Is Engineering Philosophically Weak? A Linguistic and Institutional Analysis

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Abstract

This paper follows a paper by Mitcham and considers whether engineering is among a group of occupations he calls philosophically weak, in the sense that engineering does not aspire to good-in-themselves ideals as do medicine and law. The paper agrees that engineering is philosophically weak, but in the different sense that engineering is not as reflective upon its nature and place in the world as some other professions. The paper recovers Mitcham's distinction by consider the institutional complexity of a given occupation, suggesting that engineering's practice in the context of complex institutional arrangements precludes the relative ethical simplicity of such occupations as medicine and law.

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