

The Role of Intuitions in Philosophy

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As we write this, philosophers all over the world are in a state of temporary, collective self-scrutiny. They are poring over the results of the PhilPapers Survey, conducted by David Chalmers and David Bourget—a grand-scale survey of the profession's views on 30 major philosophical issues, ranging from aesthetic value to zombies. More than 3000 people have responded, and many more are currently absorbing and analyzing the results.¹

Or are they? Well, so it seems, from discussions at our departments and in various social media on the internet. However, what engages philosophers right now is an empirical issue, not reliably settled by such anecdotal and parochial evidence. But we are philosophers and, as such, not above making rash guesses from our desk chairs; old habits die hard.

What is immediately evident from Chalmers' and Bourget's survey results is that philosophers are not timid when it comes to holding forth on difficult questions. We are somewhat more cautious when asked to take a stand on empirical questions, like those of the meta-survey where Chalmers and Bourget asked subjects to estimate the results of the original survey: the meta-survey received roughly a fifth as many responses as the original one. And those of us who did proffer guesses in the meta-survey did a fairly bad job at guessing the relative popularity of competing views. This is not surprising, given that what most of us did in the meta-survey was to take a stab in the dark about empirical issues we had no solid evidence for.

The meta-survey provides a solid way of calibrating error and success. But what about the original survey, about the big philosophical questions? Obviously, there is no facile way of calibrating the reliability of the answers here. But philosophical methodology has recently become a vigorous branch of philosophy itself. In particular, much discussion has concerned the use of intuitions in philosophy: whether they are any better when it comes to ad-

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¹ Cf. <http://philpapers.org/surveys/results.pl>.

jucating philosophical truth than, say, the sociological truths uncovered by the meta-survey. This issue is dedicated to a continuation of that discussion.

1. What are intuitions?

The question of the nature of intuitions and the question of their evidential value (or other roles) in philosophy are hard to extricate from one another. It is natural to suggest that the evidential value of intuitions will depend on what they are. But the question of what they are (or what should count as an intuition) is not altogether independent of the question of what role they play. One reason for this is that 'intuition' is sometimes used as a functional term for whatever fulfills certain roles, among them a certain evidential role, as Herbert Feigl (1958), quoted by Sebastian Lutz in his paper in this volume, notes. But it is just one sense; as Feigl also notes, there are other senses which are neutral on the question of evidential value. In one sense, intuitions are psychological phenomena, whose existence has to be granted but does not in itself imply any epistemic role. This much may be agreed upon even by defenders of intuitions as evidence. But such a psychologistic view invites the question: what sort of psychological phenomena?

In both ordinary and in some philosophers' usage, 'intuition' has sometimes been taken to refer to a special faculty of the mind, whose products are called 'intuitions'. The claim that there is such a distinctive faculty of the mind has become less widespread in contemporary philosophy than it once was. But the "faculty view" is by no means extinct. Chomsky's claim that linguistic intuitions are products of our linguistic competence is more than a little reminiscent of the traditional faculty view (cf. (Hintikka 1999), which argues that the surge in philosophical appeals to intuitions was largely inspired by the Chomskyan conception of linguistic intuitions). And contemporary rationalists have argued that intuitions are produced by something akin to a faculty of intuition.

In modern philosophy, however, the word is usually taken to denote tokens or types of psychological phenomena, rather than a faculty. The average philosopher typically has many such intuitions during her work-life, encounters appeals to them, and invokes them herself to defend or criticize various theses. However, it may be that the things called 'intuitions' even in (broadly speaking) contemporary analytic philosophy do not form a homogenous class of things, united in the way the members of a natural kind are supposed to be united. Sebastian Lutz in effect makes this claim in pressing the distinction between intuitions in the sense of hunches about empirical matters, on the one hand, and posited analogues to sense perceptions about trans-empirical (mathematical, modal, perhaps moral) matters,

on the other.² Clearly, the word ‘intuition’ is used in contexts which are empirical (including psychological) as well as in contexts which are concerned with non-empirical questions. Opinions on how much disunity this introduces will vary with one’s view of the importance of the distinction, and perhaps with what one envisages the purview of philosophy to be.

1.1 Intuitions as propositional attitudes

Intuitions are frequently deemed true or false. This invites the view that they are like beliefs at least in being truth-valued propositional attitudes, which are true or false according to whether their contents are true or false. The view that intuitions have propositional content is shared by several contributors to this volume. Brian Talbot argues that in addition to having content, they are also experiences. With George Bealer (e.g. Bealer 1998), he claims that they are a distinctive kind of seemings, distinguished from e.g. memory-, inference- and perception-based seemings by having a partly unknown etiology. According to this view, which Talbot takes to be widely shared in philosophy, “intuitions are things that strike us as true without us knowing entirely why they do”.

Mark Fedyk also undertakes to give a descriptive account of the term’s use in contemporary philosophy, and also takes the consensus to be that intuitions are content-bearers. Jonathan Ichikawa suggests that intuitions simply are beliefs, as David Lewis has claimed.³

The identification of intuitions with (a certain class of) beliefs has been criticized, notably by Bealer (e.g., Bealer 1996). He argues that belief, unlike intuitions are *plastic*; that intuitions have a phenomenology distinct from belief in being *seemings*; that unlike beliefs, intuitions are restricted to certain types of modal contents; and that the intuition that p may coexist with the belief that not- p in a way suggesting that it is something different from the belief that p (a point that seems related to the putative lack of plasticity of intuitions). But the arguments from lack of plasticity and restricted contents may only go to show that not *all* beliefs are intuitions (cf. Sosa 1996), and the phenomenology of intuition (and of belief) remains controversial. The argument from robustness of intuitions in the face of beliefs with incompatible contents may be stronger. It may, however, be explained by the claim that intuitions are inclinations to believe: the view espoused by Joshua

² John Symons (2008) similarly argues that Russell’s and Moore’s usage of ‘intuition’ to denote approximately *common sense opinion* was exapted, and subtly changed, by Kripke to refer to something capable of grounding claims about metaphysical modality.

³ Cf. (Lewis 1983, x). A variant on the belief thesis is to say that intuitions are *judgments* (cf. also (Williamson 2007, ch. 7), who takes them to be “judgments, or inclinations to judgments”).

Earlenbaugh and Bernard Molyneux.

Earlenbaugh and Molyneux claim that intuitions are neither evidence nor beliefs. Being inclinations, they are “inner mental states or events”, which do, however, have a content—the same contents as the beliefs they tend to cause. Earlenbaugh and Molyneux are thus in agreement with the view that intuitions are bearers of propositional content, although the function of appeals to intuition is rhetorical rather than evidential, on their view. A more radical departure from the content view would be a position analogous to Davidson’s view of observations as a class of psychological phenomena causally related to (observation) beliefs, but not themselves endowed with propositional content. On such a view, intuitions would be causal precursors to beliefs, but not themselves content-bearers.

Another issue is whether intuitions are episodic, occurrent mental phenomena, or whether they may be dispositional states like beliefs or inclinations. It is sometimes argued that since intuitions are episodic, they cannot be identified with inclinations to believe. Earlenbaugh and Molyneux discuss and reject this argument.

1.2 Etiology and phenomenology

On Earlenbaugh’s and Molyneux’s view, intuitions are things that play a certain causal role: they cause beliefs. A more common stance is to take intuitions to be demarcated by having a special etiology. The faculty view is one variant of this stance. But philosophers to whom the faculty view is foreign also frequently characterize intuitions in terms of etiology. The very distinction between observation or perception, on the one hand, and intuition, on the other, is often made to turn on taking intuitions to be independent of sensory perception, at least among their proximal causes. At the same time, intuition is often characterized in terms of a supposedly special phenomenology: intuitions are taken to be marked by directness, (apparent) non-inferentiality, (subjective) compellingness or “glow”, et cetera. These phenomenological attributes are those often used to characterize perception. Combining the phenomenological and the etiological conditions on intuitions, then, invites the widely shared view (denied by Earlenbaugh and Molyneux as well as by Ichikawa) that intuitions are a sort of non-empirical evidence, available to philosophers for evaluating non-empirical theories. But are intuitions evidence?

The question of whether intuitions are marked by a specific phenomenology is relevant to their epistemic status. For on some theories, such as Bealer’s, intuitions are a chief route to non-empirical knowledge. But to provide grounds for believing a proposition to an armchair thinker, the thinker must also have some means for identifying what an intuition is. If intuitions are

marked by a special phenomenology (and perhaps a specific form or type of content; cf below), they may be identifiable a priori as well.

The demand for a specific etiology, on the other hand, pulls in the opposite direction. This is perhaps more obvious if we consider the idea that a “good”, epistemically valuable intuition, must have a specific type of causal ancestry. We don’t know just how intuitions arise; and their etiology is not introspectively knowable, beyond the minimal negative characterization of them as non-observational, non-memorial, not based on conscious inference, etc. Hence, the combination of phenomenological and etiological demands on what counts as an intuition may still render something’s status as an intuition (or as a good one) an a posteriori matter. This question is discussed in the essay by Talbot, as well as by Weinberg and Crowley.

1.3 Content and form

Sometimes, the term ‘intuition’ is restricted to mental phenomena whose contents are particular propositions. This seems to be an assumption, for instance, in certain accounts of reflective equilibrium, when mutual adjustment is said to take place between general principles and intuitions about individual cases. Sometimes, however, the term is used in a way allowing very general and abstract contents, such as propositions in mathematics and set theory. Mark Fedyk suggests that, contrary to what is sometimes held, the content of an intuition is not a proposition about a concept, but about the salient properties of a case. For instance, the intuitions evoked by Gettier cases are not about the concept of knowledge, but about properties of the doxastic states of the protagonists in Gettier cases. This suggests a restriction to particular cases, since cases evoking intuitions are particular.

Further demands are sometimes put on the contents of what may count as an intuition. Thus Bealer holds that intuitions concern only priori propositions (cf. Earlenbaugh and Molyneux). And several philosophers have claimed that a rational intuition always has a modal content (Bealer 1998, Sosa 1998, Bonjour 1997, Grundmann 2007).

1.4 Intension, extension, and nature

There may be more widespread agreement on what the extension of the term ‘intuition’ is than on what its meaning is, or should be. This enables some room for fruitful discussion of their evidential (or other) role. But a different question seems to be more pressing. This is whether the phenomena in the extension are things that share a common nature or form a unified kind at all. At present, this question still seems quite far from resolution. And even if we grant that intuitions may be categorized into various types according to subject matter etc, and even if we disregard penumbral or disputed cases,

the question still remains: do *these* things share a common nature?

This is a question relevant both for arguments attacking and defending the status of intuitions as evidence. For if an experimental philosopher, say, argues that some class of intuitions, e.g. in epistemology, are unreliable indicators of truth, the argument depends on an ampliative inference from the particular cases (and, of course, the particular subjects; cf. Weinberg and Crowley) demonstrably subject to error. And this ampliative inference will be variously legitimate, depending on how homogenous the class of intuitions indicted by the argument is.

Similarly, a defense of the evidential value by pointing to the success of *certain* intuitions turns on the legitimacy of inferring that what holds for the successful intuitions may be projected to the intuitions one wants to defend. This is also an ampliative inference that will be stronger or weaker according to how similar the intuitions one is defending are to the ones adduced as defense.

Naturally, the question of the shared nature (or lack of one) is not independent of what the items that we want to pick out by the term are. It is not impossible that in the future, as a long-term but somewhat frustrating legacy of current debates in philosophy and psychology, we will operate with several different concepts of intuition in parallel: one defined according to phenomenology, one according to psychological etiology, etc. Something like this has arguably happened before in other contexts, for instance with the concept of a gene (cf. Griffiths and Neumann-Held 1999). Such pluralism might result in different verdicts on whether intuitions have a common nature, depending on which concept or dimension is salient. Earlenbaugh and Molyneux suggest that philosophical intuitions are *psychologically homogenous* but *epistemically heterogeneous*. This is a claim exemplifying a sort of qualification that may perhaps become quite common.

2. Intuitions and X-Phi: Should philosophers trust their intuitions?

A man goes to the supermarket once a week and buys a dead chicken.
But before cooking the chicken, he has sexual intercourse with it.
Then he cooks it and eats it. Do you think this person is doing something *morally* wrong?

As the psychologist Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues found in an empirical study (Haidt et al. 1993), our intuitions about the moral acceptability of such a case vary with our socio-economic background: The lower your socio-economic standing the more likely you are to find this case morally problematic.

The point is not that subjects with a lower socio-economic standing are

mistaken in their moralization of such behavior while subjects with higher standing would have the more correct gut reactions. The difficulty is rather to decide which of such conflicting responses can properly serve as a constraint on ethical theory, when actually both may be results of apparently arbitrary, and philosophically irrelevant cultural factors. In the last few years “experimental philosophers”, following the methodology of Haidt and his colleagues, found many of our philosophical intuitions to be subject to variation in response to philosophically irrelevant factors—not only in ethics, but also in such areas as philosophy of language and epistemology.

2.1 The Challenge of Experimental Philosophy

The fact that ordinary people have intuitions that differ from the views of professionally trained philosophers is perhaps *prima facie* not very surprising: *of course*, the woman in the street also has different intuitions about physics than a professional physicist has.

What makes the results of experimental philosophy so challenging to traditional philosophy is the fact that philosophical methodology seems to give intuitions such a big role—a role that is unlike the role intuitions would have in other sciences. Of course, physicists make experiments and thereby test their theories. Philosophers do not test their theories empirically in the lab, they seem to test their theories in the armchair, usually by reflecting on what we would or should say about a certain imaginary case. In other words: philosophers test their theories by conducting *thought experiments*.

As an example, take the discussion in epistemology about the right analysis of ‘knowledge’. For a long time, philosophers were convinced that the correct analysis of ‘knowledge’ is in terms of justified, true belief. According to this account, a person *P* knows that *q* if and only if *P* has the justified, true belief that *q*.

Now imagine that some guy named Bob has a friend Jill who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. Bob is not aware, however, that Jill’s 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. Now, Bob’s belief that Jill drives an American car is justified, since it is based on Bob’s observation. It is also still true, because Jill does drive an American car. But is Bob’s belief *knowledge*? Does Bob *know* that Jill is driving an American car?

Most philosophers were convinced by cases like these (when presented by Edmund Gettier in 1963) that Bob does *not* know that Jill is driving an American car and that there is something wrong with the standard account of knowledge, and that knowledge isn’t just justified true belief. And these philosophers were convinced by this case, because they found it *intuitively*

false to say about it that Bob knows that Jill drives an American car. The result was that the majority of philosophers concluded that the justified, true belief account of knowledge is mistaken.

However, in empirical studies that were conducted by Jonathan Weinberg, Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich (2001), it turned out that people from East-Asia and from India show significantly different reactions when presented with this case, than Americans of European descent do. While people from the West largely agree with philosophers that Bob does not have knowledge, the majority of people from East-Asia or India believe that Bob *does* know.

Does that mean that they have a different concept of knowledge than people in the West? But if philosophers are only reconstructing the Western concept of knowledge, with what justification are they ignoring the Eastern concept? Do we know that ours is better or more accurate? If so, how do we know that? In response to a similar result regarding the cultural variation of intuitions, Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich formulate the challenge thus:

We find it *wildly* implausible that the [...] intuitions of the narrow cross-section of humanity who are Western academic philosophers are a more reliable indicator of the correct theory [...] than the differing [...] 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. (Machery et al. 2004, 9)

In any case, philosophers seem to assume that their philosophical intuitions are universally shared. Experimental philosophy, on the other hand, seems to show that this assumption is mistaken. Does that mean that philosophical methodology needs to change? Does it show that we can't and shouldn't trust intuitions anymore when deciding about philosophical theories? Or does it show that we need to do serious cross-cultural empirical research about the intuitions of the man in the street from Tallinn to Taipeh, instead of trying to evaluate philosophical matters from the armchair?

3. Evidence for What?

Whether intuitions are evidence depends, of course, on what they are supposed to be evidence *for*. In contemporary (analytic) philosophy we can

distinguish the ideal types⁴ of at least three different conceptions of what philosophical analysis is concerned with that correspond to three different evaluations of whether intuitions should be considered evidence in philosophy.

A traditional conception which, arguably, also represents the mainstream (cf. Williamson 2007), considers philosophical questions like ‘What is truth?’, ‘What is knowledge?’, ‘What is consciousness?’ to be concerned with extra-linguistic subject matter. On that conception, the answers to these problems are not analytic truths, nor do these questions concern the choice of linguistic conventions. There are several ways in which one might come to hold this position. On the traditional understanding, philosophy is concerned with “metaphysical” truths or is attempting to investigate the “essences” of things; metaphysical truth is then construed as made true by non-linguistic facts about Reality, and essences are properties that things may or may not have, independently of our practices in using language. On a variant of the same conception, philosophy is considered continuous with the other sciences. Thus philosophy is interested in broadly the same kind of truths the other sciences are interested in, and answers its questions in cooperation with them.

On a second conception, philosophy is considered a linguistic enterprise: instead of inquiring what knowledge, truth and consciousness *are*, philosophers investigate what ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘consciousness’ *mean*. The meaning of these terms being our concepts, this enterprise is often called ‘conceptual analysis’. One of the motivations for this approach is the belief that philosophical problems can be (dis-)solved by paying close attention to the way ordinary language is used.

On a third conception, philosophy is also conceived as a linguistic enterprise, but one that is only to a small extent interested in our “ordinary” concepts of truth, knowledge or consciousness. On this conception, sometimes labelled ‘ideal language conception’, our ordinary concepts are likely to be imprecise or outright confused, and it is these confusions that lead to philosophical problems. The aim of philosophy is to replace these with precisified concepts, which either leads to a dissolution of the philosophical problem or a restatement of the problems in terms that make them tractable by the empirical sciences.

If one intends to give special evidential weight to intuitions on the first conception, one will need to present a story that explains why we should have intuitions that reliably inform us about metaphysical or even empirical mat-

⁴ That we distinguish between three ideal types rather than four or ten is only because these three seem to map best onto the discussion in this issue. Of course, in philosophy there are all kinds of intermediate positions.

ters. This story typically involves some form of *rationalism*, it identifies the relevant and reliable “rational” intuitions—for example by their phenomenal properties—and explains why we should be entitled to them as part of our rational nature.

Empiricists, on the other hand, typically don’t believe that we have ways to intuitively know any non-trivial metaphysical facts. Insofar as there are metaphysical truths, they are knowable in principle in the same way as any other empirical truth, by empirical means. Accordingly, for an empiricist, intuitions aren’t very likely to be evidence for extra-linguistic subject matter. At best, they might be educated hunches (cf. Lutz) which might provide us with plausible initial hypotheses about a certain subject matter. However, as soon as they are exhausted as a source for initial hypotheses, controlled empirical observation should replace intuitions in the process of inquiry:

[W]hat we ought to be doing is not just consulting the beliefs we already have, but more directly examining the external phenomena; only then would appeals to intuition be given what, on my view, is their proper weight. Thus, appeals to intuition early on in philosophical investigation should give way to more straightforwardly empirical investigation of external phenomena. (Kornblith 2002, 15)

The second conception, on the other hand, seems to be able to accommodate the central methodological role of intuitions in philosophy in a much easier way, that also seems *prima facie* acceptable to an empiricist. Perhaps we don’t have reliable intuitions about extra-mental subject matter, but it doesn’t seem absurd to think that we could have reliable intuitions about mental subject matter, e.g. about what we mean by the words we use. Thus on the second approach it seems that—given the alternative subject matter that philosophy investigates—we are put in a much better epistemic position with respect to that subject matter, such that it might be a lot easier to argue for the evidential weight of our intuitions in philosophical investigations.

Moreover, one might think that what, e.g. ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, and ‘consciousness’ mean depends at least in part on the dispositions of competent speakers to apply these terms to actual and counterfactual cases. And it is these dispositions that are also known as “intuitions” in philosophical methodology. On this latter conception, intuitions are not merely evidence, but in fact *constitutive* of the relevant truths philosophy is investigating. In their contribution, Jonathan Weinberg and Stephen Crowley label such a view *constitutivism*:

On this account what one of our terms means is not, in general, something that can come totally unstuck from our use of that term, and as such, how we would apply or withhold the term across a range of

hypothetical cases may be better viewed not as *claims* about how the term might apply in those situations, but as *constraints* on any account of that term's meaning.

On this conception intuitions seem to be infallible, or, in the words of Weinberg and Crowley, “it is hard to miss, when you first wait to see where the dart goes and then draw a bullseye around it”. But this second conception is also confronted with various methodological difficulties. A first difficulty, that is also discussed by Weinberg and Crowley, is the case of divergent intuitions. As we discussed already, it is in any case conceivable, and perhaps even actually the case that different subgroups of a linguistic community differ in their intuitive judgments about how to apply a term to an actual or counterfactual case. What should constitutivism say about such cases? One way to accommodate divergent intuitions could be to endorse some sort of relativism about the relevant philosophical truths, another would be to consider the intuitions of one subgroup of the language community to be more interesting or relevant for philosophy than the others. For example, we might think that we are interested in what, say, ‘free will’ means, because *we philosophers* seem to have a prima facie difficulty to reconcile *our* idea of free will with belief in a deterministic universe. Thus, conceptual analyses are interesting, because the concepts we are trying to analyze lead to a philosophical problem. In so far as we are trying to solve that problem by means of conceptual analysis, it seems we should privilege our (the philosophers’) intuitions about the relevant terms and concepts over the intuitions of others, because it was us philosophers who had the problem in the first place. An analysis of the concept of other groups of the language community doesn't seem relevant for solving the philosophical problem that the conceptual analysis was sought for in the first place.

But even if that problem could be solved, constitutivism would still face the further problem that we don't, in philosophical practice, consider *all* intuitions infallible. Even if our intuitive judgments are expressions of our linguistic competence, we should make at least a distinction between *competence* and *performance* and treat our conceptual intuitions the way that linguistic intuitions get treated in the Chomskian program. Two varieties of “loose” constitutivism that could accommodate performance errors as well as diverging intuitions are discussed in Jonathan Weinberg's and Stephen Crowley's contribution to this volume. As they argue, both of these accounts face difficulties that make it unlikely that we can tell from the armchair which intuitions to trust. Thus, in any case, as also Talbot argues in his paper, we will need to start with a psychologically informed theory of intuitions even if we are “merely” interested in conceptual analysis rather than “the things in themselves”.

But there are further reasons to doubt that the conceptual analysis conception is as unproblematic as it *prima facie* seems. We said above that a lot of its primary appeal stems from the fact that it has some similarity to the Chomskian project of reconstructing the tacit knowledge of grammatical rules via investigating the grammaticality intuitions of competent speakers. However, Michael Devitt (2006) has forcefully argued that the Chomskian appeal to intuitions is already mistaken. According to Devitt, linguistic intuitions aren't directly linked to the language faculty, and thus immediate products of our tacit knowledge of grammatical rules, but are instead "empirical theory-laden fairly immediate and unreflective central-processor responses to linguistic phenomena" and as such a poor basis for the reconstruction of the *psychologically* reality of speakers. What linguists should instead be investigating is *linguistic* reality, and for that purpose speaker intuitions seem less important—as Devitt argues—than the intuitions of linguists themselves, which are experts for linguistic reality. The contribution by Gergő Somodi discusses Devitt's own conception and his criticism of Chomsky's project. Somodi agrees with Devitt that linguists should be concerned with linguistic reality, but argues that since linguistic reality is continuously changing due to the way that ordinary speakers change their ways of using the language, the intuitions of common folk should be at least as reliable as the intuitions of experts in determining what the current state of linguistic reality is. However, on Somodi's and Devitt's conception of how linguistics should re-consider the methodological role of intuitions with respect to its proper subject matter (linguistic reality as opposed to the psychological reality of speakers), the analogy to the standard internalist conception of conceptual analysis seems to break down.

Above we also took for granted that what, e.g., 'knowledge', 'truth', or 'consciousness' mean is a matter that is ultimately *mental*, and thus intuitively accessible. Externalists about meaning will probably not agree with this assumption. Some hardcore externalists believe that any form of a priori conceptual analysis is impossible, at least when it comes to natural kind concepts. Jussi Haukioja's contribution discusses the arguments of the hardcore externalists and investigates to what extent we might have substantial a priori knowledge about what it is for something to fall under our natural kind concepts. Haukioja argues that we can, merely on the basis of our competence with the relevant concepts, know at least some specification of the reference-fixers of our terms. Thus, some (still sufficiently substantial) form of conceptual analysis is compatible with the fundamental insights of externalism.

Most philosophers in the contemporary debate seem to believe that this second conception, reconstructive conceptual analysis, is the only form of

linguistic philosophy. As Sebastian Lutz emphasizes in his contribution, this overlooks at least one other traditional conception of analytic philosophy, the ideal language conception. On this conception it is not surprising that ordinary language allows for different and unstable intuitions about the application conditions of our terms. That is why philosophy should develop a new, regimented, ideal language. Intuitions of ordinary speakers play only a starting point in this process, helping us to identify the “explicandum”, these aspects of our ordinary concept that we wish to preserve in the regimented concept. As Lutz argues, the old and almost forgotten debate between ordinary and ideal linguistic philosophy gets new input from the results of experimental philosophy, which might be especially important in light of the recent re-evaluation of the philosophy of logical positivism.

On the ideal language conception, the current philosophical methodology might be overemphasizing intuitions. Similarly, Jonathan Ichikawa argues that many are exaggerating the importance of explaining away recalcitrant intuitions. Why, he asks, should philosophers be under any obligation to provide explanations of certain mental happenings—intuitions—when scientists are under no parallel obligation to explain why some people hold beliefs incompatible with the scientists’ theories? Ichikawa emphasises that explaining away intuitions is an enterprise that belongs to psychology, a field in which philosophers are not generally experts.

One possible rejoinder might be to insist that in philosophy, intuitions are used as evidence, perhaps even the only evidence, whereas scientific theories are justified independently of people’s beliefs. To wilfully neglect conflicting evidence without offering an explanation of why the offending intuitions exist exposes the philosopher to accusations of, if not narcissism (cf. the quote from Machery et al. in section 2.1 above), at least chauvinism. But of course, this just highlights the question whether intuitions are evidence, or whether appeals to intuitions are rather rhetorical appeals to consensus.

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