

Conceptual analysis is pre-dominant in 20th and 21st century analytic philosophy. Roughly, the goal of conceptual analyses is to provide answers to ‘What is X?’ questions by stating the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for X. As such, it is an entirely *descriptive* enterprise. It should not come as a surprise that this enterprise leaves *normative* questions about the concepts we use unanswered. Recently, a number of philosophers working in different fields have started asking questions like ‘What should X be?’ or ‘Does X meet our legitimate purposes?’ These normative questions fall in the domain of *conceptual re-engineering*. Conceptual re-engineering aims to improve our conceptual apparatus. Starting from Carnap’s writings about the method of explication, my talk addresses conceptual re-engineering at a very general level: Under what circumstances is it legitimate to engage in conceptual re-engineering? What kind of criteria can be used to measure whether or not a given explication is successful? Is this method even applicable to standard philosophical areas? I will try to give answers to these questions by engaging in the dispute about philosophical methods between Carnap and Strawson. According to Strawson, explications are largely irrelevant for philosophy. Carnap, on the other hand, locates them at the center of philosophy. I will argue that both of these extreme positions are unfounded. Explication, and conceptual re-engineering more generally, is an important part of philosophy and should receive more attention than it currently does; but it should not be understood as a radical replacement of conceptual analysis. I further argue that the original framework proposed by Carnap needs some revision in order to be applicable throughout philosophy. Instead of tying the criterion for when a given conceptual replacement is fruitful to the possibility of using it in formulating universal laws, as Carnap suggests, I propose to make room for the fact that our theoretical and practical interests vary between domains. Whether or not a new concept ought to replace an old one is therefore not an absolute matter, but depends on the interests which guide the context for which the replacement is introduced.