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EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, WILLIAMSON'S EXPERTISE DEFENCE OF ARMCHAIR PHILOSOPHY AND THE VALUE OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This paper examines Timothy Williamson's recent 'expertise defense' of armchair philosophy mounted by skeptical experimental philosophers. The skeptical experimental philosophers argue that the methodology of traditional 'armchair' philosophers rests up trusting their own intuitions about particular problem cases. Empirical studies suggest that these intuitions are not generally shared and that such intuitions are strongly influenced factors that are not truth conducive such as cultural background or whether or not the question is asked in a messy or tidy office. Williamson's response is that the skeptical armchair philosophers trust the expertise of the social scientists, as they trust and use the methods of the social sciences to undermine trust in the judgment of armchair philosophers. Given this, the burden of proof is on the skeptical experimental philosopher to give us a reason to doubt the expertise of the armchair philosopher. I examine how our understanding of the history of philosophy is significant in this context. And suggest that prevalent false beliefs about the history of philosophy can lead to mistrust of the expertise of philosophers.

Keywords: Williamson, Experimental Philosophy, Expertise, Gettier, Skepticism.

(1) Experimental Philosophy

One of the most influential recent development in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy has been the rise of so called experimental philosophy.[1] This movement is not homogeneous and can be divided into two strands which I call constructive and skeptical experimental philosophy.

Constructive experimental philosophy is concerned with producing experimentally informed philosophy or philosophically informed empirical work, or, perhaps most often, both. Examples of positive experimental

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1   For some idea of the breath of this movement see the blog: http://philosophycommons.typepad.com/xphi/

philosophy done by philosophers would be recent work by Jenifer Nagel and Shaun Nichols. Shaun Nichols, for example, has recently been working on modal concepts in pre-schoolers and has come up with some fascinating results about how young children understand modal concepts. He shows how even very young children have something like the distinction between logical possibility and metaphysical possibility, as evidenced by their capacity to distinguish within events that they know to be physically impossible between things that are not possible and things that 'would be possible by magic'. Understanding the way in which our understanding of such concepts develops, is clearly interesting for a philosopher working on modality. In addition to philosophers who experiment there are growing number of philosophizing experimenters.[2] So, for example, central to the research project of the primatologist and developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello, and his research group at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, is the philosophical analysis of Joint Cooperative Activity provided by John Searle and Michael Bratman.[3] Tomasello has basically tried to operationalise this philosophical analysis and his group have been examining how human infants develop their capacity to engage in Joint Cooperative Activity so understood. One of their central findings has to do with the way in which the development of the capacity for Joint Co-operative Activity presupposed a capacity for joint attention, which is manifested in the pointing behavior of healthily developing infants. They have also argued that chimpanzee's do not seem to be capable of engaging in such activity. Their proposal has been that it is the capacity for Joint Co-operative Activity that is the distinctive human capacity and is what distinguishes us from all other animals. If their results turn out to be correct, and there is some dispute about this, then this might provide empirical support for the Aristotelian claim that man is essential a social animal and it is our sociability (understood in terms of our capacity to engage in JCA) that distinguishes us humans from all other animals.

These two examples suggest the way in which there can be constructive engagement between philosophy and empirical research, going in both directions.

2   See, Shaun Nichols, 'Modal Concepts in Preschoolers' (in draft)

3   See, for example, Warneken, F., Chen. F., & Tomasello, M. (2006). 'Cooperative activities in young children and chimpanzees.' *Child Development*, 3, 640-663; Moll, H., & Tomasello, M. (2007). Co-operation and human cognition: The Vygotskian intelligence hypothesis. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 362, 639-648; Herrmann, E., Call, J., Lloreda, M., Hare, B., & Tomasello, M. (2007). Humans have evolved specialized skills of social cognition:The cultural intelligence hypothesis. *Science*, 317, 1360-1366.

Skeptical Experimental philosophy is very different beast. Skeptical Experimental philosophers, such as Stephen Stich and Jonathan Weinberg, use experimental methods to engage in a radical attack on *a priori* philosophy, which they call 'armchair philosophy' and which they take to be the dominant form of philosophy in the Anglo-American tradition. According to their analysis the tradition of analytic 'armchair philosophy' is committed to a methodology which illegitimately relies on the intuitions of philosophers concerning thought experiments. And much of the recent debate has concerned the role and status of intuitions in philosophy. At the heart of the experimentalist attack is the claim that *a priori* philosophical judgments, which are presented as offering insights into the truth, are in actual fact sensitive to, or perhaps determined by, non-truthtracking considerations, such as gender or cultural background. So, for example, Murat Baç and Nurbay Irmak have examined differences in intuitions about 'knowledge' between Turks and Americans.[4] The evidence seems to suggest that for English-speaking Turks it is much more intuitive to think that 'I know p, but I might be mistaken' than for Americans and British speakers. And the suggestion is that either Turks and British use the word 'knowledge' to refer to different concepts, or that they have different intuitions about what is true about 'knowledge'. At the very least it looks like they have very different intuitions about how to use the work 'know'. The fact that intuitions about knowledge can vary across cultures, should, the experimentalist argue, undermine our faith in the intuitions of epistemologists. And the same goes for other concepts that philosophers discuss. Thus in a recent paper, criticizing Timothy Williamson's 2008 book *The Philosophy of Philosophy*[5] Weinberg explains the experimentalist challenge in the following terms:

> I will be considering here a kind of challenge to those armchair practices. Let's call it the *experimentalist's challenge*, and those who are making the challenge *experimentalists*, as it is based on a growing body of experimental work that suggests that judgments of the sort that philosophers rely upon so centrally in this practice display a range of inappropriate sensitivities. That is, there is some evidence that the judgments vary systematically with factors that one would not expect to track the relevant philosophical truths. Most of this work

4   Baç, Murat & Irmak, Nurbay, 'Knowing Wrongly: An Obvious Oxymoron, or a Threat for the Alleged Universality of Epistemological Analyses?' *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 11:3 (2011) 305-321.

5   Tim Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 2009.

can be divided into four categories: demographic differences; order effects; framing effects; and environmental influences. For example, judgments about knowledge, reference, and morality have all been found to differ somewhat depending on whether the agent offering the judgment is of Western or Asians descent, even, in some cases, where both groups are native-English-speaking American college undergraduates… The order in which thought-experiments are considered also seems capable of influencing judgments about morality and knowledge.[6]

Now, the studies Weinberg is referring to in this paragraph are generally studies involving undergraduates. In such studies groups are given a vignette with a series of possible responses which are supposed to elicit the subjects intuitions about various philosophical thought experiments. These studies show that the responses differ according to gender, cultural background, the order the questions are asked, whether or not the questions are asked in a tidy or messy office[7] etc.

One of the best-known studies seems to provide evidence that Chinese and Western subjects tend to have different intuitions about the reference of proper names, with westerners being more likely to have Kripkean, causal-historical intuitions about the reference of proper names while Chinese subjects are more likely to have descriptivist intuitions. In this study students in Hong Kong and in the USA were presented with the following vignette and a choice between two answers:

> Suppose that John has learned in college that Gödel 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 Gödel as the discoverer. But this is the only thing that he has heard about Gödel. Now suppose that Gödel was not the author of this theorem. A man called "Schmidt", whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually

6   Jonathan M. Weinberg, 'On doing better, experimental style.' Philosophical Studies, 2009, 145, p.456. The title here is an allusion to the afterword of Williamson's book which is entitled 'Must do better' (pp.278-293)

7   So one study shows that subjects answers to particular moral questions are strongly correlated to whether or not the office in which the questions are asked is tidy or not. Schnall, S., Haidt, J., Clore, G. L., & Jordan, A. H. Disgust as embodied moral judgment. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34:8 (2008) 1096–1109.

did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work, which was thereafter attributed to Gödel. Thus, he has been known as the man who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. Most people who have heard the name "Gödel" are like John; the claim that Gödel discovered the incompleteness theorem is the only thing they have ever heard about Gödel. When John uses the name "Gödel", is he talking about:

(A) the person who really discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic? or
(B) the person who got hold of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work? [8]

Westerners were more likely to answer (B), Chinese to answer (A). And the conclusion drawn was that "[o]ur central prediction was that, given Westerners' greater tendency to make causation based judgments, they would be more likely than the Chinese to have intuitions that fall in line with causal-historical accounts of reference. This prediction was borne out in our experiment. We found the predicted systematic cultural differences on one of the best known thought experiments in recent philosophy of language, Kripke's Gödel case"[9] Now, the methodology and interpretation of the results of such studies can be and has been questioned, but let us assume, for the sake of argument, that at least some of the results are significant. What should we conclude? Weinberg recognizes that the mere fact of such variance does not in itself provide a knock-down argument against armchair philosophy. But he does think that it proves a *prima facie* challenge that demands a response. For it gives us reason to believe that the intuitions of philosophers about crucial thought experiments in philosophy might not be reliably truth tracking. Thus he argues:

These sorts of empirical findings indicate that armchair practice with thought experiments may be inappropriately sensitive to a range of factors that are psychologically powerful but philosophically irrelevant. Unwanted variation in any source of evidence presents a prima facie challenge to any practice that would deploy it. Once they recognize that a *practice faces* such a challenge, practitioners have the intellectual obligation

8   Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, Stephen P. Stich, 'Semantics, cross-cultural style', *Cognition*, 92: 3, 2004, B5.

9   *Ibid*. B8.

to see whether their practice can meet that challenge. Once challenged, practitioners incur an obligation to (i) show that their practice's deliverances are immune to the unwanted noise; (ii) find ways of revising their practice so that it is immune; or (iii) abandon the practice. ''Immune'' here of course should not be read as requiring anything like infallibility—just a reasonable insulation of the conclusions produced by the practice from the unwanted variation that may afflict its evidential sources.

Weinberg, then, believes that the sort of studies that he and his experimentalist friends are conducting provide a challenge to armchair philosophers such as Williamson, and that this challenge demands a response. And, as we shall see, Williamson agrees. Other experimentalists have made much stronger claims. For example, Stitch et. al. conclude their paper on cultural variations in intuitions about the reference of names with the claim that:

We find it wildly implausible that the semantic intuitions of the narrow cross-section of humanity who are Western academic philosophers are a more reliable indicator of the correct theory of reference (if there is such a thing...) than the differing semantic intuitions of other cultural or linguistic groups. Indeed, given the intense training and selection that undergraduate and graduate students in philosophy have to go through, there is good reason to suspect that the alleged reflective intuitions may be reinforced intuitions. In the absence of a principled argument about why philosophers' intuitions are superior, this project smacks of narcissism in the extreme.[10]

(2) Williamson's *Expertise Defense* of Armchair Philosophy.

Williamson's response to the challenge is to reply that these studies tend to be based on testing the intuitions of students, but philosophers are experts, and in general the judgments of non-experts does not, and should not, undermine our confidence in the judgments of experts.[11] The fact that a class of untrained students are not

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10   Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, Stephen P. Stich, 'Semantics, cross-cultural style', *Cognition*, 92:3, 2004, p.B9.
11   Other philosophers have also argued for a similar claim. For example, Hales argues that, "we should acknowledge that not all intuitions are created equal... For example,

able to repeat the results of a crucial experiment in physics does not undermine our confidence in the laws of physics or professional physicists.

Now, one might think that at this point we face a stand-off. On the one side we have the armchair philosophers who believe in the expertise of philosophers and trust the general reliability (although accept the fallibility) of the judgments of trained philosopher. On the other we have the experimentalists who question the reliability of such judgments. Now, in such cases, we can often argue about where the burden of proof lies. And I think, along with Williamson, the burden of proof lies with the experimentalists, and Weinberg, at least, has accepted this. But why should the burden of proof lie with the experimentalists? Williamson in a recent intervention into the debate argues that,

> [W]e do not expect physicists to suspend their current projects in order to carry out psychological investigations of their capacity as laboratory experimentalists, on the basis of evidence that undergraduates untrained in physics are bad at conducting laboratory experiments. Standards of laboratory experimentation in physics are doubtless higher than standards of thought experimentation in philosophy; nevertheless, in both cases the point remains that **it would be foolish to change a well-established methodology** without serious evidence that doing so would make the discipline better rather than worse.[12]

Now Williamson's argument appeals to the well-establishedness of philosophy as an academic discipline. And he argues that although this fact doesn't preclude the possibility that the whole discipline might be systematically corrupt (perhaps like the discipline of witch-catching in the Middle Ages), the burden is on the experimentalist to give us a good reason to doubt the expertise of philosophers; And appealing to the intuitions of non-experts will not be the right sort of reason. Thus he argues,

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the physical intuitions of professional scientists are much more trustworthy than those of undergraduates or random persons in a bus station" S.D, Hales, *Relativism and the foundations of philosophy*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, p.171. And Ludwig compares the training and expertise of philosophers with that of mathematicians. See: K. Ludwig, 'The epistemology of thought experiments: First person versus third person approaches.' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 31 (2007)128-159.

12   Tim Williamson, 'Philosophical Expertise and the Burden of Proof' *Metaphilosophy*, 42 (3):215-229 (2011)

> From a sociological perspective, philosophy is a fairly normal academic discipline. Consequently, since thought experimentation is a cognitive task distinctive of contemporary analytic philosophy, the initial presumption should be that professional analytic philosophers tend to display substantially higher levels of skill in thought experimentation than laypeople do.[13]

Now, at the heart of the argument here is a certain type of epistemic conservatism. The thought is that just because something, say the expertise of members of a certain discipline, could possibly be doubted does not in itself give us a reason to doubt it. Doubt needs some positive ground. And the thought is that philosophy is a normal academic discipline, and we generally trust the expertise of members of a well established discipline unless we have positive reason to doubt it. Now, unless we are global skeptics, our initial presumption should be to assume the genuine expertise of members of a well established discipline. This is not to say that the genuine expertise of philosophers should not be questioned, but the burden of proof is on the critics to provide a specific reason for us to doubt the expertise of philosophers.

Now, the experimentalists are not global skeptics. They trust expertise of certain other disciplines. Indeed, they rely on the soundness of the statistical methodologies used in the social sciences and psychology to launch their experimental critique of philosophy. For this reason, in response to Williamson's expertise defense, the experimentalists have generally accepted that the burden of proof is on them to give a reason to specifically distrust the expertise of armchair philosophers. Thus, for example, Weinberg, Gonnerman, Buckner and Alexander in their latest move in the argument have drawn on the recent psychological literature on expertise in general to question whether philosophical training in particular produces genuine expertise, and they, of course, argue that given what we know empirically about expertise, philosophical training does not produce a genuine expertise.[14]

13 Tim Williamson, 'Philosophical Expertise and the Burden of Proof' *Metaphilosophy*, 42 (3):215-229 (2011)

14 Their abstract, unusually for a philosophy paper, provides a good summary of their argument: "Recent experimental philosophy arguments have raised trouble for philosophers' reliance on armchair intuitions. One popular line of response has been the expertise defense: philosophers are highly-trained experts, whereas the subjects in the experimental philosophy studies have generally been ordinary undergraduates, and so there's no reason to think philosophers will make the same mistakes. But this deploys a substantive empirical claim, that philosophers' training indeed inculcates sufficient protection from such mistakes.

These arguments are unconvincing. However, there is a much more serious threat to our confidence in the expertise of philosophers that has to do with the history of philosophy. And Williamson is aware of such a threat. Thus he points out that:

> Experimental philosophers might withdraw their ill-advised claim about the initial burden of proof, but insist that more specific features of our present evidence tell against the expertise defence. What are those features? Thoughts naturally turn to the difference in track record between philosophy and many other academic disciplines. Although it would be myopic to deny that philosophy has made *some* progress, one must admit that in most areas it has not made as much progress as the natural sciences (formal logic is an exception). The **suggestion is that the comparative lack of philosophical progress is what defeats the initial presumption in favour of genuine philosophical expertise.** [15]

Now, the implication here is that a proper understanding of the history of philosophy is not only historically interesting but is also potentially important for contemporary debates, playing an important role in the *justification* of contemporary philosophical methodology. So, for example, if we think, as some people do, that whether or not a discipline can progress is significant for the question of whether the discipline is in good standing, and its practitioners genuine experts. Thus understanding whether, and if so how and where a discipline can progress, might be important for understanding which parts of the discipline are in good shape. And working this out is the task of the historian of philosophy.

In the final section of this paper I will make a few remarks of the epistemic role the history of philosophy can play in contemporary debates. One point

We canvass the psychological literature on expertise, which indicates that people are not generally very good at reckoning who will develop expertise under what circumstances. We consider three promising hypotheses concerning what philosophical expertise might consist in: (i) better conceptual schemata; (ii) mastery of entrenched theories; and (iii) general practical know-how with the entertaining of hypotheticals. On inspection, none seem to provide us with good reason to endorse this key empirical premise of the expertise defense." Weinberg, Jonathan M., Chad Gonnerman, Cameron Buckner and Joshua Alexander. 2010. Are philosophers expert intuiters?. Philosophical Psychology. 23(3):331-355.

15   Tim Williamson, 'Philosophical Expertise and the Burden of Proof' *Metaphilosophy*, 42 (3):215-229 (2011)

I will stress is the way in which certain widespread false beliefs about the history of the discipline would, if true, give us good reason to defeat the initial presumption in favor of genuine philosophical expertise. And it seems to me that contemporary Anglo-American philosophy is riddled with such discipline undermining false beliefs. One such false historical belief is what I call the Gettier Myth. If it were really true that over 2,000 years of tradition were overturned by a simple 3 page paper in Analysis in 1963, this would give us ample reason to doubt the expertise of philosophers. Luckily, this Gettier Myth is false. Past philosophers were not that stupid.

(3) The Epistemic Value of the History of Philosophy.

According to many contemporary philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition, philosophy is primarily concerned with establishing timeless truth and mistakes in our understanding of the history of philosophy may be mistaken history but are not relevant philosophically. I disagree with such a view as I believe that a proper understanding of the history of philosophy is relevant to contemporary debates for at least two reasons. The **first** is **semantic**. In order to understand what contemporary debates are really about we need a clear understanding of history. For the meaning, or at least the grasp of the meaning, of our philosophical concepts is at least partially historical. And if we misunderstand the history of a debate we will end up not really understanding what contemporary debates are really about, and so the history can help us understand whether two philosophers, or perhaps two philosophical schools are talking past each other or disagreeing about something.[16] The second is **epistemic**. I believe that our understanding of the history of philosophy can play a justificatory role in contemporary debates. It is this second, justificatory role of the history of philosophy that I will focus on in the final section of my paper. My central claim will be that, as Tim Williamson has convincingly argued, the justification of certain contemporary philosophical practices, that have come under attack by some recent experimental philosophers, are justified by an appeal to the expertise of philosophers. And there are two ways in which a proper understanding of the history of philosophy can play this role. **Firstly**, a proper understanding of history can provide us with the defeater of a defeater. For there are certain widespread beliefs about the history of philosophy that, if true, would I believe undermine this claim of expertise, and the fact that they are believed to be true by so many Anglo-American philosophers might be one reason why may such philosophers are so skeptical about their

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16   See Stew Cohen, 'epistemic justification' [forthcoming]

own tradition. One example of such a historical belief is that the traditional analysis of knowledge was that knowledge is justified true belief, with almost all philosophers being committed to such an analysis for over 2000 years. This analysis, however, was decisively refuted in a 3 page paper in Analysis in 1963. Now, if 2000 years of tradition really were overturned by a very simple 3 page argument then surely the philosophical tradition is in seriously bad shape and we reason to distrust the expertise of members of this tradition, including the contemporary members. This historical belief, which I call the Gettier Myth, is mistaken, for the view that knowledge is justifies belief was not the traditional standard analysis of knowledge. Demonstrating that widely held and taught myths about the history of philosophy are false, can help show that the philosophical tradition is in much better shape than the widespread historical belief in many such philosophical myths would indicate. In so doing one can help overcome one possible challenge to the expertise of philosophers.

The **Second** way in which the history of philosophy can play an epistemic role in is by showing where and how philosophy has made progress, for one of the reasons that skeptics about philosophy give for singling out the expertise of philosophers is that one of the features of healthy academic disciplines is that they are capable of making some sort of progress, whereas philosophy is not. And, I think, it is the task of the historian of philosophy to work out if and where progress has occurred.[17] Now, Williamson, and many other Anglo-American philosophers, believe that the increased formalism that was made possible by the advances in logic since Frege has been a major source of philosophical progress, and this seems to be one of his motives for his anti-skepticism about armchair methods. But, it is clear that this is a question in the history of philosophy. Now, as a historian of philosophy, it is not obvious to me if, how and where increased formalism has led to *philosophical* progress. It is clear that formal methods have made certain types of mistakes more perspicuous, and so there might be good reason to think that contemporary Anglo-American philosophers are less likely, for example, to provide arguments that rest on scope ambiguities than their 18th century counterparts. To try and provide some reason to think that this progress has not just been a matter of increased perspicuity the onus is on defenders of the expertise defense of armchair philosophy to provide an account of exactly how and where the formal methods introduced with the development of

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17   And I should add that I think that in philosophy this progress is not necessarily to be understood in terms of providing answers, but in reaching a better understanding of the questions.

modern logic have led to real progress in philosophy. Such stories would clearly be historical, but could also have a justificatory role in contemporary debates. Such historical stories are perhaps the best arguments one can give to skeptics about armchair philosophical method such as Stitch and his followers.

In addition there are good reasons to think that *bad* history of philosophy has played an important role in contemporary philosophy. This bad history of philosophy has played a pernicious role in mis-identifying where the burden of proof lies in certain arguments and has also led to a general undermining of faith in the expertise of philosophers. Good history of philosophy is needed to combat such bad history of philosophy. I will focus on one particular mistake, concerning a widely held view about the significance of Gettier's three page 1963 paper 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?'[18]

In this paper Gettier provides two counter example to the view that Justified True Belief is knowledge. The first counter example is the case of Smith and Jones. Here, in full is the example:

> Case I: 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 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. (Gettier, p. 122).

This example is supposed to provide us with an example of a justified true belief that is clearly not knowledge, and most contemporary Anglo-American epistemologists believe that this, and similar cases, provide a decisive refutation of the view that knowledge is justified true belief. Now, Gettier himself does not claim that the position that knowledge is justified true belief was the traditional analysis of knowledge. Instead he attributes this position to Chisholm[19] and Ayer[20] and notes that "Plato seems to be considering some such definition at *Theaetetus* 201, and perhaps accepting one at *Meno* 98."[21] In the (almost) 50 years since this article was published, however, the view that knowledge is JTB was *the* traditional view of knowledge that was hegemonic for over 2000 years before being decisively refuted in 1963 has become a pretty much universal view amongst analytic philosophers. Thus, for example, Tim Williamson argues that the view that knowledge is justified belief was the "traditional analysis" of knowledge which before 1963 had been "for 2000 years… the standard analysis". Thus Williamson writes,

> The literature on philosophical intuition takes as a paradigm case Edmund Gettier's refutation of the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief (1963). Almost overnight, the vast majority of epistemologists throughout the analytic community rejected what for more than two thousand years, since Plato, had been the standard analysis of the central epistemological concept, in response to a couple of imaginary examples in a three page article by someone most of them had never heard of: sociologically, a striking phenomenon. [22]

19   Roderick M. Chisholm, *Perceiving: a Philosophical Study*, Cornell University Press (Ithaca, New York, 1957), p. 16.

20   A. J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, Macmillan (London, 1956), p. 34.

21   Gettier, p.121.

22   Timothy Williamson, "Armchair philosophy, metaphysical modality and counterfactual thinking." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105 (2005), p.3. It is interesting to note that three years later Williamson does not repeat this claim in the chapter of *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) that is based on this paper. The reason for this, as he has expressed in personal correspondence, is that he too has become more skeptical about the view that K=JTB was the traditional analysis of knowledge.

Similarly, Robert Brandom claims that,

> Since Plato we have been told that knowledge is not just belief,
> but belief that can be justified; and not just belief that can be
> justified, but true justified belief.[23]

And similar remarks are not hard to find. It is clear, then, that many leading contemporary philosophers believe that the traditional understanding of knowledge was that knowledge is justified true belief. And that this was the traditional analysis of knowledge for over 2000 years but was overturned by a non-technical 3 page paper in 1963. I call this story, the Gettier myth.

Now, if *the Gettier Myth* were true, it would seem that we have good reasons to question the expertise of philosophers as a historically extended community. For, if the vast majority of philosophers could be so mistaken about such a central philosophical issue, and the objection to this mistake is so simple, then surely we have at least a *prima facie* reason to distrust the judgments and expertise of contemporary philosophers. And, as we have seen, the question of whether or not we have prima facie reasons to question the expertise of philosophers are central in recent arguments defending the a priori method in philosophy against attacks from skeptical experimental philosophers. Surely the fact, if it were a fact, that the philosophical tradition had been off the tracks for 2000 years would give us some reason to doubt the expertise of contemporary philosophers. Like Williamson, I am suspicious of opinion polls of undergrads and think that he is right that philosophers do have some sort of expertise. However, a far greater source of possible skeptical worry will be the judgment of other, perhaps dead, philosophers. And I think that if Williamson is right in thinking that three pages in *Analysis* in 1963 overturned 2000 years of philosophical tradition, this gives us a very good prima facie reason not to trust the expertise of contemporary philosophers – for either there was something very wrong with the philosophical tradition, or there is something very wrong in the last 40 years of philosophy. Either way we would have a good *prima facie* reason to distrust the expertise of the philosopher that does not apply, say, to the mathematician.

But, luckily for our discipline, the Gettier Myth is just a story. The vast majority of philosophers prior to the 20th century did not think that knowledge was justified true belief. This is not the place to attempt to fully justify this claim. But a few illustrative examples should help give credence

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23   Robert Brandom 'Why Truth is not Important' in *Reason in Philosophy*, Cambeidge: Belknap Press, p. 157

to this claim. Plato, for example, in book 6 of the *Republic* distinguishes belief (*doxa*) and knowledge (*episteme*) and argues that these are different in kind as they have different types of object. The object of knowledge are the forms, whereas the objects of belief are appearances. The Plato of the *Republic*, then clearly rejects claim that knowledge is a species of belief.

Descartes also clearly rejects the claim that knowledge is a type of belief, at least in the sense in which contemporary philosophers seem to use this term. For beliefs are truth apt and are the sort of things that can be either true or false. So in Descartes terminology beliefs are judgments, and as such are acts of the will.[24] Knowledge, in contrast, is a type of 'clear and distinct' perception of ideas, and is an act of the intellect. Such acts of the intellect are not truth-apt. Both Plato and Descartes then think that Knowledge is a *sui generis* mental state. It is not a specific type of belief. Further examples are not hard to find. [25]

It is also seems to be the case that the view that knowledge was a type of belief wasn't even the dominant view in the English speaking philosophical world at the end of the 19th Century. For example Shadworth Hodgson (1886) the founding president of the Aristotelian Society argues that "Belief is therefore a particular mode of knowledge as a general term, and not knowledge a particular mode of belief as a general term"[26] and D.G. Thompson (1877) argues in an early volume of *Mind* that knowledge and belief were quite distinct, although interrelated capacities.[27] It seems likely from the research I have done that

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24   See the *4th Meditation*.

25   For more examples see Julien Dutant, 'The Legend of the Justified True Belief Analysis.' Philosophical Perspectives (forthcoming). See also chapter one of his phd thesis, (University of Geneva, 2010) *Knowledge and the Impossibility of Error*.

26   Shadworth H. Hodgson 'On the relation of Knowledge to Belief' Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1:1 (1887-8) p.70. He continues by explaining that "Observe that advantages, and of whom they accrue, of subsuming knowledge under belief, instead of *vice versa*. If we take Belief or Persuasion of anything as our highest general term in these matters, and say that immediately known facts are those of which the persuasion is irresistible, a persuasion forced upon us, and which we cannot help having, the distinct lines of demarcation between fact and imagination is then obliterated, for there may exist, for many, an imagination the motives for which are so strong, that we cannot help believing it, and may feel ourselves irresistibly compelled to accept it as a fact." (p.70)

27   "Knowledge is a product resulting from a process of knowing: Belief is a product resulting from a process of believing. The products are explained by the processes…" (p.334); "Let us discard for the moment the words knowledge and belief, and signify the act of mental apprehension by the term cognition. In order that there may be cognition,

the view that knowledge was justified belief only became the dominant view in the English speaking world in the 1930s. And so the tradition that Gettier overthrew was not a long one. Getting clear about the historical myths spread by many in our profession, can also play important epistemic roles. Firstly in providing some support against those who are skeptical of the discipline. Secondly, burden of proof arguments are important in philosophy. And if a view has been the dominant view in philosophy, then the burden should be on those who propose to reject it. Most philosophers today seem to have bought into the Gettier myth. And so, although most no longer think that knowledge is justified true belief, nearly all think that knowing is a type of belief or that knowing entails believing. And there is assumption that the burden of proof is on those who want to offer an alternative. Getting the historical story right, then, can have important consequences in burden of proof arguments in contemporary debates. [28]

there must be something cognised. That which is cognised is broadly distinguished as presentative and representative… Cognition, viewed on its presentative side, is knowledge; on its representative side is belief… If then we were asked to define believing, we could say that it is representative cognition, or more exactly perhaps, the cognition of an experience as representative… More clearly still appears then the intimate connection between knowledge and belief. They are not only the same in elementary constitution, but they exist concurrently, and one is necessary to the existence of the other. They are the obverse of each other. We have seen that there is not cognition without representation, and every representation involves belief; and there is no representation without presentation, so that all believing involves knowing." (pp.326-7) Daniel Greenleaf Thompson, 'Knowledge and Belief' *Mind*, 2:7 (1877) pp.309-335.