1996) remarks that “[a] happy-face solution [to scepticism] makes it a mystery why one was ever deceived by the false proposition in the first place” (1996). We can now see (one reason) why Schiffer fails to acknowledge the possibility Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering. On such approaches, as we have seen, there *is* an explanation, via our competence, as to why the paradox gets a grip in the first place. Schiffer just misses the availability of this explanation. Hence, he mistakenly thinks happy-face treatments make contagiousness a mystery. Upshot: Contagiousness cannot be the deciding factor between happy-face and unhappy-face treatments since both approaches offer the same basic explanation for why certain paradoxes are so contagious.

23. Very Happy-Face Solutions Versus Mixed Happy-Face Solutions.

More generally, Schiffer has a pretty narrow conception of those paradoxes which admit of happy-face treatments. His paradigm of such a paradox is the barber paradox—the paradox concerning the supposed barber who shaves all those people who do not shave themselves (and so: who shaves the barber?).³⁶ It's relatively easy to spot the (basic) culprit in such a paradox: there is no such barber. Such a paradox is better seen as an exemplar of what may be termed a *Very Happy-Face Solution*. Resolving such a paradox does not involve much disruption to our beliefs (and concepts).

Paradoxes are akin to diseases.³⁷ It's rare to find an effective treatment of some significant disease which does not have certain side-effects. We should expect the same for paradoxes. Accordingly, we should make room for happy-face solutions which are a mixture of good news (we have found the culprit) and some bad news (there are significant side-effects to the treatment). Call these *Mixed Happy-Face Solutions*.³⁸ These treatments may require in a considerable disruption of our conventional beliefs about some subject-matter. If one admits concepts into the theory of understanding then that disruption may well represent a kind of conceptual disruption—a subject is compelled to reject (conceptual) principles which conceptual competence disposes them to accept. That's just why some happy-face medications are hard to swallow (at least at the outset). Unlike the barber paradox, it is not always easy to accept that the culprit really is the culprit.

Is a certain pluralism then called for? That would be a bit hasty because once happy-face treatments are taken to be bona fide approaches to paradox, what reason does the Conceptual Engineer then have to also bother with unhappy-face treatments? This worry is brought into greater relief when we consider what explanations each approach gives of the intractability property possessed by various long-standing paradoxes.

24. The Over-Explanation Problem.

Recall that Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering explains the contagious and intractability properties via the same underlying feature of our understanding: our competence with an inconsistent concept, used in some paradox, disposes us to accept the conceptual principles for that concept. So, competence makes a paradox easy to catch; it is also makes it hard to cure—any candidate solution which singles out a culprit will be difficult to accept because our competence impels us to treat this principle as true. But *Hold On!* On a Schiffer-style view, *exactly the same explanation can be given*.

Curiously, Schiffer does *not* offer such an explanation. Rather, he seeks to explain why some

³⁶ See Schiffer (2003, p.68).

³⁷ See Tarski (1969), Chihara (1979), Greenough (2018, ms2).

³⁸ There is a continuum from the very happy to the not so happy, depending on the side-effects.

long-standing paradox has proved to be so intractable via his claim that it is indeterminate which conceptual principle at work in some paradox is false. Such indeterminacy, as we have seen, makes it impossible to identify that some conceptual principle is false. Since we can't identify the culprit, this explains why the paradox has proved so treatment-resistant. The problem for Schiffer is that this further explanation is not needed. His theory of conceptual competence is already rich enough to explain why certain long-standing paradoxes have proved to be so intractable. So, there is no reason to posit indeterminate concepts with indeterminate conceptual principles. Upshot: Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering (via The Indeterminate Concept View) is not needed. Call that *The Over-Explanation Problem*. As it turns out, there are further motivating claims at work in Schiffer's defence of Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering. Let's try to tease these out.

25. Schiffer's Master Argument.

Schiffer's master argument in favour of his version of Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering can be reconstructed so that it proceeds in two stages. Crucially, the first stage deploys the claim given above that if a long-standing paradox has some happy-face solution then "we would have heard about it by now":

Stage One:

- (i) All the main theoretical work has been done as regards trying to identify satisfactory happy-face treatments to the central philosophical paradoxes (the liar paradox, the sorites paradox, the paradox of free-will, the paradoxes of personal identity, and so on).
- (ii) If such satisfactory treatments were available, and since, given (i), we have done all the work we need to do to find them, then we would have found them by now.
- (iii) We have not found any such treatments.
- (iv) Therefore, there are no satisfactory happy-face solutions to these central paradoxes.

This conclusion then plays a crucial role in the motivation for the Indeterminate Concept View and, in turn, the resultant explanation of intractability:

Stage Two:

- (v) If there are no satisfactory happy-face solutions to our central paradoxes then we are unable to identify a culprit in these paradoxes; and so, we have no sufficient reason to take some conceptual principle used in these paradoxes to be false.
- (vi) Equally, if there are no satisfactory happy-face solutions to these paradoxes then we are unable to identify the innocent conceptual principles deployed in the proof; and so we have no sufficient reason to take any of these principles to be true either.
- (vi) So, the conceptual principles used in our central paradoxes are evidentially symmetrical in just this sense.

(vii) What best explains this evidential symmetry is a kind of absolute symmetry: none of the conceptual principles *are* false; none of conceptual principles *are* true.

(ix) So, the conceptual principles deployed in some paradox are neither true nor false.

(x) That's why it is metaphysically impossible to know them to be true/false.

(xi) That's why all our central philosophical paradoxes are intractable: it is metaphysically impossible to discover a culprit.

Crudely: we've looked for the culprits; we've not found them; therefore, they are not, and cannot be, there. This master argument, if sound, tells against happy-face treatments—whether involving Conceptual Engineering or not. Now we can better see why Schiffer advocates his rather narrow conception of happy-face treatments: our long-standing paradoxes are intractable because of indeterminacy; paradoxes which have been resolved (or which are at least in the running to be solved) don't involve any indeterminacy.

26. Relative versus Absolute Intractability.

The master argument just given, if sound, establishes that our central philosophical paradoxes are, in effect, *absolutely* intractable. Absolute intractability contrasts with *relative* intractability whereby what blocks the route to finding some happy-face solution is some contingent feature of us, our language, our methods, our concepts, the world, and so on. There could be many reasons why a paradox has proved to be intractable. Often it is simply because we have not taken sufficient care to fully specify the symptoms of the malady. Often it may be because certain folk or conventional beliefs are very hard to dislodge (or very easy to slip back into once temporarily dislodged). Often it is because our philosophical theories are not fine grained enough to put our finger on a specific, basic culprit (see below). The Happy-Face Conceptual Engineer adds to this list: our conceptual competence makes it difficult to accept any proposed solution. Better theory and/or better thinking and/or better methodology will be able to overcome such intractability—and a (sufficiently) specific treatment will be in prospect.

This distinction provides the Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineer with a reply to the *Over-Explanation of Intractability Problem* given above: there is no over-explanation. The Happy-Face Conceptual Engineer is able to explain *relative* intractability; the Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineer is able to explain *absolute* intractability. Moreover, given Stage One of the master argument, our central paradoxes only exhibit the latter kind of intractability. So, not only do the two explanations not compete; there is no need to explain any kind of relative intractability because our central paradoxes don't have this property—at least if we are to believe the master argument just given. Should we accept this argument?

27. The Imperialism Objection.

Schiffer seems to think that we have already scaled the highest philosophical peaks and that it is simply time to stock as to what we have achieved. *His Answer*: not much in the way of

happily resolving paradoxes. That represents a kind of imperialism whereby the current state of (analytic) philosophy is to dominate over all past and future states of (analytic) philosophy: in the past, we were too optimistic about finding specific, happy-face treatments; in the future, such continued optimism would also be misplaced. Call that *The Imperialism Objection*.

However, it's far too hasty to assume that all the main work has been done as regards finding some (suitably) specific treatment to some long-standing paradox. Perhaps philosophy is merely in its infancy (as I am inclined to think). New philosophical theories continue to spring up. Old theories are still getting reworked. To think that *right now*, and *only right now*, in the 21st Century, have we achieved sufficient philosophical enlightenment so as to recognise that various long-standing paradoxes require us to posit indeterminacy to make sense of their intractability is frankly rather ludicrous. Upshot: Premise (i) of the master argument is highly tendentious.

28. Near Symmetry and The Indiscriminable Concept View.

Another weakness in the master argument is that the evidential symmetry of the conceptual principles deployed in some paradox need not be best explained by absolute symmetry—by taking all the principles to be false. That is, premise (vii) is not sufficiently supported. There are alternative explanations as to why there is no sufficient reason to take any of the conceptual principles to be false/true. We have encountered one already: the principles are not neither true nor false but, rather, true or false but indeterminate which—thus giving rise to a bivalent model of the Indeterminate Concept View. Another alternative explanation is that the conceptual principles are just *nearly* symmetrical: one of them is false alright but they are similar enough in their role in our thought and understanding such that our limited powers of (conceptual) discrimination are unable to discern which principle is false. On this view, *The Indiscriminable Concept View*, while it is metaphysically possible to discover the culprit, it is not feasible to do so.³⁹ This now puts us in a position to set forth a third kind of Conceptual Engineering.

29. Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering via The Indiscriminable Concept View.

Component One: Explain why a happy-face solution is not available. A happy-face treatment is not available because the conceptual principles used in the paradox are sufficiently symmetrical such that we are unable to discriminate the true conceptual principles deployed from the false one. Still, the paradox is blocked because we know that one of the conceptual principles deployed is false—it is just not feasible to work out which one.

Component Two: Explain contagiousness. Same as for the Indeterminate Concept View.

³⁹ There is really a family of Indiscriminable Concept Views depending on just how feasible it is to discover the culprit. One prominent member of this family is Mysterianism, the view that creatures like us will never be able to find the culprit in some paradox—that we will never be able to solve certain central philosophical paradoxes via a happy-face route (cf. McGinn 1993, p. 31).

Component Three: Explain intractability. The paradox is intractable because we have been looking for a happy-face solution when it is not feasible to give one—see Component One.

Component Four: Revise or replace. In order to prevent the paradox from returning we need to revise or replace our concepts. In the case of conceptual revision, the Conceptual Engineer needs to revise the concepts deployed in the proof so that a contradiction can no longer be derived. If engaging in conceptual replacement, the Conceptual Engineer needs to ensure that the surrogate concepts do not themselves give rise to a (similar) paradox.

30. Which Form of Conceptual Engineering Wins Out?

The thrust of the argument in the last few sections goes roughly as follows: The Indeterminate Concept View is tendentious on (at least) two broad counts: it doesn't give us sufficient reason to prefer Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering over Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering; and, we have not been given any good reason to prefer the Indeterminate Concept View over the Indiscriminable Concept View. If anything, it might appear that the latter view looks marginally better than the Indeterminate Concept View, and that Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering looks better still. Does this mean that Happy-Face Conceptual Engineering wins out? That would be a hasty conclusion to draw, for at least three reasons.

The first of these we have touched upon already: as things stand, effective happy-face treatments of paradox are very thin on the ground. Though that fact, as we have seen, does not give us sufficient reason to prefer unhappy-face approaches to our long-standing paradoxes, it does give us some reason to be pessimistic about the prospects for finding happy-face treatments. If in 2000 years it turns out that happy-face solutions are still thin on the ground then that pessimism will be further justified, other things being equal. So, the Happy-Face Conceptual Engineer certainly owes us a much more complete story about the apparent lack of progress in discovering effective happy-face treatments. The second reason is that conceptual defects don't occur in isolation. The third reason is that there is a more workable methodology available which involves an intermediate view. Let's take these reasons in turn.

31. Paradoxes as Stress-Tests.

To re-invoke the engineering metaphor mentioned above, paradoxes are akin to stress-testing a complex machine. Such a test may reveal that the components of the machine malfunction if sufficiently pressed—due to faults in the design. That malfunction may indeed be due to a single component. Perhaps the component is not sufficiently ductile to serve its expected purpose, or perhaps the design means that it is too small or too malleable or too thin or too brittle to do exactly what we wanted it to do. In all these cases, the component's defect only emerges in tandem with all the other components of the machine. These other components are simply enabling features of the malfunction rather than contributory causes of the defect.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In another design of machine, that component may work perfectly well.

In other stress-tests, it may make little sense to speak of a single, faulty component. If an internal combustion engine malfunctions at low speed—perhaps via misfiring—that may be due to a confluence of factors involving several features of the design—there is a kind of collective culpability at work. In such cases, there is no single (best) remedy, but rather various ways in which one or more features of the design can be altered in order to address the problem. Likewise, although we may be able to isolate a single component as the source of the malfunction, this defect may simply be due to the way in which the various parts of this component combine—we may not be able to exclusively blame a single part.⁴¹

The analogy between unhappy-face treatments of paradox ought to be clear. These considerations should encourage the Conceptual Engineer to be open to the possibility of unhappy-face solutions just as much as they should be open to happy-face solutions. It really depends upon the paradox in hand. Moreover, they should be open to The Indeterminate Concept View too, because it may well turn out that it is simply indeterminate which principle is at fault. It may now begin to look like the upshot of our discussion is that both happy-face treatments and unhappy-face treatments are both eminently available options. Alas, not so quick. As it turns out, happy-face treatments represent a kind limit case which it is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, unhappy-face treatments prove not only to be rather thin on the ground but somewhat unhelpful from the engineering perspective. How so?

32. Happy-Face Treatments Are a Limit Case.

Most treatments of paradox which purport to be happy-face treatments are not in fact happy-face at all. While these treatments promise to isolate a specific, basic culprit, they merely turn out to have isolated a group of culprits which cannot all be true. For example, there is a whole raft of responses to the liar paradox which reject Tarski's T-schema for truth, namely the schema: a sentence S is true if and only if p (where S says that p). That may seem like a good candidate for being a happy-face solution: a culprit has been identified and rejected; the paradox is thus blocked. Not so. Tarski's T-schema is a biconditional. You only need to reject one direction of the biconditional to block the relevant form of the liar paradox. Those solutions which reject the T-schema but do not tell us which direction of the T-schema fails cannot count as happy-face solutions because they have not put their finger on a single, specific, basic culprit.⁴² Rather, they have rather put their finger on two principles, at least one of which must be untrue.⁴³

This is not an isolated case. Happy-face treatments (whether involving Conceptual Engineering

⁴¹ More typically, attribution of fault will be a matter of degree.

⁴² Horwich (1990), Eklund (2002), Scharp (2013) all propose solutions in which the T-schema is rejected. However, they do not tell us which direction of the T-schema is to be rejected. And since classical logic is respected on each of these proposals then there one (or both) of the directions of the T-schema is false.

⁴³ This is why Scharp (2007, 2013) is not a Happy-Face Conceptual Engineer. This is a crucial feature of Scharp's view otherwise there would be no reason, as he thinks, to replace concept of truth with two surrogate concepts *ascending truth* and *descending truth* which, respectively, take over the enquotational and disquotational roles of the truth-predicate. See Greenough (2017) for relevant discussion.

or not) represent a kind of limit case. Absolute specificity is extremely hard to come by. Some candidate culprit Z will typically be entailed by (or theoretically motivated by) some conjunction of two or more principles (A & B & ...) which are each weaker than Z. Philosophical treatments of paradox which reject Z will often not be specific enough, as they stand, to say which of these principles A, B, ..., is to be rejected.⁴⁴ The only cases where a happy-face solution is in prospect will be when there is a single culprit which is in some sense *basic*—where the guilty party is not grounded in, or theoretically motivated by, a conjunction of two or more principles which are relevantly more fundamental or explanatory.

33. Non-Specificity and the Sorites Paradox.

Take another example. One common kind of solution to the sorites paradox is to reject the assumption that vague predicates are tolerant, where such tolerance is roughly the idea that whether or not a vague predicate applies to an object is not affected by small changes in the underlying properties of the object.⁴⁵ That may seem like a prototypical happy-face kind of treatment since a single assumption in the paradoxical proof has been singled out for rejection. Again, not so fast. The sorites paradox is actually a highly non-specific form of paradox since there can be, and indeed are, numerous different ways in which one can motivate the idea that vague predicates are tolerant.⁴⁶ Each of these various ways will seek to ground or explain the idea that vague predicates are tolerant.

The challenge for a genuine happy-face solution, then, is as follows: for each more specific version of the sorites paradox, we must isolate the single, *basic* culprit amongst the collection of principles which, taken together, entails (or grounds, or theoretically motivates) the claim that vague predicates are tolerant. That demands a finer-grain of theory. If a single culprit can be found amongst the collective, the challenge will simply re-appear since this more specific culprit will (typically) itself be grounded or motivated by a further collection of principles. We may know that this collective of more basic principles cannot all be true, but without being able to see which one is false—our theory is not fine-grained enough to discriminate the more specific culprit. The only way out of this regress is to find some basic culprit in the sense given above. The devotees of happy-face solutions have yet to give us sufficient confidence that paradoxes always bottom out in a single, basic culprit, let alone give us the confidence to declare that it is always feasible to find one. This suggests that not only are candidate happy-face solutions rather rare, they may be extremely difficult to discover.

34. Unhappy-Face Treatments are also a Limit Case.

Unhappy-face approaches are maximally unspecific. In a nutshell, such approaches go as follows: here is the group of principles which give rise to the paradox; they are collectively

⁴⁴ Often it is not be obvious that C is entailed by two or more principles (each of which is weaker than C).

⁴⁵ See Wright (1975, 1976). Tolerance is rejected by epistemic, intuitionistic, and supervaluational conceptions of vagueness (see Keefe 2000).

⁴⁶ See Greenough (2018) for some relevant discussion.

guilty; we can't find *the* culprit amongst them—because there isn't one (to be found); and indeed, crucially, we can't even identify an innocent principle in this group which we can eliminate from our investigation; the only thing we can do by way of treatment is to revise or replace one or more of the concepts deployed. Thus conceived, such treatments are rather uncommon. Some process of elimination will typically always take place whereby certain principles used in some paradoxical proof will (justifiably) not fall under suspicion. So, while unhappy-face treatments represent a perfectly achievable limit case, no self-proclaimed Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineer really practices what they preach and offers up such treatments. Rather, a more specific set of allegedly culpable principles will typically be selected for suspicion of guilt.⁴⁷

35. Unhappy-Face Treatments Give No Clue as to How to Fix a Conceptual Defect.

Because unhappy-face treatments represent a kind of limit case they have the feature that revision or replacement is difficult to successfully carry out. Go back to the analogy used above whereby we have some faulty internal combustion engine which, because of bad design, misfires at low revs. Suppose further that this is one of those very rare cases whereby we are merely able to apportion a kind of collective blame to all the components of this engine. No more specific diagnosis is available. While it will still be feasible to re-design the engine so as to fix the fault via some process of trial and error, in the absence of any more specific idea as to the source of the defect, such engineering is very difficult to carry out. That's because we are given absolutely no clue as to what revisions or replacements will be proven to be non-defective. In more real life cases of engine failure, we are always able to have a more nuanced apportionment of blame to a subset of the components in the engine. When that is so, we are given various clues as to the how best to fix the defect. The same is arguably true of paradoxes.

36. A Humdrum Result?

The discussion in the last few sections now suggests that there is a scale of intermediate treatments of paradox between the limit cases of Happy-Face and Unhappy-Face Conceptual Engineering. Such intermediate treatments are neither fully happy-face nor fully unhappy-face, neither thoroughly specific in isolating a single (basic) culprit, nor thoroughly unspecific in being content to simply apportion collective blame to all the principles at work in some paradox. Indeed, it might even be thought that this is an obvious, even somewhat humdrum result—at least once the issues have been made spelt out properly.

In fact, something a bit stronger is being suggested: that treatments on this intermediate scale can nonetheless be *effective* treatments—that absolute specificity is not required in order to successfully treat a paradox. Rather, a treatment which is *specific enough* is good enough to

⁴⁷ In his (1996), Schiffer does not put any logical concepts under suspicion of guilt in discussing what to say about scepticism. Rather, he spends a great deal of time ruling out a contextualist approach to scepticism on the grounds that contextualism is committed to an implausible error theory. That represents a further distillation of the collection of principles under suspicion. In particular, Schiffer places no suspicion on the presupposition that there is no relevant context shift occurring in the proof. (See Kindermann and Greenough (2017) for assessment and criticism of Schiffer's anti-contextualist views.)

count as effective. That may still seem a little humdrum. And indeed it is—as it stands. The real interest of the proposal in hand starts to emerge when we ask: specific enough *for what purpose?*

As we shall see, something a bit stronger still is on the table: that treatments of paradox have two dialectical goals such that a treatment may be specific enough to effectively cure a paradox, but may not be specific enough to answer all outstanding theoretical questions posed by the paradox. Perhaps, as stated, even that will still seem a little humdrum. (I hope so because that gets us half-way to Neutralism proper.)

In fact, something *much* more interesting is in the offing: that once we allow for treatments which are non-specific, but nonetheless specific enough to effectively combat a paradox, we can also make room for treatments which are *fully neutral*. These are treatments which don't simply stay silent (and therefore neutral) on certain theoretical questions posed by the paradox. These treatments reject some culprit at work in the proof *from a theory-neutral perspective*, a perspective which is as neutral as possible on points of theory. The more neutral the treatment is, the more partisans can get behind it. Mutually agreeable treatments of hitherto intractable paradoxes are thus in prospect. The upshot is *Neutralism*—the view that significant philosophical progress can take place when (and sometimes only when) a suitably non-specific, thoroughly neutral theory, treatment, or methodology is adopted.

An exemplar paradox, together with a neutralist solution, will help get clearer on the proposal.

37. Sameness Scepticism.

Consider the following kind of scepticism: let the Bad Case be a case where it appears to some subject that they have two legs, they believe that they have two legs, and yet their belief is false—because they are the victim of an evil genie who is deceiving them. In such a Bad Case, the subject fails to know that they have two legs. Let the Good Case be a case where it appears to the subject that they have two legs, they believe that they have two legs, and the subject is not being deceived by an evil genie—so their belief is true and would ordinarily be taken to be knowledge.⁴⁸

Enter the *Sameness Sceptic* who says the Good case and the Bad Case are relevantly the same when it comes to knowing: the subject is no better off (and no worse off), epistemically speaking, in the Good Case than they are in the Bad Case. The key sceptical thought here is that: all the subject has to go on, when it comes to knowing, is the evidence of their senses—how things appear—and such appearances are the same in both cases. However, since the subject fails to know in the Bad Case, and since the subject is no better off (and no worse off), epistemically speaking, in the Good Case, then they also fail to know in the Good Case.

⁴⁸ The terminology is taken from Williamson (2000).

Upshot: the subject in the Good Case cannot know that they have two legs.⁴⁹ This form of scepticism might seem to be a thoroughly troublesome challenge—indeed a paradox because from initially plausible premises, via initially plausible reasoning, we have derived an initially implausible conclusion. Even so, when we properly regiment the symptoms of Sameness Scepticism, it then becomes rather easy to see *that* the paradoxical proof fails, but, arguably, not so easy to see *where* the proof fails.

38. Sameness Scepticism Regimented.

When suitably regimented, the outline symptoms of *Sameness Scepticism* are as follows:

(1) Ex hypothesi, the Good Case and the Bad Case are phenomenally alike (with respect to the proposition that p): that is, it appears to the subject in the Good Case that p , and it appears to the subject in the Bad Case that p .

(2) If the Good Case and the Bad Case are phenomenally alike then they are evidentially alike (with respect to p): that is, the evidence had by the subject in the Good Case for p is the same evidence the subject has in the Bad Case for p . (After all, the thought goes, the only evidence we have to go on is the evidence from our senses—from how things appear to us via looking, tasting, smelling, and so forth—and matters appear the same in both cases.)

(3) If the subjects in both Good Case and Bad Case are evidentially alike (with respect to p) then they are epistemically alike (with respect to p): that is, the strength of the subject's epistemic position (with respect to p) is the same in both Good Case and Bad Case. (After all, the thought goes, our evidence is what determines how good our epistemic standing turns out to be.)

(4) If the strength of the subject's epistemic position (with respect to p) is the same in both Good Case and Bad Case then the subject in the Good Case knows that p if and only if the subject in the Bad Case knows that p . (Our epistemic position determines whether or not we know.)

(5) Ex hypothesi, the subject cannot know, in the Bad Case, that p .

(6) Therefore, given (1)-(4), the subject cannot know, in the Good Case, that p .

This regimented argument also constitutes a paradox. Premises (1) and (5) are just part of the set-up; the conclusion (6) is highly implausible; and, (2)-(4) unpack the initially plausible sounding claim that "all the subject has to go on, when it comes to knowing, is the evidence of

⁴⁹ Sameness Scepticism is not a form of Cartesian Scepticism because it doesn't invoke the claim that the Good Case is (phenomenally) indiscriminable from the Bad Case. (Nor does it invoke any kind of closure principle for evidence or knowledge.) It is much closer to what has come to be known as *Underdetermination Scepticism* (see Brueckner 1994; Vogel 2004; Pritchard 2005). Indeed, it arguably provides a clearer and more thorough statement of the symptoms of Underdetermination Scepticism than the standard formulations.

their senses—how things appear—and such appearances are the same in both cases.” So how should we address this paradox? *Proposal: Go Neutral.*

39. A Neutralist Treatment of Sameness Scepticism.

The conjunction of premise (2) and (3) entail the following sceptical claim SC:

(SC) If the Good Case and the Bad Case are phenomenally alike (with respect to p) then they are epistemically alike (with respect to p): that is, the strength of the subject's epistemic position (with respect to p) is the same in both Good Case and Bad Case.

But SC is just false—and everybody can agree on that. It is part of our ordinary concept (or conception) of knowledge that phenomenal likeness does not entail that two subjects are in the same epistemic position (with respect to p). A subject with a true belief that p is in a better, or at least different, epistemic position (with respect to knowing that p) than a subject who has a false belief that p . That's because having a true belief that p is a necessary condition on knowing that p . Meeting that condition puts you in a better (or at least different) epistemic position than someone who has a false belief that p .⁵⁰

What's crucial here is that a failure of SC is neutral between competing theories of knowledge.⁵¹ This means that the paradoxical derivation fails either at step (2), or at step (3).⁵² However, it is a far from straightforward matter to see *which* of these two principles fails. That's because we need to deploy much more controversial, specific philosophical theory to blame (2) but not (3).⁵³ Likewise, we need to deploy much more controversial, specific theory to blame (3) but not (2).⁵⁴

Philosophical illumination is hard won at the best of times. Philosophical theories are rarely obviously correct. It may take a considerable amount of time to come to accept some philosophical theory, let alone persuade others that it is the right way to go. Fortunately, we

⁵⁰ Note that (4) is not under dispute.

⁵¹ It is part of the (alleged) strength of the sceptic's challenge that they start out by saying: give me *your* concept of knowledge, and give me *your* concept of evidence, and I will give you an argument that, by *your* concept's lights, shows that empirical knowledge is impossible (see Stroud 1984). Here the compelling thought is that the sceptic would win far too easily if the sceptical argument deployed the sceptic's own concept of knowledge. So, given that the non-sceptic is also allowed to use the ordinary concept (or conception) of knowledge in their response, then they can straightforwardly reject the claim that phenomenal likeness entails sameness of epistemic position. This means that the treatment is not merely preventative but curative—it can also be used to persuade those who become infected with sceptical doubt via Sameness Scepticism that such doubt is misplaced. Williamson (2000, ch.8), in contrast, thinks the best we can hope for from a response to scepticism is merely a preventative solution. That represents a considerable advantage of neutralist over non-neutralist solutions.

⁵² Rejecting both, at least right now, would be overkill. See The Overkill Objection above.

⁵³ Williamson (2000, ch.8), for example, blames the phenomenal conception of evidence.

⁵⁴ Those who accept the phenomenal conception of evidence will take just this route.

don't need to be so specific in order to effectively treat a paradox.⁵⁵ Effective treatments just need to be *specific enough*. Additionally, we don't need to adopt a controversial theory of knowledge to address Sameness Scepticism—we can reject SC from a theoretically neutral, non-controversial, position.

We now have all the elements for an effective, fully neutralist treatment of Sameness Scepticism before us—a treatment that is non-specific but specific enough to be effective *and* neutral between every more specific theory of knowledge:

Firstly, we have put our finger on a false principle which features in the proof—namely SC, the principle that phenomenal likeness entails likeness of strength of epistemic position.

Secondly, SC follows from the conjunction of two more specific principles which feature of the premises in the proof: premises (2) and (3).

Thirdly, the treatment is silent/neutral as to which of (2), (3) must be given up. That's why the treatment is non-specific. Hence, this is overtly *not* a happy-face solution (nor is it a unhappy-face solution since some principles used in the proof are not under suspicion.)

Fourthly, we have not merely rejected SC—we have given an independent (persuasive) rationale for rejecting SC. That means we have stopped the paradox from taking hold. Everybody who is exposed to the treatment on offer will now be immune from Sameness Scepticism—the paradox is no longer contagious. So, the treatment is specific enough to be effective (see fn. 50 for more details).

Fifthly, this rationale involves a little bit of theory—which every partisan can accept. That's what makes the treatment fully neutral—it is not just neutral because it is neutral as regards (2) and (3), but additionally neutral because failure of SC is neutral ground amongst all theorists of knowledge.⁵⁶ (Doubly neutral, doubly non-specific.)

Sixthly, we can give a convincing explanation as to why we might initially be taken in by SC: SC follows from two principles, namely premises (2) and (3), which are (initially) plausible when considered in isolation. More generally, all the premises of the proof are initially plausible—which is why the paradox takes hold.

Seventhly, we can also explain why certain forms of Scepticism, such as Sameness Scepticism, have proved to be so intractable ... (This issue is postponed until §43 below.)

The upshot is that Sameness Scepticism can be effectively treated from a theory-neutral perspective—via Neutralism.

⁵⁵ Nor do we need to endorse the Indeterminate Concept View in treating this paradox.

⁵⁶ Not quite: some theorists may deny that knowledge entails truth. Since the sameness sceptic accepts that knowledge entails truth we can ignore such deviants in the dialectical setting. See Greenough (ms2) for more on this issue.

Doubtless it will be felt that something is missing from neutralist treatments of paradox. And in a way, something is missing, but that does not make the treatment ineffective. A return to our engineering metaphor will help here.

40. Back to the Engineering Metaphor.

An engineer will typically be able bring to bear sufficient theory to isolate that a defect is present, say, in the ignition system. Let's say it is this defect that is causing the engine to misfire at low revs. On that basis, they may be able to fix the fault, via some fairly non-specific theorising, but without having a sufficiently specific theory to say exactly what it is about the ignition system that is causing the defect to emerge. Indeed, the various design engineers for the engine may agree on a useful but fairly non-specific characterisation of the fault but disagree about just why, and in what exact way, the ignition system is causing the problem. That still represents a perfectly respectable, suitably specific resolution of the trouble—because they have enough theory to fix the fault. It would be entirely misplaced to say: Wait! We need to find out *exactly* what is causing the fault. That is a demand too far. Likewise, we can defeat the Sameness Sceptic but without being able to say which of (2) and (3) is invalid. It is also misplaced to say: Wait! We cannot defeat the Sameness Sceptic until we know just which of (2) and (3) is false. We have sufficient understanding of knowledge (or correct conception of knowledge) to provide a dialectically satisfying resolution of the paradox.⁵⁷

41. The Primary and Secondary Goals of Treating Paradox.

The considerations just mooted suggest that there is a primary and secondary goal at work in resolving paradoxes. When the engineer is faced with a faulty ignition system, her primary goal is to fix the fault. When the doctor is faced with a debilitating disease, his or her primary goal is to cure the patient. When the philosopher is faced with a paradox, such as Sameness Scepticism, her primary goal is to prevent the paradox from taking hold (and, if it has taken hold, to release the grip that the paradox has upon us). To do that, in each case, some theory is needed. The mechanical engineer uses fluid dynamics, metallurgy, and more; the doctor uses human biology, biochemistry, pharmacology, and more; the philosopher uses the theory of knowledge, the theory of truth, and more. As we have just seen, this theory need not be that specific (or that deep)—it just needs to be specific enough (and deep enough). It is not part of the primary dialectical goal to have the last word, or even a very specific word, on the concept (or conception) of, e.g., knowledge.

The secondary goal of treating or resolving some paradox is to improve our philosophical theory—to give insights into the deeper nature of, e.g., knowledge by answering all of the theoretical questions posed by the paradox. In particular, we want to know whether or not all the premises of some paradox are true. Recall Russell's remark above that philosophical puzzles

⁵⁷ It is commonplace in medicine to deploy non-specific theory to treat various diseases. Very often we treat some disease while knowing little about the underlying mechanisms of the disease and/or treatment. (Ebola is currently treated with an experimental serum—antibodies—but we don't know why one serum works and very similar sera don't. Trial and error have led the way to an effective treatment.)

serve much the same role that experiments serve in science. Equally, recall also that above we conceived of paradoxes as yielding a kind of theoretical stress-tests. In meeting the primary goal we act like a doctor (or engineer); in meeting the secondary goal, we act like a human biologist (or metallurgist or chemist or physicist).

The primary and secondary goals may often march in step, but they may come apart. In giving a neutralist treatment of some paradox, the secondary goal will typically not be fully met. In particular, we will not be able to say whether or not all the premises of the paradox are true—that's just what happened with respect to premises (2) and (3) of Sameness Scepticism. An effective treatment of this paradox does not take a stand on the phenomenal conception of evidence. Hence, the feeling that something is missing. But beware! We should not conflate the Primary and Secondary goals of treating paradox: if we demand that all theoretical questions posed by some paradox be answered then that sets an unreasonably high-bar for effective treatments.⁵⁸

42. Three Axes of Neutralism.

It's worth stressing that there is more to a neutralist treatment than being non-specific but specific enough. There are two more axes of neutralism at work in the treatment of Sameness Scepticism given above. Suppose that a paradox involves a principle A and a principle B, which, taken together entail some principle Z. Suppose that a treatment involves giving an independent reason to reject Z. Given this basic structure, there are three axes of Neutralism to consider. Firstly, we have:

Axis One: Be neutral as to which of A, B, is false (where A, B are both weaker than Z).

Axis One will be an essential feature of all neutralist treatments. Secondly, we have:

Axis Two: Reject Z using neutral theory—theory which is common ground to all partisans.

Not all non-specific treatments will invoke this second Axis because on some non-specific treatments it may be a controversial matter that Z fails. Those remedies that do invoke this axis have the attractive feature that the non-specific treatment on offer can command universal assent. The neutralist treatment of Sameness Scepticism given above had just this feature. Finally, we also have:

Axis Three: Stay neutral as to the following options: (i) one and only one of A, B is false, and it is feasible to find out which; (ii) one and only one of A, B is false, and it is not feasible to find out which; (iii) it is indeterminate whether A/B is false and so it is metaphysically impossible to find out which.

⁵⁸ Another way of thinking about the distinction in hand is via two different sorts of opponents: the paradox-peddler—the sceptic, the misologist, the absurdist, the irrationalist, the sophist, the pyrrhonist, the gadfly—versus the bemused theorist who is beset by paradox. The primary goal is to defeat the paradox peddler via some specific or non-specific treatment; the secondary goal is to provide the bemused theorist with better, more complete theory.

Axis Three in effect entails that Neutralism stays silent on the issue as to whether or not a more specific treatment is feasible: the jury is out on whether we can move beyond neutral solutions to our central philosophical paradoxes to more specific treatments. (And so we remain neutral on the veracity of the Indeterminate and Indiscriminable Concepts views.)

43. Neutralism and Intractability.

Why have our central paradoxes proved so hard to treat via (relatively) specific treatments? Because of the third axis just given, Neutralism cannot co-opt the accounts of intractability given by the Indeterminate Concept View or the Indiscriminable Concept View. Those accounts make it impossible/infeasible to discover specific treatments—but Neutralism is neutral on that issue. What about the account of intractability offered by Happy-Face Conceptual Engineers? That is certainly available. So, for the Conceptual Engineer, Sameness Scepticism has proved to be intractable because our conceptual competence with the concept of evidence and the concept of knowledge seduces us into accepting premises (2) and (3). Any promising solution which rejects one of these premises just feels wrong because of such competence.

A broader question is simply: why have our central paradoxes proved so hard to treat *simpliciter*? The neutralist answer is that we simply have overlooked (or downplayed) the possibility of neutral treatments—treatments which have all three axes of neutrality given above. We have been too focussed on specific, controversial treatments, and specific, controversial theories, and so have overlooked the possibility of non-specific, theory-neutral treatments.⁵⁹

To return to a medical metaphor: the epistemology wards of the philosophical hospital are stacked full of patients who have contracted the sickness of scepticism—in the worst cases, as Hume says, suffering from “delirium and melancholy”. Meanwhile, the expert philosophical practitioners disagree wildly on the underlying nature of the malady and disagree even further on the best course of treatment. They do, however, unite in the view that a fairly specific (and inevitably controversial) theory of health—a specific theory of knowledge and evidence—and a fairly specific (and inevitably controversial) theory of disease—telling us exactly where the sceptic is going wrong in the paradoxical proof—is an essential component of an effective cure. That is to overlook Neutralism. They should first be looking for common ground: “Is there a common core to our proposed medications?” And they should also first be looking for non-specific (but specific enough) treatments: “Do we really need to take a stand on every premise of the proof?”. It is no surprise that the various forms of Scepticism have proved to be so intractable in the absence of such a neutralist methodology.

⁵⁹ Relatedly, we have conflated the primary and secondary goals of treating paradox.

44. Neutralism and Philosophical Progress.

Neutral treatments thus may take on a particular attraction when philosophical debates have become bogged down in “bustle”, when there is little hope of philosophical consensus, when the prospect of gaining philosophical knowledge in some domain seems remote, if not quixotic.⁶⁰ Going neutral will doubtless prove appealing to those who are sceptical about philosophical progress and/or the possibility of substantial philosophical knowledge.⁶¹ It’s worth stressing, however, that the methodology on offer does not require such scepticism or pessimism—after all, the third axis of Neutralism entails that we are to be open-minded about the feasibility of finding some more specific treatment, some more happy-face solution. That said, if you find yourself beset with scepticism or deep pessimism about making headway in the face of internecine philosophical disagreement then a form of Neutralism—which at least involves the first two axes mentioned above—may well be for you.⁶²

45. Exotic Treatments and Curious Cures.

As we have seen, a neutralist treatment of scepticism will not yield the last word on knowledge and evidence. If you find yourself being highly dissatisfied by this feature then I urge you to compare neutralist treatments with all other remedies on offer. There are three broad sorts of comparison to make: to *exotic treatments*, to palliative treatments, and to what I shall term *promising treatments*.

The history of medicine is strewn with tales of exotic treatments and curious cures. Most of these were entirely ineffective—and often proved worse than the malady itself.⁶³ The history of philosophical paradox is really no different. Take the manifold responses to scepticism. Some claim that to resolve certain sceptical puzzles we must take “knows” to be a context-sensitive term.⁶⁴ That’s a pretty exotic proposal. Others have claimed that certain forms of scepticism demand that we reject the claim that knowledge fails to transmit from the premises to the

⁶⁰ See the beginning of Hume’s *Treatise* and the beginning of Kant’s first *Critique*.

⁶¹ For relevant literature see: Hume (1738), Murdoch (1970), Moody (1986), Nagel (1986), Nielsen (1987), McGinn (1993), van Inwagen (2004), Kornblith (2010), (2013), Dietrich (2011), Golding (2011), Goldberg (2013), Chalmers (2015), Frances (2016), (2017), Gutting (2016), Kelly (2016), Cappelen (2017), Cherry (2017), Green (2017), Koertge (2017), Ladyman (2017), Stoljar (2017), Tanesini (2017), Thomasson (2017), Wilson (2017).

⁶² Equally, Neutralism might be attractive to those who adopt a deflationary, anti-theory, account of treating paradox (see Horwich 2010). On one version of such a view, the source of paradox stems from a kind of standing tendency to over-generalise (see e.g. Horwich 1990 on the liar paradox where the T-schema is to be restricted). Such a diagnosis is alleged to be enough on its own to properly resolve all intractable paradoxes—philosophical theory is not needed. Neutralism, as here conceived, does not endorse such a one-size-fits-all diagnosis; nor does it shun (heavyweight) theory in the resolution of paradox.

⁶³ See Wootton (2006), Belofsky (2013).

⁶⁴ Stine (1976), Cohen (1987), DeRose (1995), Lewis (1996).

conclusion of an argument that is known to be valid.⁶⁵ That's even more exotic, to say the least. Some say that scepticism is to be cured with a dose of Idealism.⁶⁶ Some say with a dose of Relativism.⁶⁷ Some with a certain kind of Naturalism.⁶⁸ Some with a heavy dose of Structuralism.⁶⁹ Some with just the right dose of Internalism.⁷⁰ Beyond this familiar range of treatments from Big Philosophical Theory there are innumerable less familiar tinctures and tonics ranging from the quirky to the utterly bizarre.⁷¹ Neutralist treatments, in comparison, are decidedly unexotic. They have no fancy packaging, no fancy ingredients, and few, if any, side-effects.

46. Palliative Treatments.

Many philosophers have simply conceded to one or more forms of scepticism.⁷² Some allow that the knowledge sceptic is simply right—knowledge really is impossible—but that, nonetheless, a palliative treatment is still available: we can learn to live with the symptoms of scepticism because our beliefs about the external world remain justified or warranted.⁷³ Some go even further and take the various forms of scepticism to show that both knowledge and justification are impossible. Palliative care in such a case would consist in showing that in some sense our ordinary claims to knowledge are still allowable.⁷⁴ Living with such scepticism is not easy. It seems to require a wholesale revision of our ordinary ways of thinking about the world. Neutralism shows that such intensive and painful palliative care is simply not needed.

47. Promising Treatments and Minimal Adequacy.

Neutralism allows for a modest kind of pluralism because neutral and non-neutral treatments can happily co-exist. That's because there may be some more specific and controversial theory of knowledge which improves upon a neutralist treatment by meeting both the primary and secondary goals of an effective treatment. Not all non-neutralist proposals should be taken

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Dretske (1970, 1971), Nozick (1981).

⁶⁶ Berkeley (1710, 1713).

⁶⁷ Williams (1991).

⁶⁸ Strawson (1985); cf. Hume (1738)

⁶⁹ Chalmers, forthcoming.

⁷⁰ Vogel (2008).

⁷¹ See Greenough ms2 for a collation of various less well-known and increasingly peculiar proposals.

⁷² The pyrrhonics, meanwhile, thought that belief itself is the disordered state, and suspension of belief is the healthy state.

⁷³ See Wright (1991), Fumerton (1995), Kvanvig (1998), Kornblith (2000); cf. Schaffer (2004) who thinks we can't know we have two legs, but we can discriminate having two legs from having stumps. Quine (1969) famously said that "the Humean condition is the human condition". See also Cavell (1979).

⁷⁴ See Unger (1971, 1975), Nagel (1986); cf. Stroud (1984); cf. Hume (1738, 1742).

seriously however. Go back to Sameness Scepticism. Neutralism rejects SC, where SC follows from the conjunction of premises (2) and (3). Only those specific responses which both reject SC and reject either (2) or (3) should be taken seriously. Should some non-neutralist treatment fail to entail that SC is to be rejected then we can dismiss its credentials from the outset. For this reason, neutralist treatments serve as a kind of minimal adequacy condition for any more specific and substantive remedy.⁷⁵

48. Neutralist Conceptual Engineering.

We are finally in a position to state the main components of Neutralist Conceptual Engineering:

Component One: Isolate the non-specific culprit from a neutral perspective. Give a sufficient reason, from a theory-neutral perspective, to think that some premise or rule of inference or presupposition invoked in a proof is false or invalid; or, give sufficient reason to “bite the bullet” and endorse the conclusion. Here the culprit will be non-specific in the sense that it is entailed by the conjunction of two or more conceptual principles, where each of these principles is weaker than the non-specific culprit, and where the treatment is neutral as to which of these conceptual principles is false. Thus, the derivation of the unacceptable conclusion is blocked (or the conclusion turns out to be acceptable after all).

Component Two: Explain contagiousness. Mastery of all the concepts deployed in the proof disposes us to accept all the conceptual principles which feature as premises or rules of inference or presuppositions in the proof. This explains why the paradox was so contagious from the outset: our very understanding of the words used in the proof pulls us to accept a set of incompatible propositions.⁷⁶

Component Three: Explain intractability. Any (initially) promising (relatively) specific solution to a paradox entails that we must give up on some particular conceptual principle deployed in the proof. Since our competence with the relevant concept strongly disposes us to accept such a principle then that makes all promising solutions hard to swallow. Thus, the paradox is tricky to treat via a specific solution. That’s why any proposed (relatively specific) solution feels like a terrible distortion: what we take to be good philosophical theory is inevitably in conflict with our conceptual competence. Furthermore, we have simply overlooked the possibility of neutralist solutions. That’s why long-standing paradoxes have proved tricky to treat simpliciter.

Component Four: Revise or replace. In order to prevent the paradox from returning we need to suitably revise or replace our concepts. In the case of conceptual revision, the Conceptual Engineer needs to revise the concepts deployed in the proof so that the

⁷⁵ Neutral treatments are thus akin to Tarski’s minimal adequacy condition on any substantial theory of truth.

⁷⁶ I am suspicious that this diagnosis really adds anything, but that need not concern us here. See Greenough, ms1.

offending principle is no longer a conceptual principle for one of these concepts. If engaging in conceptual replacement, the Conceptual Engineer needs to ensure that the surrogate concepts do not themselves give rise to a (similar) paradox.

49. Neutralist Conceptual Engineering without Concepts.

There is little agreement as to what concepts are, where they live, how they survive, and what role they play in a theory of meaning and understanding. The concept of a concept is in pretty bad shape. Ironically, it is in desperate need of some Conceptual Engineering.⁷⁷ For that reason alone, Conceptual Engineering without concepts is arguably the more promising view.⁷⁸ Such a view is merely concerned with solving philosophical problems by revising the meanings of our words.⁷⁹ Call that view *Semantic Engineering*.

Without concepts, there are no inconsistent concepts. So how do we make sense of the source of paradox given Semantic Engineering? One surrogate for inconsistent concepts are inconsistent meanings (or intensions). These are rather like inconsistent concepts in that they are composed of principles—intensional principles—which cannot all be true. These intensional principles play an extension-determining role: they fix (or at least partially fix) the extension of the relevant word (relative to some world). So, the inconsistent of meaning of “true” has the two directions of Tarski’s T-schema for truth. These two principles manage to (partially) fix an extension for the world “true” relative a world. Such inconsistent meanings are rather exotic entities. How do they (partially) fix an extension? Does an idealised competent user need to be disposed to accept them? I don’t propose to answer these questions here. That would take us too far afield. Instead, let’s look at an alternative view.

One alternative surrogate for inconsistent concepts are *inconsistent words*. On a slightly loaded model, these are words which, if we sufficiently press the rules or conventions governing the use of these words, we get incompatible instructions as to whether to apply the word. On a less loaded model, inconsistent words have uses which are in conflict. Indeed, these uses compete to become the privileged use which manages to confer a consistent meaning onto the word.⁸⁰ In order to make sense of paradoxes, this conflict had better be intra-personal to make sense of how a single subject can be drawn into a paradox. Take Sameness Scepticism. A single competent subject uses the words “evidence” and “knows” such that they are disposed to accept both (2) and (3).⁸¹ It’s easy to see how an account of contagiousness and intractability can be developed from there.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Machery (2009) for a version of Concept Eliminativism.

⁷⁸ One further prominent reason to reject concepts stems from Williamson (2006) who argues that there are no conceptual truth/principles, and so no concepts.

⁷⁹ Or by replacing such words altogether.

⁸⁰ This, or something very like it, is Cappelen’s view whereby inconsistent words are meta-semantically inconsistent: used in ways which compete and conflict (see Cappelen 2018).

⁸¹ At least when these premises are considered individually.

Is Neutralism available to the Semantic Engineer? Yes. Because we can simply replace talk of inconsistent concepts with inconsistent words in the characterisation of Neutralist Conceptual Engineering given above. For example, Component Four then becomes: *Revise or Replace*. In order to prevent the paradox from returning we need to suitably revise or replace the uses of the inconsistent words deployed in the paradoxical proof. In the case of revision, the Semantic Engineer needs to revise the use of the premises deployed in the proof so that one or more premises is no longer assented to. Take Sameness Scepticism. The Neutralist Semantic Engineer revises our usage (or recommends revision of our usage) of “knows” and “evidence” such that (2) and (3) are both not endorsed.⁸²

50. Concluding Remarks.

Neutralism is the broad view that philosophical progress can take place when (and sometimes only when) a thoroughly neutral, non-specific theory, treatment, or methodology is adopted. We saw above how Neutralism was able to give an effective theory-neutral, non-specific treatment of Sameness Scepticism. It also offers the promise of treating various further intractable paradoxes—though that issue is for another day. Neutralism is, I submit, a promising view. Those who sponsor some form of Conceptual and Semantic Engineering can embrace it. Indeed, I hope to have shown that Conceptual Engineers, of whatever stripe, should embrace Neutralism.⁸³

References

- Belofsky, N. (2013): *Strange Medicine: A Shocking History of Real Medical Practices Through the Ages*, New York: Penguin.
- Brueckner, A. (1994): “The Structure of the Skeptical Argument”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54, pp. 827-35.
- Burge, T. (1993): “Content Preservation”, *The Philosophical Review*, 102:4, pp. 457-488.
- Burgess, A. (2014): “Keeping ‘True’: A Case Study in Conceptual Ethics”, *Inquiry*, 57:5-6, pp. 580-606.
- Burgess, A., and Plunkett, D (2013a): “Conceptual Ethics I”, *Philosophy Compass* 8, pp. 1091-1101.
- Burgess, A., and Plunkett, D (2013b): “Conceptual Ethics II”, *Philosophy Compass* 8, pp. 1102-1110.

⁸² I take it that Cappelen thinks that to resolve paradox we simultaneously engage in semantic and meta-semantic engineering: we revise both use and meaning simultaneously.

⁸³ Particular thanks to Herman Cappelen, Alexis Burgess, and David Plunkett for very helpful editorial and philosophical feedback. Thanks also to Dragana Bozin, Zoe Drayson, Matti Eklund, Paul Horwich, Mirela Fus, Chris Kelp, Anna-Sara Malmgren, Andrew Peet, Mark Richard, Sven Rosenkranz, Kevin Scharp, Camilla Serck-Hanssen, Mona Simion, Natalia Waights-Hickman, and Elia Zardini. The parts of this paper concerned with Neutralism were presented at Aberdeen (2011), UWA (2012), ANU (2012), St Andrews (2013, 2015, 2017), Graz (2014), Bled (2015), Bristol (2015), Leuven (2016), Glasgow (2016), Oslo (2016, 2017), Zermatt (2018). Work on this article has received funding from the project FFI2013-45968-P, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competition (MINECO). Thanks also to ConceptLab, UiO, for hosting me as a research fellow for two months in 2017 when the bulk of this paper was written.

- Cappelen, H. (2017): "Disagreement in Philosophy: An Optimistic Perspective", in Overgaard and D'Oro (eds) *Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*.
- Cappelen, H. (2018): *Fixing Language: Conceptual Engineering and the Limits of Revision*, forthcoming, Oxford: OUP.
- Carnap, R. (1950): *Logical Foundations of Probability*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cavel, S. (1979): *The Claim of Reason*, Oxford: OUP.
- Chalmers, D. (2015): "Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy?", *Philosophy* 90:1, pp. 3-31.
- Chalmers, D. (2017): "Structuralism as a Response to Scepticism", forthcoming.
- Cherry, M. (2017): *Coming out of The Shade*, in Blackford and Broderick (eds) *Philosophy's Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress*, Wiley Blackwell: Malden, MA.
- Chihara, C. (1979): "The Semantic Paradoxes: A Diagnostic Investigation", *Philosophical Review* 88:4, pp. 590-618.
- Cook, R. (2013): *Paradoxes*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cuonzo, M (2014): *Paradox*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1991): *What is Philosophy?*, translated by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, 1994, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Diaz-Leon, E. (2017): "Epistemic Contextualism and Conceptual Ethics", in J. Jenkins-Ichikawa (ed.) *Routledge Handbook for Epistemic Contextualism*, London: Routledge.
- Dietrich, Eric (2011): "There Is No Progress in Philosophy," *Essays in Philosophy*, 12:2.
- Dummett, M. A. E. (1975): "Wang's Paradox", *Synthese*, 30, pp. 201-32.
- Eklund, M. (2002): "Inconsistent Languages", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 64, pp. 251-75.
- Eklund, M (2015): "Intuitions, Conceptual Engineering, and Conceptual Fixed Points", in C. Daly (ed.) *Palgrave Handbook of Philosophical Methods*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 363-85.
- Eklund, M. (2017): *Choosing Normative Concepts*, Oxford: OUP.
- Fassio, D. and McKenna, R. (2015): "Revisionary Epistemology", *Inquiry*, 58: 7-8, pp. 755-779.
- Frances, F. (2016). "Worrisome Skepticism About Philosophy", *Episteme* 13:3, pp. 289-303.
- Frances, F. (2017). "Extensive Philosophical Progress and Agreement", *Metaphilosophy*, 48: 1-2, pp. 47-57.
- Goldberg, S. (2013): "Disagreement, Defeat, and Assertion", in *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*, Edited by D. Christensen and J. Lackey, Oxford: OUP.
- Golding, C. (2011): "A Conception of Philosophical Progress", *Essays in Philosophy*, 12:2.
- Green, K. (2017): "Re-Imagining the Philosophical Conversation", in Blackford and Broderick (eds) *Philosophy's Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress*, Wiley Blackwell: Malden, MA.
- Greenough, P. (2002): *Knowledge, Lies, and Vagueness: A Minimalist Treatment*, PhD Thesis, St Andrews.
- Greenough, P. (2003): "Vagueness: A Minimal Theory", *Mind*,
- Greenough, P. (2008): "Indeterminate Truth", in *Truth and Its Deformities, Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. XXXII, pp. 213-241, edited by P. French, 2008.
- Greenough, P. and Kindermann, D. (2017): "The Semantic Error Problem for Epistemic Contextualism", in J. Jenkins-Ichikawa (ed.) *Routledge Handbook for Epistemic Contextualism*, London: Routledge.
- Greenough, P. (2017): "Conceptual Marxism and Truth", *Inquiry*.
- Greenough, P. (2018): "Neutralism and the Observational Sorites Paradox", *Synthese*,
- Greenough, P. *Against Conceptual Engineering*, ms1, 2017.
- Greenough, P. *Knowledge: In Sickness and in Health*, ms2, 2018.

- Gutting, G. (2016): "Philosophical Progress", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*, (eds.) Herman Cappelen, Tamar Szabó Gendler, and John Hawthorne, Oxford: OUP.
- Haslanger, S. (2000): "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?", *Noûs*, 34:1, pp. 31-55.
- Haslanger, S. (2005): "What Are We Talking About? The Semantics and Politics of Social Kinds", *Hypatia*, 20:4, pp. 10-26.
- Haslanger, S. (2006): "Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds: What Good are Our Intuitions?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Vol.*, 80. p. 89-118.
- Haslanger, S. (2012): *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, New York/Oxford: OUP
- Horwich, P. (1990): *Truth*, Oxford: Blackwells.
- Horwich, P. (2010): "The Nature of Paradox", ch.11 of *Truth, Meaning, and Reality*, Oxford: OUP.
- Keefe, R. (2000): *Theories of Vagueness*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Kelly, T. (2016): "Disagreement in Philosophy: Its Epistemic Significance", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*, (eds.) H. Cappelen, T. Szabó Gendler, and J. Hawthorne, Oxford: OUP.
- Koertge, N. (2017): "Progress and Philosophy", in Blackford and Broderick (eds) *Philosophy's Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress*, Wiley Blackwell: Malden, MA.
- Kornblith, H. (2010): "Belief in the Face of Controversy," in *Disagreement* (eds.) R. Feldman and Ted A. Warfield, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 29-52.
- Kornblith, H. (2013): "Is Philosophical Knowledge Possible?", in D. E. Machuca (ed.) *Disagreement and Skepticism*, London: Routledge.
- Ladyman, J. (2017): "What has Philosophy ever Done for Us?" in Blackford and Broderick (eds) *Philosophy's Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress*, Wiley Blackwell: Malden, MA.
- Machery, E. (2009): *Doing Without Concepts*, Oxford: OUP.
- Mackie, (1972): *Truth, Probability, and Paradox: Studies in Philosophical Logic*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- McGinn, C. (1993): *Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry*, Oxford: Blackwells.
- Moody, T. (1986): "Progress in Philosophy", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 23, pp. 35-46.
- Murdoch, I (1970): *The Sovereignty of the Good*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nagel, T. (1986): *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: OUP.
- Nielsen, K. (1987): "Can there be progress in philosophy?" *Metaphilosophy*, 18, pp. 1-30.
- Plunkett, D. and Sundell, T. (2013): "Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms", *Philosophers' Imprint*, 13:23, pp. 1-37.
- Plunkett, D. (2015): "Which Concepts Should we use?: Metalinguistic Negotiations and the Methodology of Philosophy", *Inquiry*,
- Plunkett, D. (2016): "Conceptual History, Conceptual Ethics, and The Aims of Inquiry: A Framework for Thinking About The Relevance of the History/Genealogy of Concepts to Normative Inquiry", *Ergo*. 3: 2, pp. 27-64.
- Pritchard, D. (2005): "The Structure of Sceptical Arguments", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 55, pp. 37-52.
- Quine, W. V (1960): *Word and Object*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Quine, W. V. (1969): "Epistemology Naturalised", in W. V. Quine *Ontological Relativity And Other Essays*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Richard, M. (forthcoming): *Meanings as Species*, book ms.
- Russell, B. (1905): "On Denoting", *Mind*, 14:56, pp. 479-493.

- Sainsbury (2009): *Paradoxes*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Scharp, K. (2007): "Replacing Truth", *Inquiry*, 50:6, pp. 606-621.
- Scharp, K. (2013): *Replacing Truth*, Oxford: OUP.
- Scharp, K. (forthcoming): "Replies to Critics", *Inquiry*.
- Schiffer, S. (1996): "Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society New Series*, 96, pp. 317-333.
- Schiffer, S. (2003): *The Things We Mean*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schiffer, S. (2004): "Skepticism and the Vagaries of Justified Belief", *Philosophical Studies*, 119 (1-2), pp. 161-184.
- Simion, M. (2017): "The 'Should' in Conceptual Engineering", *Inquiry*, pp. 1-15.
- Sorensen, R. (2001): *Vagueness And Contradiction*, Oxford: OUP.
- Sorensen, R. (2003): *A Brief History of the Paradox*, New York/Oxford: OUP.
- Spicer, F. (2008): "Are there any Conceptual Truths about Knowledge?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 108, pp. 43-60.
- Stoljar, D. (2017): *Philosophical Progress: In Defense of a Reasonable Optimism*, Oxford: OUP.
- Strawson, P. (1963): "Carnap's Views on Constructed Systems Versus Natural Languages in Analytic Philosophy", in P. Schilpp, (ed.) *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, pp. 503-518.
- Stroud, B. (1984): *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford: OUP.
- Tanesini, A. (2017): "Doing Philosophy", in Overgaard and D'Oro (eds) *Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*.
- Tarski, A. (1944): "The Semantic Conception of Truth", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 4, pp. 341-76.
- Tarski, A. (1969): "Truth and Proof", *Scientific American*, 220: 6, pp. 63-77.
- Weiner, M. (2009): "The Mostly Harmless Inconsistency of Knowledge Attributions", *Philosophers' Imprint*, 9, pp. 1-25.
- Thomassen, A. L. (2016): "What Can We Do, When We do Metaphysics?", in Overgaard and D'Oro (eds) *Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*.
- Van Inwagen, P. (2004): "Freedom to Break the Laws", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 28.
- Vogel, J. (2004): "Varieties of Skepticism", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 68, pp. 1-37.
- Vogel, J. (2008): "Internalist Responses to Skepticism", in J. Greco (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Scepticism*, Oxford: OUP, pp. 533-556.
- Wootton, D. (2006): *Bad Medicine: Doctor's Doing Harm Since Hippocrates*, Oxford: OUP.
- Williamson, T. (1994): *Vagueness*, London: Routledge.
- Williamson, T. (2000): *Knowledge and Its Limits*, New York/Oxford: OUP.
- Williamson, T. (2006): "Conceptual Truth", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary*, 80, pp. 1-41.
- Wilson, J. (2017): "Three Barriers to Philosophical Progress", in Blackford and Broderick (eds) *Philosophy's Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress*, Wiley Blackwell: Malden, MA.
- Wright, C. (1975): "On the Coherence of Vague Predicates", *Synthese* 30, pp. 325-65.
- Wright, C. (1976): "Language Mastery and the Sorites Paradox", in G. Evans and G. McDowell (eds.) *Truth and Meaning: Essays in Semantics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 223-47.