

Engineering Conceptual Change: The Enactive Torch

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Summary: In the Philosophy and Engineering community, there is general agreement that interaction between the two fields can be mutually beneficial. However, there are distinctive ways in which engineering can play a crucial role in assisting the particular case of philosophy of mind, especially concerning our understanding of conscious experience and perception. The reciprocal design/use cycle of certain kinds of experience-augmenting technologies can facilitate the kind of conceptual advance that is necessary for progress toward a scientific account of consciousness, a kind of advance that is not possible to induce, it is argued, through traditional discursive, rhetorical and argumentative means. We present an example of engineering activity that plays this crucial role in informing philosophical research in the PAICS group at the University of Sussex: the design and use of a novel sensory substitution device (the Enactive Torch) as a means of inducing in the user new philosophical concepts of perceptual experience.