

Should one care about diverging intuitions of others?

Trying out intuition solipsism

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Until recently, armchair philosophy was in a state of innocence. According to standard philosophical practice (SPP), one can use one's own intuitions about hypothetical cases as evidence for or (more frequently) against philosophical definitions of important philosophical categories, e.g. knowledge, justification, truth, freedom of will, responsibility, personal identity, causation etc. If the definition's implications about particular cases are in line with one's intuitive judgments, the definition is taken to be confirmed; and if its implications are in conflict with one's intuitions, the definition is considered to be refuted. In general, SPP centrally involves testing philosophical theories about the nature of philosophical categories against one's intuitions about particular cases. This method is deeply entrenched in our current philosophical practice (but see Deutsch 2010, Cappelen 2012).

Let me briefly comment on my understanding of the metaphysics, explanation and role of intuitions. First, I hold the deflationary view that intuitions are spontaneous attractions to believe rather than propositional attitudes *sui generis* (i.e., what George Bealer calls "intellectual seemings") or states with a built-in phenomenology.¹ But not every intuition is a *rational* intuition.² Rational intuitions have a specific causal source: they are manifestations of the conceptual dispositions that are associated with the concepts involved in the considered proposition. If attractions to believe are rooted in, e.g., affective dispositions, cultural bias or memory, I do not classify them as rational intuitions. So, if an attraction to believe manifests itself in my mind and I am not aware of any conscious reason it is based upon, this is not yet sufficient for a rational intuition.

Second, rational intuitions provide us with evidence about the world, not just about the meanings of our words or mental concepts. So, the Gettier intuition tells us something about *knowledge*, rather than just about the English word "knowledge" or our concept KNOWLEDGE. How is this possible, given that rational intuitions are rooted in conceptual dispositions? The key explanatory assumption here is that if one possesses a concept, one's concept possession is constitutively associated with a disposition to apply the concept to actual and hypothetical cases such that the application disposition determines the concept's *correct* application. If one

¹ Here I take sides with Sosa (2007: 54) and against Bealer (1998: 207).

² Compare Grundmann (2007) for this distinction.

has the rational intuition that the Gettier case is not a case of knowledge, it is *true* that there is no knowledge in the Gettier case. And the latter is a claim about knowledge, not only about the English word “knowledge” or the concept KNOWLEDGE. Of course, performance errors are always possible, even if we possess the required conceptual dispositions. But if such errors occur, they result in ordinary, run-of-the-mill intuitions, not in rational intuitions.

Third, rational intuitions are rooted in conceptual rather than linguistic abilities. Possessing a concept must be associated with the ability to correctly apply the concept to hypothetical cases. In contrast, a competent speaker of a public language need not herself be able to determine whether a case is in the extension of a word that she uses in a competent way. There are linguistic mechanisms, such as semantic deference, that can fix the reference of a word without the speaker being able to competently judge whether the case is or is not in the extension of the word.

Now, back to SPP as it still was in a state of innocence. Practitioners of this method usually assumed that their own intuitive responses to hypothetical cases were typical. They expected, without relying on any empirical evidence, that other competent speakers of English, or at least those of them who had some expertise in the domain in question and had some training with assessing hypothetical cases, would respond similarly unless they were deeply confused about the case description, or severely distracted. Here is, e.g., what Frank Jackson said in the late 1990s: “often we know that our own case is typical and so can generalize from it to others. It was surely not a surprise to Gettier that so many people agreed about his cases.” (Jackson 1998, p. 37) As we all know now, Jackson’s claim was unreasonably optimistic. We do not know from the armchair whether our own intuitions can be generalized. More than 10 years of empirical research on how people really respond to hypothetical cases suggest that intuitions vary among ordinary people as well as among expert philosophers in ways that cannot be predicted from the armchair. The findings of experimental philosophers indicate the variation of intuitions with a number of factors that seem clearly irrelevant to their truth, e.g. cultural background, order of presentation, affective content, personality traits, or age.³ Especially striking is cultural variation among competent speakers of a common language. In their seminal paper, Weinberg, Nichols and Stich (2001) reported – among other things – a cultural variation of intuitions about Gettier cases. Whereas a large majority of undergraduates with a Western cultural background did not attribute knowledge in the Gettier case, this pattern was reversed among undergraduates with an East Asian background. Machery et al. (2004) discovered a similar cultural variation of semantic

³ Alexander (2012) is a survey of some of these results in book-length.

intuitions. Whereas Westerners tended to respond to Kripke's Gödel/Schmidt case in accordance with a causal-historical account of reference; competent speakers of English with a Chinese background tended to respond in accordance with descriptivism. Further studies also suggest the cultural variability of intuitions about hypothetical cases (but see Nagel 2012).

What are the methodological implications of these findings for SPP? We can basically distinguish two views here: **intuition socialism** and **intuition solipsism**.⁴ According to intuition socialism, the intuitions of all sufficiently competent thinkers are epistemically relevant to everyone's judgment. Among socialists there is disagreement about who counts as a competent thinker. **Intuition populists** claim that folk intuitions are in general relevant as long as the intuitions involve only pre-theoretical concepts. In contrast, **intuition elitists** claim that only expert intuitions are relevant since only experts, i.e., professional philosophers, are sensitive to the relevant aspects of the assessed cases and trained to assess even far-fetched possible cases. Intuition socialists should accept the following conditional: If the variation of intuitions among competent thinkers is in general as strong as extant experimental studies suggest, then intuitions are not epistemically trustworthy. Even if the antecedent is not robustly confirmed yet, socialists should be very interested to find out to what extent the intuitions of others diverge from ours.

Intuition solipsists strongly disagree.⁵ They claim that only one's own intuitions are epistemically relevant and possess an epistemic priority over the intuitions of others. Solipsism divides into two sub-kinds as well. According to **individual intuition solipsism**, only the intuitions of the single and lonesome thinker are epistemically relevant to her judgment. According to **group intuition solipsism** (or **intuition culture-centrism**), it is only the intuitions of members of one's own cultural group that are epistemically relevant to one's judgments.

In my talk, I will focus exclusively on the cultural variation of intuitions. First, I will reconstruct an argument from cultural variation to a skeptical consequence about the evidential status of intuitions that is available to the intuition socialist. Then, I will explore different possible responses by intuition culture-centrists. It will turn out that the prospects of the latter view are much better than is commonly believed. In the final part of my paper, I will

⁴ Alexander & Weinberg (2007: 57) introduce a three-partite distinction between intuition solipsism, elitism and populism. For my purposes, it is more convenient to treat elitism and populism as sub-kinds of a common kind, namely socialism.

⁵ The majority view is some kind of intuition socialism. Wedgwood (2010) is clearly a proponent of intuition solipsism. Goldman (2007) is a deviant case. Although he takes isolated individual intuitions as evidence, he treats them as evidence for individual concepts, rather than evidence for propositions about the world.

address some of the consequences of intuition culture-centrism for SPP as a public scientific practice.

1 The generalist's skeptical argument

Consider the following skeptical argument:⁶

- (1) I am justified in believing that most of the intuitions of my cultural group are in conflict with the intuitions of different cultural groups.
- (2) I know that if the intuitions of my cultural group are ubiquitously in conflict with intuitions of different cultural groups, it is likely that my own intuitions are unreliable.
- (3) I am justified in believing that it is likely that my intuitions are unreliable.
(from 1, 2 and PC)
- (4) If one is justified in believing that the source of one's beliefs is likely to be unreliable, one's prima facie justification for these beliefs is defeated.
- (5) My intuitive beliefs are *ultima facie* unjustified.
(from 3, 4)

Let me quickly motivate the argument's premises and one of its inferential steps. Premise (1) claims that I am justified in believing that the intuitions of my cultural group are in conflict with intuitions of other cultural groups across the board. Although this is not yet established by the empirical findings of experimental philosophy, it might be established by future research established. In this paper, I will assume, for the sake of the argument, that there is sufficient empirical evidence to back up this claim. Why do I know that if there is ubiquitous cross-cultural conflict between intuitions, then it is likely that the intuitions of my own cultural group are unreliable, as premise (2) claims? It seems to me that I can know this in an a priori way. Either there is a single method of intuition that is used by all cultural groups, or different cultural groups use different methods. If the former is true, one can rely on the conceptual truth that a method with strongly conflicting output is unreliable. If the latter is true, our own method of intuition is either very reliable or very unreliable. If we treat both alternatives as equally likely, one can argue that the unreliability of one's own method is sufficiently likely to defeat one's prima facie justified intuitive beliefs. Lemma (3) follows from the premises (1) and (2) together with the closure principle for propositional justification under known implication. (3) claims that I have evidence that supports the proposition that my

⁶ Compare Horvath (2010: 448), for a different reconstruction of the skeptical argument.

intuitions are probably unreliable. According to premise (4), this provides me with a *normative* undercutting defeater for all beliefs that are *prima facie* justified by my intuition.⁷

The above argument has certain virtues. First of all, it is not committed to a specific meta-epistemological view as, e.g., internalism or externalism, both of which can accept undercutting defeaters. Secondly, the argument can be used in a completely general form, as above, but might also be restricted to specific domains of intuitions, if strong conflicts among intuitions occur only within these domains.⁸

2 Solipsism's first reply: first person authority about one's rational intuitions

The intuition solipsist might respond that the above argument can be blocked if it is restricted to *rational* intuitions. As explained before, rational intuitions are manifestations of conceptual reference-fixing application dispositions and, therefore, cannot be false. Kirk Ludwig (2007) has put forward an argument along these lines.⁹ Consider the following objection to premise (1) of the skeptical argument when it is applied to rational intuitions:

- (i) There cannot be conflicting *rational* intuitions. (by definition)
- (ii) We observe responses to case descriptions from members of other cultural groups that are in conflict with our own responses. (empirical findings)
- (iii) At most one side in this conflict relies on rational intuitions. (from i, ii)
- (iv) We know with first person authority that our own responses express rational intuitions.
- (v) The diverging responses of others do not express rational intuitions. (from iii, iv)

If Ludwig is right, we need not care about conflicting intuitions of others since we know in a privileged first-personal way that our own intuitions are rational intuitions and, therefore, are infallible. Intuitions that conflict with our own must, therefore, be false. But at least one of Ludwig's premises, i.e., premise (iv), is extremely doubtful. To begin with, psychological findings strongly suggest that we do not have introspective access to the causal sources of our mental states (Wilson 2002, for methodological reflection on the consequences of these findings see Horvath 2010: 169). So, it is very unlikely on empirical grounds that we can

⁷ Compare Lackey (2008: 44-45) who distinguishes between *doxastic defeaters*, i.e. beliefs that speak for the target belief being false or being based on an unreliable source, and *normative defeaters*, i.e., available evidence in the light of which the subject ought to acquire a belief that suggests that the target belief is false or is based on an unreliable source.

⁸ This view is called 'restrictionism'. See, e.g., Alexander (2012: 82).

⁹ Ludwig (2007) uses the term 'intuitions' for what I call 'rational intuitions'. It is not quite clear whether Ludwig is proponent of intuition solipsism. He personally seems to prefer a version of intuition elitism. But his argument may also be used to defend some kind of intuition solipsism.

know in a first-personal way that our intuitions are manifestations of conceptual dispositions. More importantly, the assumption of first person authority (FPA) about one's rational intuitions is inconsistent with the observed conflict of intuitions. If one claims, as Ludwig does, that one has FPA with respect to whether one's intuitions have a rational source, then this privileged access should, other things being equal, be attributed to every party in the dispute. So, it is not only me who can know whether his intuitions are rational, but also my opponent. But then both sides should be expected to endorse only rational, infallible intuitions and, hence, conflicting intuitions would be ruled out. Since it is, however, a striking fact that there are intersubjective conflicts of intuitions, there cannot be FPA about rational intuitions on either side. Therefore, solipsism's first reply to the skeptical argument is unconvincing.

3 Solipsism's second reply: epistemic indefeasibility of one's own intuitions

Consider again premise (2) of the skeptical argument:

- (2) I know that if the intuitions of my cultural group are ubiquitously in conflict with intuitions of different cultural groups, it is likely that my intuitions are unreliable.

At first glance, (2) seems obviously true. Registering the mere fact that a single method (here: the method of intuition) produces many conflicting results puts one in a position to know that this method is unreliable. However, as soon as we take into account that intuitions can have very different sources, such as, e.g. conceptual dispositions, memory, emotions, or bias, the view that they constitute a single method becomes dubious. But there is a different way to defend (2). A very simplified case of cultural variation may illustrate this. Suppose that all members of the A-group intuitively believe that there is no knowledge in the Gettier cases, whereas all members of the B-group intuitively believe that there is knowledge in the Gettier cases. Since both groups have *conflicting* intuitions about these cases, they must share a common concept of knowledge. Without a shared concept there would be no conflict. If the dispositional theory of concept individuation is correct, then both groups must also associate the same concept-application disposition with their concept of knowledge. How is it still possible that they apply the concept of knowledge so differently? The most plausible explanation is that only the intuitions of one side are manifestations of conceptual dispositions, whereas on the other side the influence of cultural factors blocks the manifestation of conceptual dispositions and results in non-rational intuitions. The influence of cultural factors might work as suggested e.g. by Nisbett and his colleagues. According to them, Western thought is characterized by analytic and causal features, whereas East Asians

think in a more holistic way.¹⁰ Some of these habits of thought might have a distorting effect on the manifestation of conceptual dispositions. So, as far as we know, one group may have mainly rational and thus very reliable intuitions, whereas the other group may have mainly non-rational intuitions that are very unreliable. But since neither group has any reason to privilege its own intuitions, neither group has a reason to regard its own intuitions as reliable.

So far I have described the case from a neutral, third-person perspective. But now suppose that you are one of the members of the A-group. When you consider a Gettier case, you have the clear and strong intuition that the epistemic agent does not know. When you discover the diverging intuitions of the B-group, you might want to say that those intuitions cannot be rational intuitions since they falsely (according to your intuitions) classify Gettier cases as cases of knowledge.¹¹ But this would be tantamount to privileging your own intuitions. It would simply *presuppose* that your own intuitions are rational intuitions. Alternatively, you might consider the following principle: unless there is a reason to privilege your own position, you have to treat your opponent as an epistemic peer. Hence, there is a general presumption of peerhood with respect to your opponent unless you have evidence to the contrary. If this principle of *presumptive peerhood* were correct, then you would have to treat any group whose members have opposing intuitions as epistemically equal to your own group. This would immediately generate an undercutting defeater for your intuitive beliefs. Because then there would be a 50% chance that your own intuitions are unreliable. But if we look at the peer disagreement debate, the principle of presumptive peerhood has strongly counterintuitive consequences. Suppose you and someone unknown to you come to a conflicting result on the basis of mental calculation. You know that at least one of you must have made a mistake. But this need not defeat your own justification unless you have additional information about the epistemic authority of your opponent. The same is true when you realize that a complete stranger disagrees with you about something that you justifiedly believed. As long as you don't have positive reasons to believe that she is your peer, you need not suspend belief. But then the following principle seems more reasonable: facing an opponent does not defeat your own position unless you have positive epistemic reasons to take her as your epistemic peer.¹² Since this principle is accepted in the peer disagreement debate it should also be applicable to the case of a cultural variation of intuitions. You need some positive reason to assess the B-group as a group of peers such that it is equally likely

¹⁰ See Nisbett et al. (2001).

¹¹ See Wedgwood (2010).

¹² See Christensen (2011: 16).

that each group relies on unreliable intuitions in case of conflicting intuitions. This seems to be necessary to generate an undercutting defeater.

Typically, when we face conflicting intuitions in other cultural groups, this condition is not satisfied. Either we do not know enough to settle the issue of peerness, or there is such a widespread and systematic cultural variation that the groups simply cannot be peers, even though we still don't know which of the groups is in better epistemic standing. As long as this kind of *peerness agnosticism* prevails, we do not acquire defeaters when we face intuition conflicts.

One might object here that there is at least some positive reason to believe that both groups are peers. For, the members of *both* groups are competent speakers of English and normal human adults with the relevant cognitive abilities. This, however, is not sufficient to ground an expectation of peerness in the range of conflicting intuitions. Above, we carefully distinguished between linguistic and conceptual competences. Linguistic competence does not require any conceptual competence such that a competent speaker is able to apply the related mental concepts correctly to cases. So, equally competent speakers of English may have different conceptual competences. Moreover, possessors of the same concepts may show very different ratios of correct performances due to the prevalence of biasing factors. But then it is still an open question whether equally competent speakers of English show an even ratio of rational intuitions.

At first glance, the suggested view might appear to involve a kind of dogmatism or even cultural imperialism. But this would be a misunderstanding.

First, I do not claim that we can privilege our own intuitions in the face of opposing intuitions. What I do claim instead is that our own intuitive beliefs are not defeated as long as we remain agnostic about the epistemic authority of our opponents. So, our own intuitions are *protected* rather than *privileged*.

Second, in the same way as we can protect our intuitions against being defeated by the conflicting intuitions of a different group, this group can protect its intuitions against being defeated by the conflict with our own intuitions. So, the same point applies symmetrically to all parties.

Third, even if the intuitions of either group cannot be defeated by conflicting intuitions of the other group, this does not imply that the intuitive beliefs of both groups are equally justified. Externalists might want to claim that only the group that in fact relies on rational intuitions has justified intuitive beliefs.

The crucial point is that no matter whether we are internalists or externalists, the recognition of widespread cross-cultural divergence of intuitions does not automatically defeat one's own intuitive justification. If our intuitive beliefs are justified, their epistemic status need not be affected by our experience of conflicting intuitions in other cultural groups.

4 Solipsism's third reply: the conflict disappears when different concepts are involved

Suppose you confront people from Mars who are competent speakers of English but apply the word "knowledge" to hypothetical cases in which the believer has a strong but false belief. They also apply the phrase "should be punished" to cases in which the subject is completely innocent. In this situation, as well as in other such cases, it is not very plausible that the people from Mars intuitively believe that knowledge need not be true or that innocent people should be punished. There is a more plausible explanation of this situation, namely that the people from Mars express different concepts with their utterances of "knowledge" and "should be punished" than we express when we use the same English words. So, there is a verbal rather than a substantial disagreement between us and the people from Mars. There is no real conflict between our apparently diverging intuitions. Whereas we have the intuition that an agent with a strong false belief does not have knowledge, the Martians just use the term "knowledge" to express the concept of strong belief. In the case of punishment, it might be plausible to assume that the Martians are hardcore utilitarians and thus apply the phrase "should be punished" even to a completely innocent person to express that she should be harmed if only this maximizes overall utility ever so slightly. So, in the mouth of the utilitarian Martians the phrase "should be punished" expresses their complex concept SHOULD BE HARMED. Something similar may happen in the case of a radical clash of intuitions among different cultural groups on Earth. When one group apparently disagrees with another group in their intuitions, this might actually be a case where different concepts are involved, such that there is no genuine and substantial disagreement between the various groups (Jackson 1998: 32, Sosa 2009).

If the appearance of radically conflicting intuitions can be explained by the hypothesis of different concepts, this has two significant implications for intuition solipsism. First, premise (1) of the skeptical argument is no longer plausible, since the observable verbal disagreement with members of different cultural groups does not indicate any substantial conflict of intuitions and intuitive beliefs. Second, the hypothesis of different concepts directly explains why seemingly divergent intuitions of other groups are epistemically irrelevant when one uses one's own intuitions to test a philosophical definition. Consider again the case of the apparent

conflict of intuitions about knowledge between the Martians and us. We are searching for a proper definition of *knowledge* (i.e., of the referent of our concept KNOWLEDGE). Suppose that we all share the intuition that knowledge implies truth. Now, if we discover that all Martians have the intuition that something else, i.e., strong belief, does not imply truth, this is strictly irrelevant for our own intuitions about knowledge. For, the relevant philosophical subject matter is fixed by our own concept of knowledge. Other people's intuitions about different things (picked out by different concepts) are not relevant to the analysis of *knowledge*.

The different-concepts hypothesis has been strongly criticized.¹³ In this paper, I will address two main objections. The first has been put forward by Stephen Stich on several occasions. I will call it the *arbitrariness objection*. Here is one version of it:

“the analytic epistemologist offers us no reason whatever to think that the notions of evaluation prevailing in our own (...) culture are any better than alternative evaluative notions that (...) do prevail in other cultures. But in the absence of any reason to think that the locally prevailing notions of epistemic evaluation are superior to the alternatives, why should we care one whit whether the cognitive processes we use are sanctioned by those evaluative concepts.” (Stich 1998: 107)

Stich argues that if different cultures endorse different concepts in the evaluation of cognitive processes, it is not rational to prefer our own concepts just because they happen to be our own. In his objection, Stich forces us to look at our own epistemic concepts from an external, detached perspective. It seems that different concepts can be associated with verbal labels like “knowledge”, “justification” or “epistemic evaluation”. Any rational decision for one rather than the other requires, according to Stich, some further reason. Without such a reason, the preference for one's own concepts would be arbitrary.

But Stich seems to overlook something important here. We cannot entertain a completely detached perspective on our own concepts. When we think about the world and other people's concepts of the world we are always committed to our own conceptual framework. So, in order to understand concepts of other groups as concepts of *knowledge*, *justification*, or *epistemic evaluation*, they must be closely related to our own concepts. If someone uses the English word “knowledge” to express the concept of strong belief, we cannot regard this concept as a concept of knowledge. If someone evaluates our cognitive processes with respect to the amount of happiness they produce, we cannot assess such an evaluation as an *epistemic* evaluation. Of course, we can take different evaluative perspectives on our own cognitive

¹³ See, e.g., Stich 1998, 2009; Horvath 2010: 454-57.

processes. But there does not seem much room for taking different perspectives of *epistemic* evaluation on these processes.

The second objection I want to address in this context is the *immunization objection*.¹⁴ It claims that the hypothesis of different concepts is just a bad *ad hoc* maneuver to explain away the appearance of conflicting intuitions. Whenever members of different cultures claim to have conflicting intuitions, a proponent of the different concepts hypothesis just postulates that there is no genuine conflict involved because different verbal responses indicate a difference in the concepts used by both parties. Moreover, there are plausible alternative explanations that do not deny that there is a genuine conflict. First, even if one accepts a dispositional theory of concept possession, such that one's application dispositions determine their semantic value with respect to hypothetical cases, it still seems possible that two parties share a common concept and nevertheless have conflicting intuitions. As I have argued above, this can happen when one party is strongly biased in such a way that this bias interferes with the manifestation of conceptual dispositions. Second, one may argue that, in general, there is no constitutive connection between concept possession and application dispositions. On such a view about concepts, it can easily happen that two groups use the same concept quite differently when they assess hypothetical cases.¹⁵

If the solipsist's response were based on nothing but the different concepts hypothesis, the immunization objection would be a serious one. But the solipsist does not have to claim that whenever there seem to be conflicting intuitions, it is a mere verbal disagreement. This would be a bold and unreasonable claim.¹⁶ There is, however, a more solid line of defense. The intuition socialist argues that in the face of a seeming conflict of intuitions, one's intuitive justification is defeated. This position faces a *trilemma*. Whenever we confront a seeming conflict of intuitions, one of the following alternatives must be true: the seemingly conflicting intuitions are *either* a consequence of different conceptual dispositions *or* they result from the same conceptual dispositions *or* they do not result from any conceptual dispositions. *I want to argue now that no matter which of these alternatives holds, one's intuitive justification is not defeated.* So, we need not actually determine which alternative holds in a given case.

(i) If the seemingly conflicting intuitions are manifestations of different conceptual dispositions, then the concepts involved are different and hence there is no genuine conflict between the intuitions.

¹⁴ I have frequently heard this objection in conversation, though I don't know of any explicit expression of this objection in print. Williamson 2007, Ch. 4, raises something in the vicinity of this objection.

¹⁵ A proponent of such a view of concepts is, e.g., Fodor 1998.

¹⁶ In so far, I agree with Horvath (2010: 455).

(ii) If the seemingly conflicting intuitions result from the same conceptual dispositions, then both sides share the same concepts, and there is a genuine conflict between the intuitions on both sides, and the intuitions of one side cannot be manifestations of the relevant conceptual dispositions, but must be rooted in some other psychological source. The above discussion of the solipsist's second reply has shown that recognition of this fact is not sufficient to generate a defeater either.

(iii) If the seemingly conflicting intuitions are not rooted in any conceptual dispositions, then none of these intuitions are *rational* intuitions. It then seems reasonable to classify the relevant intuitive processes as belonging to a single type. But then the observed conflict of intuitions suggests that intuition is an unreliable belief-forming process within the range of conflicting intuitions. This would defeat intuitive justification within this range. But, at the same time, it would also self-defeat the skeptical argument against intuitions itself, at least if different cultural groups have conflicting intuitions about cases of undercutting defeat.¹⁷ Consider premise (4) of the skeptical argument if it is restricted to the relevant range of intuition conflicts:

- (4) If one is justified in believing that the source of one's beliefs is likely to be unreliable, the *prima facie* justification of these beliefs, if any, is defeated.

This premise can only be justified by intuitions about what counts as a proper case of epistemic defeat. The crucial point here is that alternative (iii) suggests that the skeptical argument is applicable to those intuitions that support premise (4), if there are cross-cultural intuition conflicts about cases of undercutting defeat. As far as I know, there are no actual surveys that would support intuition conflicts about cases of undercutting defeat. So, I have to speculate here a bit. If there are cultures that exempt the beliefs of certain people (e.g., gurus) or certain (e.g., religious) views from being defeasible by any kind of evidence, which at least seems probable to me, then members of these cultures would have the intuition that these beliefs or views are consequently not defeated by any reason to believe that they are based on unreliable sources.¹⁸ These intuitions would then conflict with the intuitions in support of (4). So if the argument is applicable in such a way, then its consequence (5*) – that within the range of conflicts my intuitive beliefs are not *ultima facie* justified – is epistemically inconsistent with the justification of one of the argument's premises, i.e. premise (4). As a consequence, if we chose alternative (iii), the skeptical argument for defeat cannot be

¹⁷ That *unrestricted* objections against the epistemic value of intuitions might be self-defeating is discussed by Bealer (1992) and Weinberg (2007).

¹⁸ Interestingly, there are proponents of this view even within our own culture. E.g., Strawson 1952, p. 261, finds it intuitive that inductive justification would not be undermined if people were to discover that they are living in a chaotic world in which induction is not a reliable method.

consistently endorsed. As a result, it seems irrelevant whether we can determine which alternative applies to a particular case of seemingly conflicting intuitions. In neither case, we would acquire an epistemic defeater of our intuitive justification.

5 Some further thoughts about SPP as a public scientific practice

What has been achieved so far if what I said is correct? If we look at the philosophical practice from an individual thinker's point of view, the epistemic force of her intuitions *with respect to her own beliefs* is not undermined by her recognition of the radically diverging intuitions of other groups. The same is true for collective intuiters. If we look at the philosophical practice from a particular cultural group's point of view, the epistemic force of its intuitions *with respect to the beliefs of its own members* is not undermined by the recognition of radically diverging intuitions in other cultural groups. Hence, from one's own point of view one is not epistemically affected by the diverging intuitions of others, unless one has positive reasons to regard them as epistemic peers. But even if one grants this much, one might still be worried about the epistemic status of SPP as a public philosophical method in light of the appearance of widespread intuition conflicts.

Here is a first worry: the subject-relative epistemic force of someone's intuitions for herself is not sufficient to generate evidence that has epistemic force for other people who use the method of intuition. Unless intuitions have *public* epistemic authority, they cannot be used as starting-points in public controversies, public arguments, or scientific debates as they are represented in academic journals. But this public epistemic authority is seriously challenged by inter-subjective or cross-cultural intuition conflicts. Intuition solipsism cannot in principle save the public epistemic authority of intuitions (see Alexander & Weinberg 2007: 57-58).

This seems correct to me, as far as it goes. But in my eyes it does not at all undermine SPP as a collective practice. Consider the case of publishing an intuition-based argument in a philosophical journal. You will propose this argument because you accept the premises on the basis of your own intuitions. Other people who read your argument will be moved by it to the extent they share your intuitions. Hence, the scope of the intersubjective force of your argument is limited to people who share your intuitions. The argument will not work with people who do not share your intuitions. But this is exactly how the dialectic of arguments generally works within scientific practices. Your arguments will move other people only if they accept your premises, and there is ample room for disagreement in all scientific disciplines. This does not show that public epistemic authority depends on being acceptable to all members of the scientific community.

Here is a second worry: “If different cultures (...) were to associate different concepts with the English word ‘knowledge’ (...), then many debates about the nature of knowledge would not only be verbal, and thus insubstantial, but also of rather local interest to only those people who happen to share one of the many candidate concepts.” (Horvath 2010: 173) The worry seems to be that in those cases where a seeming intuition conflict is explained by the possession of different concepts, philosophical disputes lose their common subject matter and will be relativized to merely locally shared concepts.

In response to this second worry, let me make three points. First, even if all intuition conflicts were explained away as purely verbal, this would not have the consequence that all substantial philosophical disputes disappear. Even if there were no substantial conflicts among intuitions about cases, there could still be substantial disputes about which definition (or theory) best captures the locally shared intuitions about cases. In the current debate about the analysis of knowledge, the main debates are not so much about how to assess cases, but rather about which account best captures the shared case intuitions. Second, the intuition solipsist need not claim that all intuition conflicts are purely verbal. Some genuine disputes can be explained by interfering biases along the lines explored above. Third, even if people who associate different concepts with their use of the word ‘knowledge’ do not share a common subject matter when their intuitions involve these different concepts, this does not imply that they could not use other concepts to refer to the same subject matter. The fact that philosophical disputes are sometimes merely verbal does neither imply that the various kinds of subject matter are not of interest to all parties, nor does it imply that only one party can talk about each subject matter. Suppose that thinker A possesses the concept KNOWLEDGE that picks out *true belief that could not easily have been false*, while thinker B possesses the concept SCHMOWLEDGE that picks out merely true belief. It is true that when A comes to believe that knowledge is true belief that could not easily have been false, B can neither agree nor disagree with this belief since B does not possess the concept KNOWLEDGE. But B does still possess other concepts that enable her to think about true beliefs that could not easily have been false. So, even if B does not possess the concept KNOWLEDGE, she can still argue with A about the epistemic role of what A refers to with her concept KNOWLEDGE. As a consequence, B might acquire the concept KNOWLEDGE herself and learn to associate it with the English word ‘knowledge’. Or suppose that A and B associate different concepts with the term ‘free will’. Whereas A possesses an incompatibilist concept that only applies to cases in which the agent’s decision is indeterminated, B possesses a compatibilist concept that only applies to cases in which the agent’s decision is under her rational control. Although B can

neither disagree nor agree with what A believes when she believes that in a certain case free will is absent, both can have a substantial disagreement about whether the absence of determinism is necessary for moral responsibility or justified punishment.¹⁹ The different concepts hypothesis thus neither undermines the possibility of substantial philosophical disputes, nor does it undermine the possibility of a shared philosophical subject matter.

There is a final objection that worries me most. Taking a solipsistic stance on seeming intuition conflicts has the consequence that one is generally bound to assess intuitions relative to one's own intuitive perspective. If that perspective involves only rational intuitions, everything is fine. But if one's intuitions are in fact radically distorted by cultural factors, there is no generally effective procedure to detect and correct such biases.²⁰ In some cases, one might be able to detect local biases within one's own perspective on the basis of critical reflection or consistency checks from within. But even local biases might be so systematic and inaccessible that there is no effective way of correcting them from a solipsistic point of view. Hence, the potential for calibrating intuitions is highly limited if we endorse intuition solipsism.

Does intuition socialism fare better in this respect? One might think so, because socialists have the option to suspend all those intuitions about which there seems to be an intersubjective conflict. They might argue that we should not use any intuitions for which there is some reason to think that they might result from bias. Notice, however, that as long as we are not able to distinguish substantial conflicts from merely verbal ones in a systematic manner, intuition socialists will have to suspend the vast majority of all philosophically interesting intuitions. Hence, whereas the attitude of intuition solipsists may not be critical enough, the intuition socialist faces the danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

6 Conclusion

What is the answer to our initial question: *should one care about the diverging intuitions of others?* On the one hand, the answer is 'no' – one does not violate any epistemological requirement or obligation when one does not care about the diverging intuitions of others, unless one has positive reasons to regard them as epistemic peers. As it turned out, recognition of conflicting intuitions does not automatically generate an epistemic defeater. In this sense, we can properly ignore diverging intuitions of others, no matter whether we face a seeming conflict with other individuals or other cultural groups. On the other hand, intuition

¹⁹ Compare Schulte 2013.

²⁰ Compare the calibration objection in Weinberg 2007. For critical discussion, see Grundmann 2010.

solipsism is helpless with respect to potential biases that might affect one's own intuitions. In contrast, the intuition socialist has to suspend all disputed intuitions. But the risk here is that all philosophically interesting intuitions are thrown out. As it seems to me, intuition solipsism is epistemologically defensible, although it has certain limitations as a scientific method.

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