

## **Armchair in Flames?** Experimental Philosophy and its Critics

### **Abstracts**

**Joachim Horvath** (University of Cologne)

*Experimental Philosophy and Meta-Epistemology*

First, the significance of the empirical results of experimental philosophy for the methodology of epistemology will be evaluated. A precise formulation of the challenge that these results pose to intuition-based epistemology will be presented. Then, a taxonomy of reactions to the challenge will be developed and it will be claimed that the experimental findings cannot be dismissed too easily. Second, I will argue against ‘meta-epistemic quietism’, which tries to avoid substantial meta-epistemic claims in disputes about the methodology of epistemology. Third, a constructive meta-epistemic proposal that I call ‘meta-epistemic instrumentalism’ will be worked out, for we need a substantial meta-epistemic framework in order to discuss and adjudicate the relevance of the experimental philosophers’ challenge. Fourth, I will apply meta-epistemic instrumentalism to some of the experimental results and show that especially the findings of cultural and socioeconomic variation can be explained in a novel and fruitful way. Nevertheless, some experimental results still cannot be accommodated, and epistemologists should therefore better not appeal to the relevant intuitions as philosophical evidence.

**Kirk Ludwig** (University of Florida)

*Intuition and Relativity*

In this paper I want to address a radical criticism of traditional philosophical methods that has been advanced on the basis of the survey method of so-called experimental philosophy. The criticism I have in mind holds that this method has turned up evidence that intuitions are relative in a way that undermines the claim that intuition-based investigation of traditional philosophical questions yields any objective answer to them. The two crucial questions are

- (1) What are intuitions (supposed to be)?
- (2) What are they (supposed to be) relative to?

To answer the first question we should look to the role of intuitions in traditional philosophical inquiry. To the answer the second, we should look to the relevant experimental literature. I will argue that when we have done this, we can see that it is impossible for intuitions properly understood to be relative in the way that has been suggested. This leaves room for some relativity of something, and it is of some interest. But it cannot bear the critical weight it has sometimes been asked to do.

**Ernest Sosa** (Rutgers)

*Intuitions and X-Phi*

This paper takes up the critique of armchair philosophy based on X-Phi results, including the most recent installments in papers by Jonathan Weinberg and Stephen Stich.

**Thomas Grundmann** (University of Cologne)

*Some hope for intuitions. A Reply to Weinberg*

In his recent paper “How to Challenge Intuitions Empirically without Risking Skepticism” (Midwest Studies 2007), Jonathan Weinberg defends three main claims:

- 1.) If we cannot detect and correct the errors of a putative source, then this source does not provide any genuine evidence.
- 2.) The philosophical practice of appeal to intuitions as evidence does not permit the detection and correction of errors (basically because philosophical intuitions are radically unstable).
- 3.) One can justify 1.) without relying on the philosophical use of intuitions.

If all three claims were true, then Weinberg could indeed challenge the philosophical use of intuitions without committing cognitive suicide.

In my talk, I will first raise some doubts about 1.) and then try to challenge 2.) and 3.) as well. On my view, Weinberg’s crucial argument relies on a fallacious inductive inference from the instability of folk intuitions to the instability of philosophers’ intuitions. There is also some positive evidence which suggests that philosophers’ intuitions are much more stable than shaky folk intuitions.

**Anand Vaidya** (San José State University, USA)

*On the Central Theoretical Posit of Experimental Philosophy*

Experimental philosophers have raised a number of objections against the use of intuition in Analytic philosophy by investigating folk intuitions. As a consequence, Analytic philosophers have spent time developing and refining theories of intuition which can handle the objections. I take at least some of the objections raised by Experimental philosophers to be healthy and good objections to the unchecked methodology of Analytic philosophy. However, it is not clear whether all experimental philosophers use "intuition" in the same sense. In this talk I will raise the question of whether there is any unified mental state picked out by "intuition" as used by experimental philosophers. I will discuss six models of intuition: psychological, linguistic, belief, judgment, propositional attitude, and perceptual. I will argue that experimental philosophers must choose one of these models or a hybrid of them, but that for every single version there appears to be some problem. As a consequence, I argue that experimental philosophy as a kind of special science that studies intuitions about philosophical issues through the methodology of cultural psychology must itself produce a theory of intuition. I close by sketching

some questions that a general theory of intuition ought to answer.

**Frank Hofmann** (University of Tübingen)

*Intuitions, Dispositions, and the Apriori*

Intuitions, as used in philosophical thought experiments, can be delineated by their content. They are about what is possible and what would counterfactually be the case. Thus they provide the justification for the premisses of modal arguments which lie at the heart of philosophical thought experiments (Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, 2007). Plausibly, intuitions can provide this justification in virtue of their special, 'intuitive' origin. Conceiving of hypothetical cases and imagining scenarios gives rise to intuitions. According to one view – the conceptual competence view – it is merely due to possessing and exercising the relevant concepts that intuitive judgments are reliable and justified. I will try to point out several serious problems for this view. A second view – which belongs to a perceptual model approach – builds on imagining rather than conceiving, and thinks of imagining as analogous to perceptual experience. We do not exercise competence entailed by concept possession merely, but rather bring to bear further, imaginative capacities that go far beyond what is entailed by mere concept possession. These capacities can be acquired and trained, and so we do in philosophy, and they are subject to various sorts of bad influences – just as other sources of belief are. Experimental philosophy can in principle test empirically how reliable these capacities are. I will try to spell out this view and to investigate into its advantages and disadvantages. The view differs significantly from the perceptual model that Ernest Sosa (*A Virtue Epistemology*, 2007) has discussed and criticized, and so it can avoid its difficulties.

**Joe Shieber** (Lafayette College, USA)

*On the Very Idea of Experimental Philosophy*

The movement of experimental philosophy sees itself as posing a serious challenge to the project of traditional philosophical inquiry. If the proponents of this new movement have their way, the comfortable armchair from which philosophers have grown accustomed to issuing their pronouncements would be no more, having simply gone up in smoke. The key to this assault on traditional philosophy is an attempt to impugn the use of thought experiments as a source of evidence by proponents of traditional philosophy. In this paper, however, we will suggest that this assault is misguided, in that what experimental philosophers take to be the role of thought experiment in traditional philosophy is a misconception and, thus, that what experimental philosophers take to be evidence undermining the utility of thought experiments is in fact irrelevant, given the function that thought experiments actually serve.

**Jonathan Weinberg** (Indiana University, USA)

*Are Philosophers Experts?*

Empirical challenges to the philosophical practice of the appeal to intuitions have overwhelmingly been based on data from ordinary undergraduate subjects. One line of response to such challenges, therefore, is the objection that philosophers are in some important respects epistemically special, allowing their intuitions to be immune from the problems that might plague the folk. In this paper, we argue that such an objection presents a plausible empirical hypothesis, but at this time, the existing psychological evidence does not indicate that the hypothesis is particularly likely to be true.

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