Alexander, Joshua. Experimental Philosophy: An Introduction
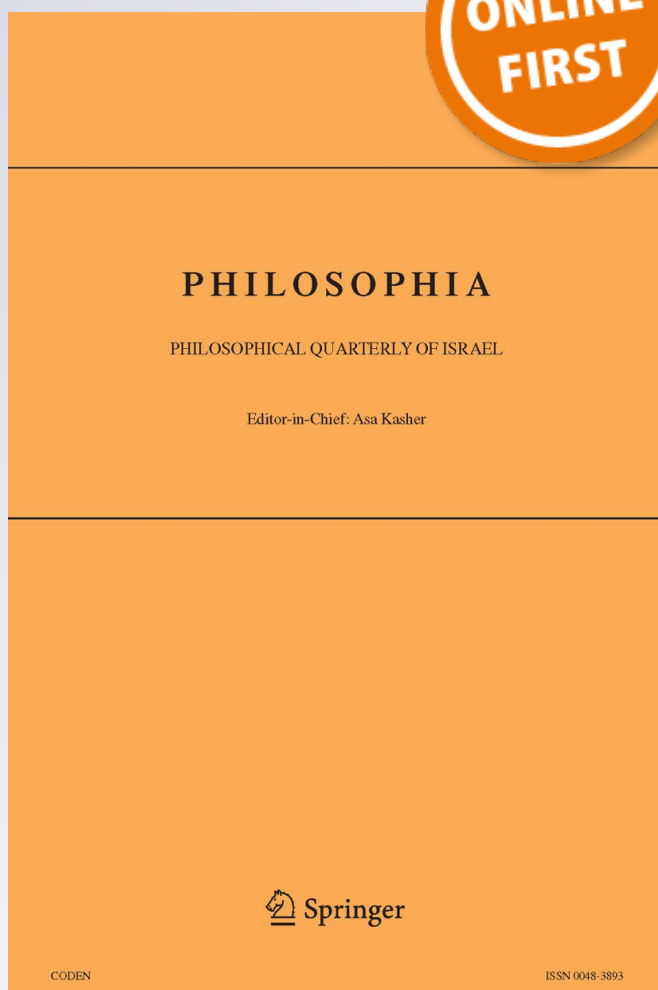
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BOOK REVIEW

Alexander, Joshua. *Experimental Philosophy: An Introduction*

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I

Consider this version of Gettier's (1963) classic thought experiment:

American Car

Bob has a friend Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American car. Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it?

We naturally say that Bob does not really know but only believes that Jill drives an American car. The fact that we would intuitively judge this case in this way undermines a standard theory in epistemology, which holds that knowledge is true justified belief. For, in this example, Bob's belief is true and he is justified in what he believes, and yet intuitively he does not possess knowledge.

Overturning the true-justified-belief theory of knowledge was a great success for Gettier. But it was predicated on two things: a key role for pre-theoretical intuitions in philosophical practice and the universality of his readers' judgment that Bob does not possess knowledge. Recent studies, however, have shown that not everyone shares the judgment that Bob does not possess knowledge. Weinberg et al. (2001) and Nichols et al. (2003) claim to show that most people from Western backgrounds (74 %) judge the way Gettier expected, while most people from East Asian or South Asian backgrounds judge that Bob actually *knows* that Jill drives an American car. What are we to make of these data? Gettier might be able to argue that the 26 % of Westerners who do not agree with him are making a mistake or

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did not understand the question. But it is harder to dismiss the fact that for most people from East Asian or South Asian backgrounds, Gettier's arguments simply do not go through. Isn't this a profound problem for the classic methodology of philosophy itself? Or, perhaps empirical data of this kind is not relevant to philosophical practice? But why not?

These are merely a few questions raised by only one part of the new movement called "Experimental Philosophy."

Experimental Philosophy: An Introduction, by Joshua Alexander, is the first book-length monograph treating exclusively of experimental philosophy, and, as such brings with it considerable excitement. A new interdisciplinary movement, experimental philosophy uses the empirical methods of social psychology and cognitive science to explore questions normally associated with philosophy. Most commonly, experimental philosophers gather data through surveys that probe ordinary intuitions about specific philosophical debates.

In its early "Gotcha!" phase, many papers in experimental philosophy seemed to aim at merely embarrassing "armchair" philosophy. But as experimental philosophy has progressed and matured it has (1) carried on a detailed metaphilosophical discussion about what role intuitions play in philosophical practice; (2) contributed to classic and contemporary philosophical debates by collecting data on ordinary intuitions, sometimes shifting the dialectical burden; and (3) constructed theories that explain the intuitive judgments people make by positing particular mechanisms underlying those judgments.

Alexander's volume, while slim, can educate those to whom experimental philosophy is entirely new; it can serve to anchor an undergraduate class on experimental philosophy; and it can go toe-to-toe with experimental philosophy's many critics.

Chapter One demonstrates the central role philosophical intuitions play in the practice of philosophy, and then briefly surveys five theories about the nature of those intuitions. Chapter Two discusses the role experimental philosophy is playing in the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists regarding free will and determinism. It also considers important experimental results in epistemology. The side-effect effect (formerly known as the Knobe effect) is thoroughly examined in Chapter Three. Chapter Four considers the diversity of intuitions people have with respect to some classic and contemporary thought experiments. In Chapter Five the various ways of criticizing experimental philosophy are detailed and rebutted.[1]

II

Perhaps the best way to come to understand experimental philosophy is to look at a few examples of it in action. Some of the most exciting results in experimental philosophy are to be found in the debate about free will and determinism. Many armchair philosophers have claimed that the folk—or, non-philosophers—naturally

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[1] Alexander apologizes for having to leave out recent experimental work on consciousness and some other big issues. He provides further reading (e.g., Gray et al. 2007; Knobe and Prinz 2008; Arico 2010; Huebner et al. 2010; Sytsma and Machery 2010; Arico et al. 2011). An undergraduate syllabus would want to add the work of Doris (1998, 2002), Haidt (2001) and Greene (2003, 2008).

manifest incompatibilist intuitions. The dialectical burden, thus, weighs on the compatibilist.

> In my experience, most ordinary persons start out as natural incompatibilists… Ordinary persons have to be talked out of this natural incompatibilism by the clever arguments of philosophers (Kane 1999).

> We come to the table, nearly all of us, as pretheoretic incompatibilists (Ekstrom 2002, p. 310).

> When ordinary people come to consciously recognize and understand that some action is contingent upon circumstances in an agent's past that are beyond that agent's control, they quickly lose a propensity to impute moral responsibility to the agent for that action (Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne 1996, p. 50).[2]

These certainly have the look of empirical claims. In an influential study of philosophical intuitions about free will and moral responsibility, Nahmias et al. (2006) challenged the assumption that people are natural incompatiblists. Consider this vignette:

> Supercomputer

> Imagine that in the next century we discover all the laws of nature, and we build a supercomputer which can deduce from these laws of nature and from the current state of everything in the world exactly what will be happening in the world at any future time. It can look at everything about the way the world is and predict everything about how it will be with 100 % accuracy. Suppose that such a supercomputer existed, and it looks at the state of the universe at a certain time on March 25, 2150 A.D., 20 years before Jeremy Hall is born. The computer then deduces from this information and the laws of nature that Jeremy will definitely rob Fidelity Bank at 6:00 PM on January 26, 2195. As always, the supercomputer's prediction is correct; Jeremy robs Fidelity Bank at 6:00 PM on January 26, 2195.

Did Jeremy act of his own free will when he robbed the bank? And is he morally responsible? The armchair philosophers above would predict that people would say that Jeremy did not act of his own free will. Nahmias et al. found otherwise. It turns out 72 % of people who are asked to consider *Supercomputer* judge that Jeremy acted of his own free will. Eighty-three percent said that Jeremy was morally responsible. These are compatibilist responses, running contrary to the armchair prediction that people are "natural incompatibilists."

These data suggest that we might switch the burden in the free will dialectic from the compatibilist to the incompatibilist. However, some other experimental philosophers have defended the claim that people are "natural incompatiblists." Nichols and Knobe (2007) suggest that while people are indeed natural incompatibilists, they can come to form compatibilist intuitive judgments when presented with affectively charged vignettes. In order to test their theory, Nichols and Knobe ran studies involving vignettes that explained determinism and then either asked about free will

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[2] These quotations are culled from Knobe and Doris (2010).

with respect to an affectively charged case or a case that was affectively neutral. For example, in a vignette roughly similar to *Supercomputer*, John chooses to eat French Fries and Bill murders his wife and children. After reading about determinism, most people judge John to have acted unfreely (and without moral responsibility) while most people judge Bill as having acted freely (and with moral responsibility). In reaction to the more abstract presentation, people make the incompatibilist judgment. But in reaction to the affectively charged action, they make a compatibilist judgment. The contention is the Jeremy's bank robbing behavior is immoral and so triggers the emotions of the survey participants which then distorts what would normally be an incompatibilist judgment.

Thus Nichols and Knobe (2007) explain the incompatibilist judgments as demonstrating conceptual competence with respect to the concepts of determinism, free will and moral responsibility. But they explain the compatibilist judgments as being performance errors due to untoward emotional influences.

But as Alexander rightly points out, you have to make a theoretical inference that goes beyond the data to make a distinction between what is part of our competence with the concept and what is an error of performance. Alexander says:

> To describe one process as interfering with another presupposes an understanding of the processes involved. If we already have a well-worked-out account of the particular mechanisms responsible for our moral responsibility or a characterization of the function that the cognitive mechanisms responsible for those judgments is supposed to compute, then we might be in a position to determine whether or not emotional responses interfere with the proper function of those mechanisms—that is, whether or not the influence of our emotional responses constitutes a performance error. The problem is that we don't have this (p. 32).

In other words, you need a theory. The armchair philosophers above and Nichols and Knobe have it that the incompatibilist judgments (made in the abstract) are the *natural* judgments. But what's to say that the emotional response is not the *natural* response and the competent use of the relevant concepts? Why would our judgment in the abstract, affect-less case be the one considered natural? It takes a theory about the function of these concepts to answer these questions and we don't have one, Alexander says.

In the chapter on the side-effect effect, on the other hand, there is a theory on offer that explains the data regarding judgments of *intentional action*.

III

Consider the following vignettes:

Environmental Harm

The vice-president of a company went to the chairman of the board and said, "We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also harm the environment." The chairman of the board answered, "I don't care at all about harming the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let's start the new program." They started the new program. Sure enough, the environment was harmed.

Environmental Help

The vice-president of a company went to the chairman of the board and said, "We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also help the environment." The chairman of the board answered, "I don't care at all about helping the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let's start the new program." They started the new program. Sure enough, the environment was helped.

In one of the most famous studies in experimental philosophy, Knobe (2003) found that most people asked to consider *Environmental Harm* judged that the chairman intentionally harmed the environment, while most people asked to consider *Environmental Help* judged that the chairman did *not* intentionally help the environment.

This is a surprising result. It would seem that an action ought to be intentional or not irrespective of the moral valence of the outcome.

However, these data show that people are more willing to judge that an agent has brought about a side-effect intentionally when they regard the side-effect as morally bad than when they regard it as morally good. Moral considerations seem to be influencing judgments of *intentional action*.

This is an extremely robust effect and has been replicated and extended in a number of other studies (Cushman and Mele 2008; Feltz and Cokely 2007; Mallon 2008; Nadelhoffer 2005; Nichols and Ulatowski 2007; Phelan and Sarkissian 2009). The effect arises in different cultures (Knobe and Burra 2006), and in children as young as 3 years old (Leslie et al. 2006; Pellizzoni et al. 2009). Besides intentional action, moral considerations seem to influence people's use of other concepts integral to folk psychology, including desiring (Tannenbaum et al. 2009), valuing (Knobe and Roedder 2009), deciding (Pettit and Knobe 2009), and happiness (Phillips et al. 2011).

Consider a case wherein moral considerations influence people's use of a concept outside of folk psychology, namely causation (Alicke 2000; Buckwalter 2011; Cushman et al. 2008; Hitchcock and Knobe 2011; Roxborough and Cumby 2009; Solan and Darley 2001). Studies show that an agent is more likely to be considered a cause of an event when that agent's contribution to the event is judged morally bad. Consider this vignette (Knobe and Fraser 2008):

Missing Pens

The receptionist in the philosophy department keeps her desk stocked with pens. The administrative assistants are allowed to take the pens, but faculty members are supposed to buy their own. The administrative assistants typically take the pens. Unfortunately, so do the faculty members. The receptionist has repeatedly emailed them reminders that only administrative assistants are allowed to take the pens. On Monday morning, one of the administrative assistants encounters Professor Smith walking past the receptionist's desk. Both take pens. Later that day, the receptionist needs to take an important message… but she has a problem. There are no pens left on her desk.

With respect to this vignette, people typically say the professor caused the problem and deny that the administrative assistant did. Yet the only thing differentiating them

is the moral status of their actions. This suggests that moral considerations are affecting people's judgments about causation.

In summary, moral considerations appear to be influencing judgments on a wide variety of folk concepts. Is that an appropriate explanation of these data?

Concerning only the concept of *intentional action*, there are two main kinds of explanations for the data about the side-effect effect, Alexander says. According to the first kind of explanation, which includes Knobe (2003, 2006, 2010), Knobe et al. (2012), Nadelhoffer (2004a, 2004b, 2006) and others, these data tell us something about our concept of *intentional action* and are "best explained in terms of specific features of the underlying mechanism responsible for people's judgments about intentional action," (p. 54). On the other hand, according to the second kind of explanation, we "should be careful about using facts about people's intuitive judgments to reach conclusions about the nature of their underlying concepts" (p. 54). On this view, these data are "best explained in terms of specific features of the underlying mechanism responsible for our linguistic practices" (p. 54).

We may look more closely at one of these latter explanations. Adams and Steadman (2004a, 2004b) argue that in the "conversational" or communicative context of the harm vignette the question about whether or not the chairman acted intentionally will be "pragmatically" understood as a question about the chairman's blameworthiness. According to Adams and Steadman, people believe the chairman should be blamed, but the only way to communicate this is to say he acted intentionally. Let me explain.

In order to understand the contention that these judgments are best explained in terms of pragmatic considerations, it may be helpful to think of an analogous situation (adapted from Knobe 2010). Imagine there is a bathroom in your building but it doesn't work and has been boarded up for 3 months. Now imagine that someone asks you, "Do you have a bathroom in your building?" It seems that according to your concept of "bathroom," you do have one in your building. But when you hear this question you immediately understand what the questioner wants to know, namely whether or not they can *use* the bathroom in your building. With these thoughts in mind, consider what might happen when people are faced with a questionnaire that asks whether or not they agree with the sentence "The chairman of the board harmed the environment intentionally." It might be that their concept of "intentional action" does not apply to cases like this one; but that as soon as they receive the questionnaire people immediately understand what is really being asked of them, namely whether or not the chairman is to blame for harming the environment. So to express an answer to *this* question people aver that they agree with the statement that the chairman acted intentionally. Because only if he acted intentionally can he be blamed. This is an important worry.

But for a number of reasons, in particular because people are willing to blame drunk drivers who kill unintentionally, Alexander finds that the pragmatic considerations lose out to the idea that the side-effect effect is telling us something about our concepts. (For more see pp. 54–57.)

Knobe thinks these results demonstrate our competent use of concept of *intentional action*. Thus the purpose of the concept of intentional action is thoroughly evaluative. "There is no hidden nonmoral capacity that is distorted by moral factors. Instead, asymmetric application arises because morality informs a fundamental part

of what it means to correctly apply these folk psychological and causal concepts" (Knobe et al. 2012).

Nadelhoffer, on the other hand, thinks these results demonstrate a malfunction of a non-evaluative concept of *intentional action*. How to resolve this disagreement?

> The problem is that any resolution of this disagreement would require something that we don't have, namely some agreed-upon way of distinguishing what is and what is not constitutive of our folk concept of intentional action… we need some sort of account of the kind of work our folk concept of intentional action is supposed to be doing for us… for example evolutionary or teleological approaches (pp. 60–61).

But, "because empirical evidence alone simply won't help produce such an account," (p. 61) Alexander seems to agree with Machery (2008) who has argued that we ought to remain neutral on this issue. To tell the difference between what is competence and what is performance we have to have a position on what is the proper function of the relevant concept; and we don't have this, Alexander says.

But both Nadelhoffer and Knobe are offering just such a theory. Alexander is right to point out that Nadelhoffer has merely *stipulated* that the purpose of our concept of intentional action is non-evaluative. (It is for predication and explanation. It is meant to be determined independently and then used to determine blameworthiness, not the other way around.) And Alexander is right that Knobe also makes a *stipulation* beyond the data when he says that our concept of intentional action is being competently deployed when it is deployed evaluatively.

But Alexander fails to understand that stipulation here is not so bad. Offering a theory is always somewhat stipulative, as it goes beyond available data to posit things—in this case properly or improperly functioning mechanisms—that explain the data. Furthermore, Alexander neglects Knobe's published elucidation of his theory, namely that our entire folk psychological conceptual scheme is morally inflected because, roughly, we are metaphorically not little scientists but little moralizers (Knobe 2010).

Knobe has suggested that folk psychology is "suffused with moral considerations from the very beginning," (Knobe et al. 2012, p. 328). "We are moralizing creatures through and through…" (p. 328). This is really a theory of human nature in the tradition of Hume and other empirically informed philosophers who wish to construct theories about how the human mind works, Knobe says in his (2007a, b).

Of course, Alexander is right that in order to test these theories, "What is needed… are neuroanatomical accounts of the cognitive processes and mechanisms responsible for our folk psychological judgments… Developing these kinds of accounts is going to require experimental philosophers to become even *more* experimental by expanding the variety of experimental methods they employ" (p. 69). But one cannot make sense of any data without some theory.

IV

In the fourth chapter, Alexander returns to consider the role of intuitive judgments in philosophical practice. In particular, he carefully examines what problems arise for philosophical methodology given data that show so much diversity of intuitions.

"We tend to believe that our philosophical intuitions are more or less universally shared," (p. 72) Alexander writes. Indeed, when philosophers write, "it is clear that…" "we would all say that…" and "it is natural to say…" they have an idea already in mind of what it is "natural to say." That is, when philosophers make a claim about what is the proper intuitive judgment with respect to a thought experiment, they are imputing universality to the judgment. They assume that our judgments on the case will be univocal.

But recent empirical studies of classic philosophical thought experiments have found a striking diversity of judgments, not universality. We already discussed the cross-cultural responses to Gettier cases. It appears that Gettier's argument does not go through for people of East Asian or South Asian backgrounds.

Consider another case. Kripke (1980) was extremely successful in changing many philosophers from descriptivism about reference to his causal-historical account. But, as we may begin to expect, people of East Asian and South Asian backgrounds make the descriptivist judgments.

Godel

Suppose that John has learned in college that Godel is the man who proved an important mathematical theorem, called the incompleteness of arithmetic. John is quite good at mathematics and he can give an accurate statement of the incompleteness theorem, which he attributes to Godel as the discoverer. But this is the only thing that he has heard about Godel. Now suppose that Godel was not the author of this theorem. A man called "Schmidt" whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Godel somehow got a hold of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work, which was thereafter attributed to Godel. Thus he has been known as the man who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. Most people who have heard of "Godel" are like John; the claim that Godel discovered the incompleteness theorem is the only thing that they have ever heard about Godel.

Tsu Ch'ung Chih

Ivy is a high school student in Hong Kong. In her astronomy class she was taught that Tsu Ch'ung Chih was the man who first determined the precise time of the summer and winter solstices. But, like all her classmates, this is the only thing she has heard about Tsu Ch'ung Chih. Now suppose that Tsu Ch'ung Chih did not really make this discovery. He stole it from an astronomer who died soon after making the discovery. But the theft remained entirely undetected and Tsu Ch'ung Chih became famous for the discovery of the precise times of the solstices. Many people are like Ivy; the claim that Tsu Ch'ung Chih determined the solstice times is the only thing they have ever heard about him.

According to Machery et al. (2004) and Mallon et al. (2009), "this suggests that, while most analytic philosophers followed Kripke's lead by adopting some kind of causal-historical account of reference, this move might be rather unique to Western culture" (Alexander 2012, p. 74). But not even all Westerners go in for the causal-historical supporting intuition. What are we to make of the minority responses?

This question is important because there is intuitional diversity "between cultures but also within cultures," (p. 76), and not only between people, but within individuals, (p. 78). Thus it is not just diversity but intuitional sensitivity that is a real problem. Our intuitions are sensitive to a variety of factors about which we know too little. Intuitions are sensitive to cultural background, gender (Zamzow and Nichols 2009), affect (Nichols and Knobe 2007), personality type (Feltz and Cokely 2009), and contextual factors.

For example of contextual factors, consider the ordering effects found with respect to some classic versions of the trolley problem (Petrinovich and O'Neill 1996). There were three versions tested. The first was as follows:

Switch

A trolley is hurtling down the tracks. There are five innocent people on the track ahead of the trolley, and they will be killed if the trolley continues going straight ahead. There is a spur of track leading off to the site. There is one innocent person on that spur of track. The brakes of the trolley have failed and there is a switch that can be activated to cause the trolley to go to the side track. You are an innocent bystander (that is, not an employee of the railroad, etc.). You can throw the switch, saving five innocent people, which will result in the death of the one innocent person on the side track. What would you do?

The second and third versions differ only with respect to the location of the innocent person and the manner in which the five people are saved. In the second case, you press a *button* and the trolley will derail hitting the man on the footbridge, while saving the five down the tracks. In the third version, a large man is standing near you on a footbridge over the tracks. In order to save the five you must *push* the man off the bridge onto the tracks.

Petrinovich and O'Neil presented some participants with the cases ordered this way: *Switch*, *Button*, *Push*. Then they presented other participants with the cases in this order: *Push*, *Button*, *Switch*.

They found that people were more willing to act to save the five track workers in both the *Switch* case and the *Push* case when those cases appeared first in the sequence than whey they appeared last in the sequence, and that people were more willing to act to save the five workers in the *Button* case when that case followed the *Switch* case than when it followed the *Push* case, (Alexander 2012, p.81).

These results suggest that our intuitions are sensitive to context, specifically the order in which cases are considered. But it does not tell us *why* our intuitions are sensitive in this way.

As Alexander says, we "find ourselves in the untenable epistemic position of suspecting that *some* intuitional evidence is problematically sensitive without being able to reliably predict *what* intuitional evidence is problematically sensitive, (p. 83). Is there hope? Weinberg (2007) says four things contribute to hope: "external corroboration (agreement *between* sources of evidence); internal coherence (agreement *within* sources of evidence); detectability of margins (awareness of a

source's limits); and theoretical illumination (awareness of how sources work when they do and why they don't when they don't)," (Alexander 2012, p. 83).

How shall we face the challenge of intuitional sensitivity? Alexander answers:

> The most radical version of this challenge would call for a complete methodological elimination of philosophical intuitions, but this position seems too radical, being neither warranted by the empirical results nor necessary in order to accommodate them. The most conservative version of this challenge would call for limited methodological restrictions, removing problematically sensitive philosophical intuitions from play, while leaving our intuition deploying practices otherwise intact. This position seems too conservative, failing to appreciate the risks involved in not knowing how widespread this kind of problematic intuitional sensitivity might be. The right position falls somewhere in between, combining *local* methodological restrictions with a *global* shift in how we think about and approach our intuition deploying practices (p. 71).

And specifically:

> We are simply called to reconcile our views about philosophy, philosophical evidence, and our intuition deploying practices with the existence of certain kinds of intuitional sensitivity; and asked to spend more time and energy thinking carefully about the nature of intuitional evidence, where it comes from, what mechanisms are responsible for producing it, and what factors influence it (p. 87).

V

In Chapter Five, Alexander notes that experimental philosophy has received its fair share of criticism. The challenge it poses to traditional philosophical practice has not gone unnoticed by practitioners of that tradition, "who have not gone quietly into that good night" (p. 89).

Furthermore, unlike most work in Anglo-American philosophy, experimental philosophy has received some attention in the popular media. Proponents of experimental philosophy sometimes manifest a revolutionary fervor issuing in manifestos, a musical anthem, T-shirts and YouTube videos.[3] It may be that the intensity of the informal criticism of experimental philosophy is proportional to the intensity of its proponents' informal advocacy. "A philosophical problem is not an empirical problem," Judith Jarvis Thomson writes in an e-mail message to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "so I don't see how their empirical investigations can be thought to have any bearing on any philosophical problem—much less help anyone to solve a philosophical problem."[4] In *Prospect Magazine*, David Papineau said, "I don't see that they'll learn anything worthwhile from asking ordinary people what they think about these things."[5] Some have even suggested that "X-Phi"—as it's sometimes called by proponents—is not proper philosophy and should not be supported

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[3] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tt5Kxv8eCTA and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHoyMfHudaE
[4] "Against Intuition," Christopher Shea, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 3, 2008.
[5] "Philosophy's Great Experiment," David Edmonds, *Prospect Magazine*, March 1, 2009.

financially in philosophy departments. Alexander's book is not overly exercised by any of this. It is a serious work that even-handedly addresses only the peer-reviewed formal criticisms.

We'll examine some of these criticisms, which almost always focus on the philosophical significance of experimental philosophy and seem to come in two mutually exclusive versions. Either some kind of intuitions do play a role in philosophical practice but experimental philosophy is studying the wrong kind of intuitions (Ludwig 2007; Kaupinnen 2007); or intuitions do not play a role in philosophical practice and so experimental philosophy is irrelevant (Williamson 2007, 2011).

Let's consider here a few different criticisms of experimental philosophy. The *expertise argument* holds generally that expert intuitions are what're valuable to philosophical methodology. But we can cash out "expertise" a number of ways.

Perhaps philosophical methodology involves *technical* concepts and philosophers have privileged access to these technical concepts. The problem with this view, Alexander says, is that it's just not true to say that most philosophical debates involve technical concepts. Some certainly do; but many do not. "Concerns about ordinary concepts are precisely what gave rise to these philosophical discussions in the first place. If these discussions were couched in purely technical terms they would lose traction with the ordinary concerns that gave rise to them" (p. 93).

Perhaps philosophers have a better grasp on our *ordinary* concepts. "Maybe philosophers are able to make more precise distinctions, for example," (p. 93) Alexander says. But the problem with this view is this kind of comparison between competencies seems to invite more experimental philosophy, not less. "We would love to know more about the ways in which philosophers differ from ordinary folks," Knobe and Nichols (2008) say.

Perhaps, then, philosophers' intuitions are more valuable to philosophical practice because philosophers have a certain educational exposure to some received standard of conceptual competence. "One hypothesis is that philosophy students train their conceptual judgments against a previously certified philosophical intuitions, but this only invites explanatory regress. How were *those* philosophical intuitions certified?" (p. 94).

Perhaps philosophical expertise consists in mastering some set of philosophical theories or principles. Why ask the opinions of people who don't have the relevant background? Kornblith (2007) says: "Intuitions uninformed by any theory… would be no more useful [in philosophy] than observations performed by investigators wholly ignorant of relevant background theory in science," (p. 34). But Alexander replies: "If our theoretical commitments shape our philosophical intuitions, it is hard to see how our philosophical intuitions can help us *independently* assess the accuracy of those theories" (p. 95).

Perhaps Kaupinnen (2007) is correct to say that *robust* philosophical intuitions are more valuable to philosophical practice. "Robust" would mean the intuitions formed in *sufficiently ideal conditions*, "conditions in which we have the time to carefully examine and evaluate not only our judgments about hypothetical cases, but also the cases themselves and what influence our philosophical commitments might have on what details we find relevant in those cases" (Alexander 2012, p. 96).

Alexander's response to Kauppinen is that reflective judging does not always make for more reliable judging. Alexander admits, "There are times when reflection helps improve our judgments," but "reflection can just as easily serve as an echo chamber, simply ratifying whatever initial judgments we might have made" (p. 96).

Alexander then switches gears to ask, "Maybe the issue isn't *whose* intuitions matter or even *what* intuitions matter, but *whether* intuitions matter at all" (p. 100). According to this second kind of criticism, the work of experimental philosophy is irrelevant to philosophical practice because intuitions play no role in that practice. "In short, experimental philosophers take philosophical intuitions seriously, and this means that the philosophical significance of experimental philosophy depends, at least in part, on the significance of our philosophical intuitions" (p. 100).

According to some critics, experimental philosophy has been studying our intuitions about certain propositions, when philosophy only cares about the propositions not our intuitions about them. "It is the intuitive proposition, and not the fact that the proposition is intuitive, that counts as our best philosophical evidence," (p. 102).

Williamson (2007, 2011) says we "can get away with doing philosophy without having to appeal to our philosophical intuitions as evidence, and, in fact, we are much better off doing philosophy in this way" (Alexander 2012, p. 103). According to Williamson, for example, "the best evidence that knowledge isn't simply true justified belief is the fact that it is possible for someone to have a justified true belief that p without knowing that p," (p. 103). Here is a reconstruction of Gettier's argument as Williamson sees it.

(1) Gettier cases are possible (that is, there is nothing inconsistent about the cases).
(2) If a Gettier case were to occur, then the subject would have a true justified belief that p without knowing that p.
(3) Therefore, it is possible for someone to have a justified true belief that p without knowing that p.
(4) Therefore, it is not the case that, necessarily, a person knows that p just in case she has a justified true belief that p.

This is fine. But as Alexander points out, while the argument for (4) is valid, we are also concerned with whether or not it is sound. So we do not only ask why we should accept (4), but we also ask why we should accept (1), (2), and (3). For instance, why should we accept (2)? "Gettier expects the reader to accept (2) and the basis for this acceptance is its supposed intuitive appeal (to the reader, not just to Gettier). Therefore, intuitions do seem to play a role in the argument for (4)" (Alexander 2012, p. 104). So, Williamson cannot just appeal to the fact of (2). "If a person were not already convinced that a proposition is true, it would hardly help matters to simply assert that, in fact, it is" (p. 104).

For diehard critics of experimental philosophy, this back and forth will feel rushed. But Alexander's book plays an important part in the dialectical maturation of the criticism and defense of experimental philosophy.

Overall, I recommend this timely book. It is careful, well organized, and the clarity of Alexander's writing is to be admired.

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