

“Intuition in Contemporary Philosophy”

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Rightly or wrongly, discussion of intuitions, and especially of the role of intuitions in philosophy, has dominated much twenty-first century metaphilosophical theorizing. It is widely (but not wholly) agreed that the ‘standard philosophical methodology’ (whatever that is) is one that affords a central role to ‘intuitions’ (whatever those are). As a result, a significant proportion of the literature that sets out to evaluate whether the methods of traditional analytic philosophy are good ones is focused on the question of whether the widely-perceived reliance on intuition is legitimate: critics of traditional philosophical methods often attack the use of intuitions; defenders of traditional methods often defend the use of intuitions.

Perhaps you suspect by inference from my tone that I am not wholly convinced in the truth of the assumption that intuitions *do* play central roles in traditional philosophical methods. You are correct: I have my doubts. I expect that the contemporary focus on intuitions has exaggerated their importance in traditional philosophical methods, as actually practiced by traditional philosophers. I am by no means alone in my skepticism; although a perception of the importance of intuitions for standard methods is justly deserving of the title of orthodoxy, it has recently become increasingly fashionable to call this orthodoxy into question.

This chapter will consider three themes relating to the significance of intuitions in contemporary philosophy. In §1, I’ll review and explore the relationship between philosophical use of words like ‘intuitively’ and any kinds of mental states that might be called ‘intuitions’. In §2, I’ll consider the widely-discussed analogy between intuitive experience and perceptual experience, drawing out some interesting similarities and differences. Finally, in §3, I’ll introduce the recent movement of ‘experimental philosophy’, and consider to what extent its projects are tied up with questions about the role of intuitions in philosophy. My primary aim will be to survey and explain; I will make no effort, however, to hide the fact that I’m a philosopher and a partisan to some of these debates. So there will be some arguments for controversial points of view, too—hopefully these will be easily perceptible, and my opponents fairly represented. Limitations of space demand a rather superficial treatment of most of our topics; endnotes will direct the reader to more comprehensive discussions.

1. Philosophers' use of 'intuitively'

It is widely believed among philosophers writing about the methodology of contemporary philosophy that the latter depends in important ways on intuitions. Alvin Goldman (2007) espouses orthodoxy when he writes that “[o]ne thing that distinguishes philosophical methodology from the methodology of the sciences is its extensive and avowed reliance on intuition.” (p. 1) Why do so many philosophers consider it obvious that philosophical methodology proceeds on the basis of intuitions? One obvious possible explanation is that philosophers often describe themselves as relying on intuitions; here is one of myriad examples of such quotations:

Externalists about belief hold that whether a subject believes that P, or whether the subject believes, instead, that Q, depends, at least sometimes, on facts about the world external to the subject herself. The dispositional account offered here is compatible with our intuitions in the kinds of cases typically invoked to support externalism. In fact, the present account comports more exactly with our intuitions in such cases than do standard externalist views. (Schwitzgebel 2002, p. 266)

It is not difficult to find many more instances of such quotations, in which intuition is invoked in the service of a philosophical argument. It should be recognized, however, that this kind of explicit invocation of intuition, although not at all uncommon, is less ubiquitous than some causal metaphilosophers may suppose. In many canonical instances of what is widely taken to be reliance on intuition, the term ‘intuition’ does not actually appear. (See Deutsch (2010), especially p. 450.) Consider the following three cases that are widely taken to be paradigmatic instances of philosophical reliance on intuition. First, some of Saul Kripke’s arguments against the descriptive theory of proper names invoke judgments about thought experiments—in a famous case, Kripke (1980) argues that if the descriptive theory were true, then the name ‘Gödel’ would refer to a particular individual Schmidt, but that this is the wrong result (pp. 83-84). Second, in another widely-discussed case, Judith Jarvis Thompson (1971) argues that under certain circumstances, it is morally permissible for a subject to perform an action that will have the result of ending the life of someone who is dependent on one; this, she argues, is relevantly similar to abortion. Third, in perhaps the most-discussed thought experiment within metaphilosophy,¹ Edmund Gettier (1963) argued against what was then the received view, that justified true belief was both necessary and sufficient for knowledge, by providing a counterexample: a scenario in which a subject has a belief that is both justified and true, but is not knowledge. Notably, none of these authors, in their own canonical presentations of these thought experiments, invoked the word ‘intuition’ or ‘intuitively’.²

¹ See Weatherson (manuscript) for the suggestion that this focus on Gettier’s case may be regrettable.

² Kripke (1980) writes that “since the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about ‘Gödel’, are in fact [on the descriptivist view in question] always referring to Schmidt. But it seems to me that

What this fact shows is debatable. Deutsch (2010) and Cappelen (2012) take this and related considerations to show that there is much less reason than is typically supposed to think that philosophers are relying on intuitions. Another possibility is that although philosophers *do* very often rely on intuitions, they don't always signal such reliance with the word "intuition". By way of analogy, it is overwhelmingly plausible that chemists often rely on sensory experience in an evidential capacity—for example, when one performs a given sample analysis, one relies in part on the visual experiences one undergoes while examining a component's color. Nevertheless, it would not be at all surprising if articles in the leading science journals rarely mentioned the perceptual experiences of the scientists. We expect the journal to report, in objective terms, the *results* of the experiment; it is understood implicitly that the researcher's epistemic access to those results is mediated by perceptual experience. In the same way, one might hold that the facts about the thought experiment verdicts in the cases just mentioned themselves are simply put forward, even though a philosopher's *justification* for these claims depends on their having had certain intuitions. There is no incoherence in this view; I expect that many philosophers who think intuitions are important will respond to the lack of explicit invocation of 'intuition' in this way.

Someone taking this tack might enjoy some (intuitive!) support from the observation that even when philosophers do not use the word 'intuition' or its cognates, it may seem very natural to regard them as relying implicitly on intuitions; often, what appears to be an appropriate paraphrase will include such language. Consider, for example, Gettier's (1963) famous argument about the conditions under which a given subject knows a given proposition. As indicated above, Gettier does not mention intuition directly; he simply sets out a case, and states the relevant verdicts about it:

Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition:

(d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago.

Proposition (d) entails: (e) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true. But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Proposition (e) is then

we are not. We simply are not." (p. 84) Thompson (1971) writes of her case that "I imagine you would regard this as outrageous, which suggests that something really is wrong with that plausible-sounding argument I mentioned a moment ago." (p. 71) Gettier's (1963) presentation is given in the main text.

true, though proposition (d), from which Smith inferred (e), is false. **In our example, then, all of the following are true:** (i) (e) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (e) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (e) is true. But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (e) is true; for (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (e) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job. (p. 122, emphasis added)

Suppose Gettier had instead written in the emphasized portion above, "in our example, then, all of the following are *intuitively* true..." and continued as before. It is difficult to see that this would have represented a significant difference. What this shows is that the presence or absence of "intuition" and its cognates in a given philosophical text is probably not a particularly important guide to the epistemology of the conclusions advanced in that text. It is certainly very plausible that in at least many of these cases, one does no violence to a philosopher's intentions by embedding key stated premises inside an "intuitively". (I'd wager that most philosophers would do no better than chance at guessing by memory whether the original presentations of canonical philosophical arguments did include "intuitive" language—even when considering their own past work.) But what does this show about the role of intuitions themselves in the arguments in question? It would show quite a lot, given a principle like this one:

(Straightforward) If "intuitively, p" is an appropriate gloss of a philosopher's claim, then that philosopher relies on an intuition as evidence for p.

If Straightforward is true, then it is easy to attribute evidential reliance on intuitions to many philosophical arguments. For example, since it is appropriate to characterize Gettier's argument partly with "intuitively, the subject does not have knowledge," Straightforward has the implication that the central claim in Gettier's argument—that the subject in the case under consideration lacks knowledge—rests evidentially on a intuition (a natural candidate here would be the intuition that the subject lacks knowledge).

But there is reason to doubt whether Straightforward properly captures the relationship between "intuitively" and epistemology; for one thing, it appears as if almost anything that one knows can be naturally embedded inside an "intuitively" in some contexts—if, for instance, someone gave a philosophical argument for the view that there is no such thing as personal property, and that consequently, nobody owns anything, it would be perfectly natural for me to point out that "intuitively, I own a tweed jacket".³ Straightforward would have the implication, then, that intuition is or supplies an important part of my evidence for this

³ Williamson (2007, pp. 218-19) makes roughly the same observation.

proposition about what clothing I own. But this implication is somewhat counterintuitive.⁴ Nevertheless, it has its defenders.⁵

If Straightforward isn't the right story about what "intuitively" is doing in philosophical language, or in appropriate paraphrases of philosophical language, then what *is* such language all about? One attractive idea is that it is simply being used as a *hedge*. (See Cappelen (2012), pp. 36-39.) In cases where a speaker doesn't wish to commit fully to the proposed content, she may offer it in a hedged way; instead of saying "the Red Sox play the Rangers tonight," one might hedge, saying "I think the Red Sox play the Rangers tonight" or "I heard that the Red Sox play the Rangers tonight". In the same way, one might use "intuitively" to weaken one's commitment to a philosophical thesis; instead of boldly asserting "this is a case of justified belief", one hedges, saying "intuitively, this is a case of justified belief". On the hedging hypothesis, it is no commitment of such use that the evidential source derive from any such state as an intuition; the language merely serves to indicate a weakened commitment.

The availability of the hedging hypothesis demonstrates that it is no straightforward matter to establish evidential reliance on intuitions, based simply on the ubiquity of the philosophical use of words like 'intuitively'. Of course, this also doesn't show that intuitions *aren't* used as important evidence in philosophical matters all the time; the linguistic data are not probative. Broader theoretical considerations about the epistemology of the relevant domains may ultimately be needed to settle the question.⁶

We turn to some such considerations now.

⁴ Cappelen (2012), p. 16 suggests that any interesting version of the claim that philosophy relies on intuitions must construe this as a respect in which philosophy is exceptional; so given his commitments, the view mentioned here is not a live option. However, there may well be room for a believer in the philosophical importance of intuitions to identify a weaker respect in which philosophy's reliance on the intuitive is exceptional—it may be that, in certain core philosophical cases, reliance on the intuitive *exhausts* the relevant evidential base, while in other fields, perceptual evidence and intuitive evidence *together* comprise the evidential base. So I think Cappelen is a bit quick to dismiss the view that (some) reliance on intuition is ubiquitous.

⁵ For example, Huemer (2001), p. 105.

⁶ Part I of Cappelen (2012) is an extended argument against any argument that runs from philosophical language to the reliance on intuitions; I agree with Cappelen that no such argument will be convincing. However, I have some reservations about the way that he has set up the dialectic; there is at least an argument to be made that, given its orthodoxy, the view that philosophy does proceed on the basis of intuitions has sufficient preliminary plausibility such that it *needn't* be established by any argument from the way philosophers talk; that it is reasonable to hold onto the view until it is *shown* to be false.

2. Intuition and perceptual experience

Setting aside arguments from philosophers' linguistic use, what other reasons might there be to suppose that intuitions play important roles in philosophy? One potential line of argument begins with the apparent difference between some prototypically philosophical judgments and more straightforwardly empirical ones. Consider, for example, what happened to me just a moment ago: as I was typing, I had the experience of a loud *whooshing* sound outside the window to my left, in the direction of the nearest street; this experience initiated a causal process in my brain, which ultimately led me to the belief that an automobile recently drove by. How does this process compare with what happens when someone achieves *philosophical*, as opposed to perceptual, knowledge?

Suppose someone starts out accepting the view that pain is a disposition to a certain sort of behavior (saying 'ouch', wincing, etc.), then considers Hilary Putnam's (1963) example of the 'super-super-Spartans', recognizing them to be creatures who have phenomenal experiences just like our pain, but who lack any such dispositions. No sensory experience akin to my whooshing sensation seems obviously to be playing a justificatory role here.⁷ It's all very well to say that it needn't be an intuition that's doing the justifying here, but, unless one is offered an alternate story, one is bound to remain less than fully satisfied.

Here, then, in rough outline, is a possible argument for the significance of intuitions in standard philosophical methodology:

The 'What Else?' Argument (WEA)

1. People sometimes come to justified philosophical beliefs via armchair methods.
2. In many of these cases, no sensory experience is playing justificatory roles.
3. All justified beliefs must be mediated by something like sensory experience.
4. Intuitions are the best candidates for such experiences in the cases in question. Therefore,

⁷ If our subject considers Putnam's thought experiment because she's reading his work, or being introduced to it by a teacher or colleague, then of course there will be sensory experiences involved—the visual impression as of words on the page, for example. But these do not seem to be playing the relevant kind of justificatory role with respect to the claim that Putnam's claims about this case are correct; we are supposing that she accepts the argument, not on Putnam's or anybody else's authority, but because she herself is somehow able to recognize that it is correct.

5. In some cases, people come to justified philosophical beliefs with intuitions playing justificatory roles.

There are many debatable points in the WEA. Skeptics about armchair philosophy (including skeptics motivated by experimental philosophy, which I will discuss below) might deny premise (1). Quinean empiricists, who think that it is ultimately our sensory experience that justifies all of our justified beliefs, including the philosophical ones in question, will deny premise (2). On the other hand, some rationalists—I am one of them—will deny premise (3), offering a different story about justification in these cases that does not involve intuition.⁸ But the WEA does enjoy a certain *prima facie* plausibility; I suspect that it motivates at least some philosophers towards the view that intuitions are playing important roles in armchair methods.

A proponent of the WEA will consider intuition to be importantly similar to perceptual experience; when I consider a philosophical thought experiment, I undergo a phenomenal experience called an intuition, which is in at least some important respects to the phenomenal experience that is constitutive of sensory perception. At least, it plays a similar justificatory role.

There are a variety of options available with respect to how seriously one wants to take the analogy; at an extreme, one might think that intuition literally is a kind of sensory perception, caused by the (presumably abstract) entities that are the subject of the relevant judgment; perhaps it is by causal interaction with the Platonic form of the Good that my moral intuitions are sensitive to the moral facts. This somewhat incredible view is not taken very seriously by many, although it has been attributed to Kurt Gödel within the realm of arithmetic. (See e.g. Parsons (1995).)

More moderate versions of the WEA-inspired analogy between intuition and perception are also available. For example, Chudnoff (2011) suggests that intuition and perceptual experience are similar with respect to what he calls their ‘presentational phenomenology’, telling a unified story about how intuitions and sensations can justify (while avoiding the commitment that intuitions are caused by their contents).

Call a philosopher who holds that intuitions play an important non-empirical role in justifying philosophical claims an *experientialist rationalist*—‘rationalist’ because she thinks there are non-empirical sources of justification, and ‘experientialist’

⁸ I’ll describe the approach superficially below; Ichikawa & Jarvis (2013) develops it in detail.

because she thinks that the experience of having an intuition is playing an important justificatory role. The WEA may be thought to motivate experientialist rationalism.⁹

As we have seen, unless one holds some rather extravagant metaphysical views, one will think that there are at least some important respects in which any role played by intuition in the justification of philosophical beliefs is disanalogous to that played by perceptual experience in the justification of perceptual beliefs: the objects I perceive cause my sensory experiences; philosophical subject matters don't in general cause my intuitions. This much difference is granted by most parties; experientialist rationalists, however, will argue that it does not undermine the role they posit for intuitions in philosophical knowledge. One way they might make this case is to suggest that the causal connection between objects in the world and sensory experiences indicative of them is epistemically important in a more general way that does not depend on causation, and that this more general way is shared with the case of intuition. One version of this view would embrace *reliabilism* about evidential support. On this view, the reason that sensory experience justifies perceptual belief is that the former is a *reliable indicator* of the truth of the latter. A high enough proportion of the times when I have a certain pattern of sensory experiences (bright light sensations, a feeling of warmth on my face, etc.), I am in the presence of sunny weather; this, according to the reliabilist in question, is why those sensory experiences are evidence for its being sunny.¹⁰

The same story may well be applied to at least many cases of apparent 'intuitive justification'. When one considers Thompson's thought experiment about the violinist, one undergoes a certain intuitive experience; one feels an attraction to judging that it is morally permissible to unplug said fiddler. If, a high enough proportion of the time when such intuitions occur, their contents are true, then intuitions are reliable indicators of their contents in much the same way that sensory experiences reliably indicate the states of affairs they do. Although the latter but not the former involves a causal connection, the reliabilist is not

⁹ Note, however, that experientialist rationalism is strictly stronger than the conclusion of the WEA; one may embrace the WEA, thereby holding that intuitions have important roles to play, without accepting rationalism. This would be the view of an empiricist who thought that intuitions are important, but only because they themselves are responsive to one's empirical access to the world. (Papineau (2009) is such an one.) I focus on the rationalist interpretation of the importance of intuitions, in part because it is the more interesting one—there is a sense in which the intuitions do not play an *ultimately* significant role in the empiricist interpretation—and in part because I think there are good general objections to this form of empiricism. See e.g. Bonjour (1998) ch. 3, Ichikawa & Jarvis (2013) ch. 2. (This latter thought is, of course, a subject of controversy.)

¹⁰ For reliabilism generally, including distinctions between 'process reliabilism' and the 'indicator reliabilism' here discussed, see Goldman (2011).

interested in causal connections *per se*; reliability is paramount, and that feature is shared between the two cases.¹¹

Prima facie, it is reasonably plausible that intuitions reliably indicate their contents. That is to say, it is reasonably plausible that most intuitions are true—at least if we're not too restrictive about what felt attractions to assent count as intuitions. If, for example, the feeling you have when you consider whether $8 + 3 = 11$ counts as an intuition to the effect that it is, then it, then this is an example of an intuition whose content is true; and there are of course many (many!) more to match it. Does this mean that intuition on the whole is very reliable, and therefore that intuitions provide evidence in general? Or, alternatively, should we think of the kinds of intuitions at issue in many philosophical questions as comprising a different kind that needs to be evaluated separately for reliability? It is notoriously difficult for reliabilists to give a principled answer to this kind of question.¹²

Another problem for a reliabilist vindication of intuitions as evidence is that it does not appear very plausible that in general, reliability is sufficient for providing evidence. Suppose that through a quirk of my psychology, I tend to experience the intuition that humans are intrinsically virtuous when it is sunny, but not otherwise. Suppose also that I have never observed this correlation in myself; the connection occurs at an exclusively subconscious level. Since the intuition that humans are intrinsically virtuous is for me a reliable indicator of the sun, the reliabilist view in question will have it that the intuition that humans are intrinsically virtuous is evidence for me that it is sunny; but this is not particularly plausible. Reflecting on human nature and noting my inclinations on the matter is not, under the circumstances described, relevant to determining whether it is sunny. More esoteric thought experiments along these lines have been widely influential in criticism of reliabilism, e.g. Bonjour's (1980) case of Norman the clairvoyant.

Let's survey one more attempt to explain how it is that intuitions may be importantly like perceptual experience. Maybe what is important about the relationship between perceptual experience and the facts perceived isn't that there be a causal link or a mere reliable correlation, but that there is a reliable correlation that is *explained* in a suitable way. A causal connection is *one* such explanation—the fact that red objects, and not other things, tends to cause in me sensations of redness explains why in general, when I have redness sensations, there tend to be red things around—but other explanations might also be offered. One prominent version of this strategy, the *conceptual roles strategy*, ties the occurrence of certain intuitions strongly to the possession of the relevant concepts (e.g. Peacocke (1992), Boghossian (2003)). What is characteristic of this approach is the suggestion that part of *what it is* to entertain thoughts with a certain concept as a constituent is to be inclined to apply it in certain kinds of cases. Consider, for example, the concept TRIANGLE. A conceptual role theorist might suggest that part of

¹¹ Bealer (1992) defends intuitions as evidence on these reliabilist grounds.

¹² This is the 'generality problem' for reliabilism. See Conee & Feldman (1998).

what makes a given thought a thought involving the concept TRIANGLE is that the thinker is inclined to apply the concept to all and only three-sided polygons; somebody who felt no intuitive repulsion from applying a given concept to objects with four sides, according to the conceptual role theorist, just wouldn't count as possessing the concept TRIANGLE.

If this theory about the possession of concepts is correct, then the conceptual role semanticist can offer a non-causal explanation for the reliability of intuitions such as these: possession of these intuitions is what settles the content as what it is, which in turn guarantees that the intuitions will be true. So there is a philosophical explanation for reliability—one which runs through the theory of mental content.

The conceptual role strategy is controversial; closer examination would take us too far afield in this survey, but here in brief are two characteristic challenges. First, it seems that the strategy might over-generate justified reliance on intuition; it appears as though there could be cases of concepts that are tied to reliable conceptual roles that do not accompany justified beliefs.¹³ Second, one might worry about the underlying theory of content; for any given intuition that one might think is essential to the possession of a given concept, there might be possible cases where it appears that the content is present, but the intuition is absent.¹⁴ It is also worth noting that even if these challenges can be met, the scope of the conceptual role strategy is probably somewhat limited; even if some intuitions are essential for the possession of given contents, not all invocations of intuition in contemporary philosophy are plausibly such compulsory ones. Perhaps Gettier's intuition about his famous cases is a candidate for an intuition that is partly constitutive of the possession of the concept KNOWS, but it is more doubtful that Thompson's intuition to the effect that it is permissible to unplug a violinist in a given situation could be constitutive of the possession of any of the relevant concepts. (Which concept is even a candidate for requiring such an intuition? PERMISSIBLE? UNPLUG? VIOLINIST?)

Having surveyed a few attempts to explain how experientialist rationalism might be explained, let us turn briefly to an argument against experientialist rationalism. According to the argument from *blind irrationality*, intuitions cannot play a role closely analogous to the epistemic role of perceptual experience; their doing so would fail to respect the sense in which the norms of rationality are objective. This argument plays a prominent role in Part III of Ichikawa & Jarvis (2013). To introduce it, we first back up and consider different kinds of epistemic roles that experiences might play.

Set aside intuitions for a moment and consider Boris and Natasha, who are playing chess. Natasha is playing white; it is her move. The position of the pieces is as given in figure 1:

¹³ Boghossian (2003) considers and essays a response to this worry.

¹⁴ For this worry see Williamson (2007), pp. 86-91.

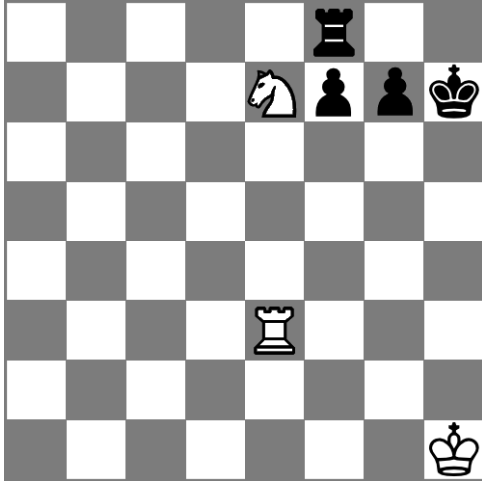


Figure 1

Natasha has available a move to win the game; Rh3# (moving her rook to the far right of the board) places the black king in checkmate. Bullwinkle knows the rules of chess, but he is nevertheless unaware that Natasha has available a move to win the game. His ignorance shouldn't be too surprising, because, it turns out, he is blindfolded, and can't see the board. He has no idea where the pieces are, so of course he doesn't know that Natasha is in a position to win.

But what happens next is slightly more interesting. Bullwinkle's blindfold slips off, and for the first time, he sees the board and the position of each piece. Now he knows a lot more about the game. But, let's suppose, he *still* doesn't know that Natasha is in a position to win. You see, Bullwinkle isn't a very experienced chess player, and although he knows where each piece is, and knows all the rules of chess, he hasn't noticed that Rh3 would put Boris in checkmate.

There are at least two important steps to knowledge in cases like this one. First, there is an input step: one needs a certain amount of information in order to come to knowledge. Bullwinkle achieved this step when his blindfold slipped. But second, there is a processing step: one needs to manipulate and process the information one has in order to draw out the relevant conclusions. The processing step is not a matter of having enough sensory experience—Bullwinkle has that, once he can see—it is a matter of rational ability. Once his eyes are open, Bullwinkle's ignorance is attributable not to the facts' being hidden to him; the problem now is that he hasn't succeeded in thinking through the situation clearly enough.

Let's say that when a subject's information provides conclusive reason to believe that *p*, the subject has *propositional justification* for *p*. As we have just seen, propositional justification does not imply knowledge; it requires rational skill to react properly to propositional justification. In cases like the chess case above, sensory experience plays an important role in establishing propositional justification, but it does not ensure that Bullwinkle's rational capacities will pick up the slack.

It is characteristic of perceptual justification in general that sensory experience provide propositional justification. Because one has had the necessary sensory experience, any continued ignorance is a matter of rational failure. A rationally perfect agent who has enough experience will always form the justified beliefs.

The crux of the argument from blind irrationality is that intuitions do not seem to play this normative role in the propositional justification of philosophical beliefs. Consider this case from Ichikawa & Jarvis (2013):

Jack is trying to build a time machine; indeed, he believes that it is nearly completed. Jack believes that, once he builds his time machine, he will go back in time. Jack's one major regret in life is having done so poorly on the final exam for his class on the philosophy of time. He intends and believes, therefore, that when he goes back in time, he will tell his past self the right answers to the questions on the exam so that it will no longer be the case that he did so poorly.

Jack is confused; he is exhibiting rational failures. How do we know this? Because he thinks that he's going to go back in time and make it the case that he did better than he actually did on his exam—an intrinsically confused thing to think. (Suppose he succeeded; then he won't have had his regret about his past performance, so he won't have bothered to build a time machine, so he won't have gone back in time, so he will after all fail his exam as 'before'...) Importantly, it looks as if Jack's situation constitutes one involving rational shortcomings *regardless of what intuitions he has*. Suppose that Jack has no intuition to the effect that he cannot go back and change the way things went in the past; this doesn't render his position any less confused. (Indeed, it looks as if he's *more* confused in this case; his confusion is not even mitigated by the nagging intuition of sensibility.) But this is precisely what we should expect, if intuitions play the role that perceptual experiences play here. Someone who doesn't think that Natasha can put Boris in checkmate demonstrates no rational shortcoming whatsoever if he can't see the position of the pieces on the board; but Jack's belief constitutes confusion whether or not he has the relevant intuitions. Jack's ignorance is *blind*; he does not have the capacity to recognize that he is going wrong, rationally speaking. But this doesn't mean that he *isn't* so going wrong. This is a respect in which the constraints of rationality are objective; they do not depend on the possession of states like intuitions. In this respect, intuitions cannot play a role that is fundamentally similar to the role that sensory experience plays in justifying perceptual belief. So goes the blind irrationality argument.

This argument is controversial; some philosophers will respond that if Jack really does have no intuition to the effect that it is impossible to change the past, then there is no respect in which he need be falling short of the demands of rationality. I have never found this response very plausible; Benjamin Jarvis and I articulate some reasons why in our (2013, §12.5). But in this survey article, it is time to move on to other things.

Before considering the bearing of experimental philosophy on the use of intuitions in contemporary philosophy, let us return briefly to the WEA. If, as I have argued, intuitions do not play a role that is fundamentally similar to the role that sensory experience plays, then how could it be that philosophical (and other a priori) claims can be justified? My preferred answer, developed again in Ichikawa & Jarvis (2013), is that the a priori contents are by their nature such that there is conclusive reason to accept them, irrespective of the presence or absence of intuitions. Everyone must think this about at least *some* contents or transitions in thought, on pain of infinite regress;¹⁵ once this observation is made, it is natural to think intuitions need play no particularly direct role in establishing propositional justification at all. This is in effect to deny premise (3) of the WEA as outlined above: not all justified beliefs need follow the model of perception.

Let us continue the survey now, and consider the recent movement of experimental philosophy.

3. Experimental philosophy

As we have seen, orthodoxy has it that contemporary philosophy relies on intuitions in an evidential capacity, but it is debatable whether orthodoxy is correct in this matter. What does any of this mean for the ‘experimental philosophy’ movement in contemporary philosophy?

As a historical fact, it is reasonably clear that experimental philosophy developed in part under the assumption that intuitions were playing important evidential roles.¹⁶ According to a simple version of this outlook, armchair philosophers have been relying on claims about which intuitions are widespread, assuming their own intuitions to be a representative sample. But it is of course an empirical question whether one’s intuitions are idiosyncratic, and some experimental philosophers have uncovered evidence that many of the influential intuitions are. Surveys of laypeople’s intuitions have, according to the experimentalists in question, yielded surprising diversity of intuition. Not everyone, it turns out, shares the Gettier intuition, so the many arguments that relied on the universality of the Gettier intuition are unsound. Relatedly, some intuitions seem to be susceptible to biases and order effects; this is thought to undermine an evidential use for such intuitions.

It is controversial whether the kinds of survey data experimentalists have uncovered demonstrate that philosophical intuitions vary in surprising ways. Some defenders of armchair methods have argued that, rather than uncovering genuinely divergent intuitions, the survey studies are best interpreted as suggesting that different groups of people tend to use slightly different concepts (Sosa (2007)). Others admit that the surveys may uncover disagreement, but argue that this

¹⁵ This is one of the many morals of Carroll (1895).

¹⁶ Weinberg et. al. (2001) is a highly influential work that is explicit in this commitment.

disagreement doesn't undermine the evidential use to which professional philosophers put their own intuitions, as the latter are the product of a special expertise that the laypeople surveyed shouldn't be expected to share (Kauppinen (2007), Williamson (2011)). Space precludes going into these questions in depth here; instead, let's consider the extent to which the experimentalist critique depends on particular assumptions about the evidential role for intuitions in contemporary philosophy. In particular, what would follow if, along the lines suggested above, it turns out that armchair philosophers rarely or never rely on intuitions in an evidential capacity?

Joshua Alexander and Jonathan Weinberg (2007) suggest that not much really hangs on whether intuitions are used as evidence, as data uncovered by the the surveys in question transcend any particular questions about what roles intuitions do or do not play. In response to Timothy Williamson's (2007) argument that philosophical arguments typically proceed on the basis of known facts about cases, rather than psychological intuitions about them, they write:

Timothy Williamson has also developed a more radical response to the restrictionist threat: rejecting the picture of philosophical practice as depending on intuitions at all! ... He compares philosophical practice to scientific practice, where we do not take the perceptual seemings of the scientists as our evidence, but the facts about what they observed. Similarly, then, we should construe Gettier's evidence to be not his intellectual seeming that his case is not an instance of knowledge, but rather the modal fact itself that such a case is not an instance of knowledge ... But we do not think that Williamson's arguments can provide much solace for traditional analytic philosophers. For the results of experimental philosophers are not themselves framed in terms of intuitions, but in terms of the counterfactual judgments of various subjects under various circumstances. Although the results are often glossed in terms of intuitions to follow standard philosophical usage, inspection of the experimental materials reveals little talk of intuitions and mostly the direct evaluation of claims. (72)

Alexander and Weinberg are correct that the methods of experimental philosophy do not rely in particular on claims about intuitions, rather than other kinds of psychological states—one can run the experimentalist critique in terms of 'considered judgments' just as well as in terms of 'intuitions'—but it is not clear how far this observation can take us. For the experimental methods in question—typically surveys—can always reveal at best psychological claims, whether intuitions, beliefs, considered judgments, or whatever. And the arguments against the evidential significance of intuitions discussed in the previous section look to be rather general arguments against the reliance on psychological evidence in philosophical matters.

In stark contrast to Alexander and Weinberg, Herman Cappelen (2012) argues that once we let go of the idea that intuitions are playing important evidential roles, any interest experimental philosophy might have held will look misplaced:

The Big Objection to experimental philosophy is easy to state and should be obvious: philosophers don't rely on intuitions about thought experiments, so studies of intuitions people have about thought experiments have no direct relevance for philosophical arguments or theorizing. ... In short: If philosophers don't rely on intuitions, then the project of checking people's intuitions is philosophically pointless. (221-22)

There is room, however, for a denier of the evidential importance of intuitions to be more sympathetic with respect to the project of experimental philosophy. For there are more significant roles for intuitions (or other psychological states) to play than evidential ones. If intuitions are not evidence, or even a source of evidence, they might still be a source of *defeat*. Evidence vis-à-vis X may well be relevant to one's justification for believing Y, even when X wasn't being used as evidence for Y. For example, I saw for myself that my colleague across the hall has a bamboo plant on her desk. My evidence concerning her bamboo is not testimonial; it is perceptual. Nevertheless, there are possible courses of testimony that might *defeat* my justification for believing that she has bamboo on her desk. For example, I might receive testimony to the effect that she often adorns her office with fake bamboo; this testimony would undermine my perceptual justification, *even though* testimony was no part of my original evidence.

It is not too far-fetched to imagine that in some cases, experimental philosophy's discoveries about intuitions might serve to *undermine* some of our philosophical beliefs, *even if* intuitions weren't any part of our evidence in the first place. Evidence to the effect that, in certain kinds of cases, certain philosophical intuitions are likely to be pretty unreliable would give us rational reason to second-guess whether we may have judged correctly about these cases. Suppose I consider a thought experiment, and am persuaded by a philosophical argument that it exemplifies an instance of causation. The discovery that people like me tend to be unduly influenced by the presence or absence of certain factors that are clearly not relevant to causation *would* give me good reason to reconsider my reasoning, to make sure that I haven't been making this common mistake. It is along this model, I think, that many of the most interesting instances of skeptical worries deriving from experimental philosophy are best construed.¹⁷ Notably, this is a form of skeptical pressure that does not depend on the questionable assumption that intuitions are widely treated as important evidence in favor of philosophical claims.

¹⁷ Ichikawa (manuscript) distinguishes another strand of skeptical experimental philosophy that does look to be more intimately committed to a central role for intuitions in traditional methods.

How worried should practitioners of traditional armchair philosophy be by the kinds of skeptical arguments pressed by experimental philosophers? Some of the latter suggest that the former should be very worried indeed; Weinberg et. al (2001, p. 429) write that “a sizeable group of epistemological projects—a group which includes much of what has been done in epistemology in the analytic tradition” is “seriously undermined” by survey data they have found; similarly, Machery et. al. (2004, pp. B8 and B9) tell us that they have uncovered evidence that shows traditional philosophical assumptions to be “spectacularly misguided,” and that as a consequence, “philosophers must radically revise their methodology.” But, as a number of authors have pointed out, there is sensitive philosophical work to be done in articulating what scope the skeptical worries will take; the form of undermining worry suggested above is a wholly general one: *any* judgment about anything can in principle be undermined by psychological evidence to the effect that one might be forming beliefs in an unreliable way (Sosa 2007; Williamson 2007; Cappelen 2012). Unless one wants to argue that the surveys experimental philosophers use show that we’re proceeding badly *in all domains* (something no serious experimental philosopher has to my knowledge defended), there is a substantive challenge of articulating which of our philosophical projects are undermined, and why the worry doesn’t apply more broadly. To broach controversial matters again: it is my view this challenge has never been adequately met; experimental philosophy has not established a respect in which armchair philosophical methods *in particular* are problematic.¹⁸

Conclusion

In summary: It is widely, but not universally, supposed that contemporary philosophy relies in a distinctive way on intuitions in an evidential capacity; evaluating whether this is so via linguistic data is far from trivial. Epistemic models of the respect in which intuitions might play a perception-like role have been surveyed; my view is that the blind irrationality argument undermines any such view. Nothing follows very straightforwardly from any of this about the significance of experimental philosophy, but the skeptical pressure it presses must be pressed very subtly, if it is not to issue into skepticism in general.

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¹⁸ Weinberg (2007) offers the most explicit attempt in the literature; Ichikawa (2012) offers a rejoinder.

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