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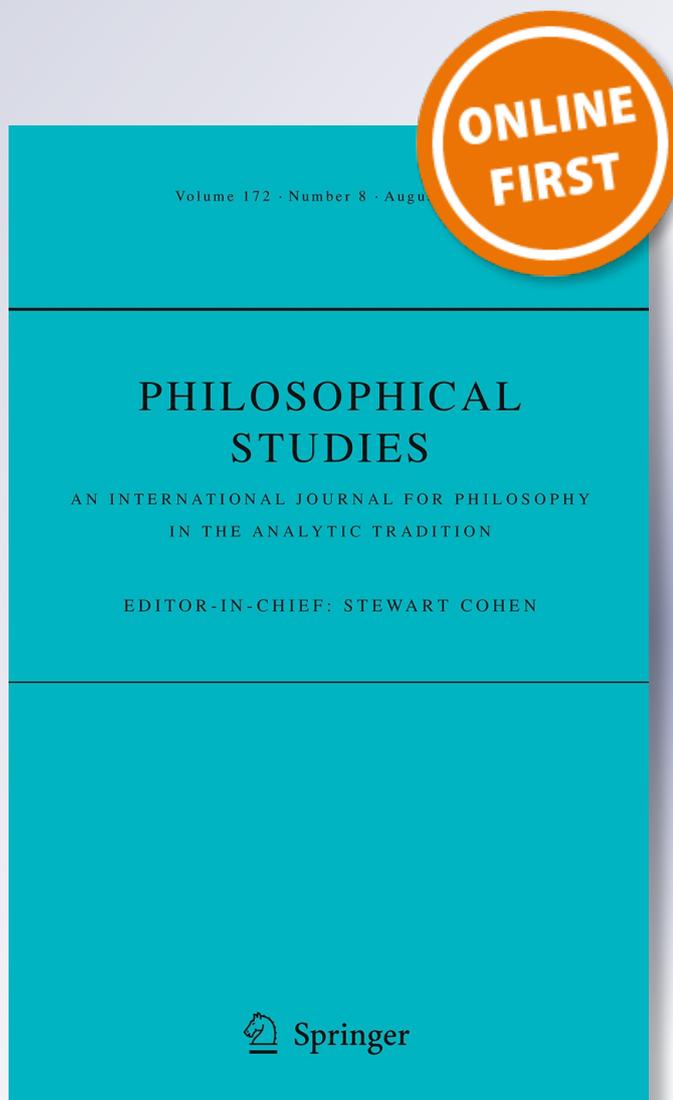
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The intuition deniers

Jennifer Nado¹

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Abstract ‘Intuition deniers’ are those who—like Timothy Williamson, Max Deutsch, Herman Cappelen and a few others—reject the claim that philosophers centrally rely on intuitions as evidence. This ‘Centrality’ hypothesis, as Cappelen (2012, *Philosophy without intuitions*. Oxford University Press, Oxford) terms it, is standardly endorsed both by traditionalists and by experimental philosophers. Yet the intuition deniers claim that Centrality is false—and they generally also suggest that this undermines the significance of experimental philosophy. Three primary types of anti-Centrality argument have cross-cut the literature thus far. These arguments, I’ll claim, have differing potential consequences on metaphilosophical debate. The first sort of argument centers on worries about the term ‘intuition’—for instance, worries about whether it has clear application, or whether anything actually falls under it. Call this the Argument from Unclear Application. The second argument type involves the claim that evidence in philosophy consists not of facts (or propositions or what have you) about intuitions, but of facts about e.g. knowledge and causation. Call this the Argument from Antipsychologism. The third type involves an attempt to demonstrate that philosophers support their claims not via bald appeal to intuition, but via argumentation. Call this the Argument from Argumentation. Although these three arguments have merit, none of them undermines the importance of experimental philosophy. Nonetheless, they do have significant consequences for the methodological debates that dominate metaphilosophy, and for experimental philosophy in particular.

Keywords Experimental philosophy · Intuition · Centrality · Metaphilosophy

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1 Introduction

The emerging field of meta-philosophy has been, thus far, overwhelmingly focused on evaluations of the nature and evidential status of intuition. On the one side, intuition critics aim to convince us that intuition is epistemologically worthless, or at least in dire straits; on the other, intuition supporters valiantly defend the standard methodological doctrine that appeal to intuition is an acceptable and even necessary tool for uncovering philosophical truth. Meanwhile, however, a few contrary souls have opted for a third response to the intuition question. Timothy Williamson, Max Deutsch, and Herman Cappelen and a few others¹ have rejected the debate outright, on the grounds that philosophers generally don't employ intuitions as evidence in the first place—according to these philosophers, the bulk of the meta-philosophical literature is methodologically irrelevant. Call these the 'intuition deniers'.

I think there's much to be said for the basic view the intuition deniers have articulated. Yet, the view is frequently also accompanied by a disdain for a primary catalyst of recent meta-philosophical debate—experimental philosophy. Herman Cappelen goes so far as to label experimental philosophy a 'big mistake' (Cappelen 2012).² Experimental philosophers, unsurprisingly, have been unfazed. Responses thus far have largely either rejected the deniers' arguments, or have argued that their thesis fails to significantly impact the debates experimental philosophy engages in. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere in the middle—or so I'll attempt to argue. Experimental philosophy is not a 'big mistake'; on the contrary, if the intuition deniers are on the right track then experimental philosophers will have more to contribute, not less. But the rejection of an intuition-centered conception of philosophy does have significant consequences for the methodological debates that dominate meta-philosophy, and for experimental philosophy in particular.

2 The argument from unclear application: What is an intuition?

Intuition deniers share a commitment to rejecting the claim that philosophers centrally rely on intuitions as evidence. Following Cappelen (2012), I'll refer to this claim as the "Centrality" hypothesis. The Centrality hypothesis is, at least according to Cappelen, endorsed by nearly all philosophers on both sides of the debate—that is, both by traditionalists and by experimental philosophers. This is, it's claimed, much to the detriment of current metaphilosophical discussions.

It seems to me that we can identify three primary types of anti-Centrality argument which have cross-cut the literature thus far. These arguments, I'll claim, have differing potential consequences on metaphilosophical debate, and are therefore worth considering separately. The first sort of argument centers on worries about the term 'intuition'—for instance, worries about whether it has clear

¹ See also Earlenbaugh and Molyneux (2009), Ichikawa and Jarvis (2013), Molyneux (2014). I will concentrate here on the arguments in Cappelen (2012), Deutsch (2009, 2010) and Williamson (2007).

² Experimental philosophy has since been upgraded to an 'enormous mistake' (Cappelen 2014a).

application, or whether anything actually falls under it. Call this the Argument from Unclear Application. The second argument type involves the claim that evidence in philosophy consists not of facts (or propositions or what have you) about intuitions, but of facts about e.g. knowledge and causation. Call this the Argument from Antipsychologism. The third type involves an attempt to demonstrate that philosophers support their claims not via bald appeal to intuition, but via argumentation. Call this the Argument from Argumentation. In this section, we'll consider the Argument from Unclear Application; the following sections will cover the other two.

Doubts about the very concept of intuition are rather easy to sympathize with—one merely needs to consider the bewildering variety of attempts to define it. For some, an intuition is a *sui generis* propositional attitude with a distinctive phenomenology; for others it is an inclination to assent to a proposition on the basis of understanding or competence; for yet others it is an empirical and theory laden judgment which occurs in the absence of conscious reflection (see for instance Bealer 1998; Sosa 1998; Devitt 2006). These examples could be greatly multiplied. It's difficult to isolate a single feature of intuition that elicits unanimous agreement—some philosophers deny that intuition has a special phenomenology, some deny that the justification it generates is *a priori*, and some even deny that it is immediate or unreflective.

Williamson (2007) notes that many claims that philosophers label 'intuitive' are straightforwardly empirical, sometimes even straightforwardly perceptual. The term 'intuition', he claims, can apparently be applied to nearly any kind of judgment—Williamson argues that states we're willing to term 'intuitions' need not be *a priori*, need not have special phenomenology, need not even be non-inferential. He concludes that "philosophers might be better off not using the word 'intuition' and its cognates. Their main current function is not to answer questions about the nature of the evidence but to fudge them, by appearing to provide answers without really doing so" (Williamson 2007, 220). This observation is pushed further by Williamson's account of the epistemology of thought experiments, which emphasizes the similarity between thought experimentation and other sorts of cognition. When we consider a thought experiment, our judgment is not properly explained by the simple operation of some distinctively philosophical capacity of 'intuition'. When we come to judge that the protagonist in the Gettier case lacks knowledge, for instance, we are employing numerous mental processes, including such commonplace capacities as our general ability to evaluate counterfactuals and to apply concepts.³ There is no 'intuitive faculty'—and if there is any definite sense at all to be given to the term 'intuition', it covers a class of mental states that is so broad as to be of essentially no methodological use. If one criticizes the epistemological worth of 'intuition', then, one's arguments will inevitably generalize to everyday judgment as well—for the processes underlying our 'intuitions' are ubiquitous in ordinary cognition. One thus becomes, in Williamson's terms, a 'judgment skeptic'.

³ See Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009) for defense of a similar view based not on our ability to evaluate counterfactuals but on our ability to understand truth in fiction.

Cappelen (2012) expresses similar worries. Uses of terms like ‘intuition’, ‘intuitive’, or ‘intuitively’ in ordinary English, Cappelen argues, generally serve as ‘hedges’ to reduce one’s commitment to a given claim, or to indicate that one has not thought carefully about that claim—they do not serve to refer to a particular type of mental state. Some philosophers may use those same terms in a technical sense that departs from the ordinary English usage, but Cappelen argues that any such usage is plausibly defective given the lack of consensus on how ‘intuition’ is to be defined.⁴

Beyond his doubts about the *term* ‘intuition’, Cappelen also appears to have doubts about the very existence of any sort of mental state that has the sorts of features philosophers have taken to be definitive of intuition. Cappelen focuses on several features that have been at least quite commonly ascribed to intuition—a special phenomenology, a ‘rock-bottom’ evidential status, and a grounding in conceptual competence. During his rejection of the ‘Argument from Philosophical Practice’—that is, the argument that Centrality can be supported by looking at actual practice rather than the use of the word ‘intuition’—Cappelen examines a number of well-known thought experiments and argues that none of them exhibit appeal to any state possessing those key features. Of course, perhaps there are states with these features and philosophers simply do not use them. But one suspects Cappelen has doubts on that broader question as well.⁵

One might well question Cappelen’s choice of key features here (see e.g. Chalmers 2014; Weatherson 2014; Weinberg 2014). More generally, one might argue that doubts about the concept of an intuition need not undermine the importance of the experimental philosophy research program. After all, couldn’t experimental philosophers simply recast their claims in terms of philosophical *judgments*, or even some other less controversial category like ‘system 1’ reasoning? Another way to see the point. Plato spent a good deal of philosophical papyrus on attempts to uncover the nature of Forms. The majority of contemporary philosophers believe that there are no such things as Forms. Should we therefore conclude that Plato’s research project was bankrupt? Certainly not—he was perhaps mistaken about what he was doing in his attempts to, say, discover the essence of the Form of Justice, but that doesn’t moot the importance of the *Republic*. In other words, it’s fairly reasonable to assume that the basic experimental philosophy approach still has value, even if experimental philosophers must now re-describe their target.⁶

⁴ See Bengson (2014) for more on this argument.

⁵ Interestingly, Deutsch does not have this sort of doubt about the concept of an intuition. As will be discussed in a later section, he freely admits that intuition is the causal source of our belief that Gettier’s cases are not cases of knowledge.

⁶ As an anonymous reviewer points out, not all research programs survive once we have reason to believe their target does not exist—phlogiston theory, for instance. There are complicated questions that we might ask about the conditions under which a research project can survive after certain of its presuppositions have been proven false. Yet even if ‘experimental philosophy’ were intrinsically bound up with the notion of an intuition, one might argue that a ‘successor’ project involving largely the same methods and aims could take its place (perhaps simply targeting ‘philosophical cognition’). If such a move were plausible (see the next section) it would, it seems to me, still count as a win for the experimentalists rather than for Cappelen.

Cappelen has recently (Cappelen 2014b) responded to this tactic. He discusses several potential replacement strategies for eliminating problematic uses of ‘intuition’, and argues that none of them will successfully motivate the experimental philosophy enterprise. Mere replacement with ‘philosophical judgments’ would obviously leave experimental philosophers with too broad a target—even putting aside the problem of defining the philosophical, Cappelen notes how absurd it would be to conduct surveys to determine what the folk tend to judge about e.g. monadic truth. One might attempt to restrict the relevant judgments to those which occur in the absence of reasoning or reflection; however, Cappelen notes that the case studies he examines in *Philosophy Without Intuitions* indicate that philosophers don’t centrally rely on such states in the first place. Those case studies invoke the Argument from Antipsychologism and the Argument from Argumentation; we will return to them in a later section. In other respects, much of Cappelen’s response here resembles Williamson’s—namely, he challenges experimental philosophers to offer up a characterization their target that isn’t overbroad or otherwise implausible.

An obvious question is looming. Why should experimental philosophers feel compelled to offer up an analysis of their subject matter in the first place? Traditional philosophers certainly don’t feel compelled to do so; it’s not as though there are any compelling definitions of the subject matter of philosophy on offer. Heck, there aren’t really any compelling definitions of much of anything on offer. The only apparent reason why experimental philosophers should have any particularly exceptional requirements here seems to be tied to their conclusions: many experimental philosophers aim to convince us that intuition is epistemically bankrupt, and therefore they must characterize intuition in order to properly delineate the class of mental states they aim to convince us to reject.

Or so goes the caricature, anyway. In actual fact, many experimental philosophers have been fairly circumspect in the conclusions they draw from their data. They often don’t draw conclusions about intuition generally. They draw conclusions about, say, intuitive judgments about reference: the primary conclusion of Machery et al. (2004), for example, is that “the evidence suggests that it is wrong for philosophers to assume a priori the universality of their own semantic intuitions” (Machery et al. 2004, B8). Of course, this isn’t always the case—Alexander and Weinberg write that

“proponents of the restrictionist view argue that empirical research into the nature of intuitions generated in response to thought-experiments, rather than supporting the use of intuitions as evidence, challenges the suitability of intuitions to function in any evidentiary role” (Alexander and Weinberg 2007, 62–63).

But there are good reasons to resist this broader sort of claim, even putting aside Williamson’s and Cappelen’s arguments.

I think most experimental philosophers would, on reflection, agree that the actual psychological processes that underlie the sorts of judgments we call ‘intuitive’ are plausibly quite diverse. There’s likely little in common, at the psychological level,

between (say) moral judgment and logical reasoning.⁷ Note that this restricts the sorts of conclusions one ought to draw from experimental findings. There are several studies indicating that moral judgments are heightened when the subject feels disgust (see e.g. Haidt et al. 1993; Wheatley and Haidt 2005; Schnall et al. 2008); it would be wildly implausible to argue, on that basis alone, that logical judgments will exhibit a similar sensitivity. Of course, they *might*; but given the plausible dissimilarity between the processes underlying these two classes of judgment, they very clearly might not.

It's equally implausible to infer from such studies that *intuition* (in general) is influenced by feelings of disgust. There is, then, a take-home message for experimental philosophers here: don't draw conclusions about 'intuition' as a whole on the basis of studies of e.g. moral judgment. In fact, don't even draw conclusions about moral judgment—as Cappelen would surely note, one might come to a moral judgment by explicit reasoning. The finding that certain moral judgments are influenced by emotional state should cause us concern only about other judgments that are produced by similar psychological processes—and we may not initially be certain exactly which judgments those will turn out to be. As to whether that sort of conclusion will have consequences for philosophy: it will depend on whether philosophers make use of the relevant class of judgments. In other words, it will depend at least in part on the success of the remaining two arguments against Centrality.

So it seems to me that the experimentalist can legitimately decline to characterize her project via some delineation of the boundaries of 'intuition'—the Argument from Unclear Application thus loses much of its force. Unfortunately, however, there does remain a residual worry that arises from Williamson's version of the argument. Recall Williamson's claim: without a clear way to isolate 'philosophical intuitions' from e.g. ordinary concept application, criticisms of intuition (such as those made by experimental philosophers) threaten to generalize to a broad swath of everyday cognition. Merely distinguishing between moral and logical cognition doesn't really avoid this issue. Suppose an experimental philosopher were to appeal to a given study to draw a circumscribed skeptical conclusion only about, say, judgments of knowledge attribution that proceed via the same psychological processes as the judgments examined in the study. As Williamson notes, we attribute knowledge all the time in ordinary life; it is plausible that many of those attribution judgments will invoke the same sorts of psychological processes as the examined judgments. The experimental philosopher, then, still appears to risk rejecting all sorts of judgments that most would treat as clear cases of knowledge—she would, for instance, plausibly have to claim that I am unjustified in judging that my spouse knows where we keep the spare apartment key. That's still a remarkably skeptical stance to take.

There are, I think, moves to be made here—although space permits only cursory suggestions of the directions those moves might take. Weinberg (2007) has discussed this sort of skepticism problem, suggesting that experimental philosophers

⁷ For some empirical support for the claim that intuition is heterogeneous, see Nado (2014).

focus their criticisms not on the *state* ‘intuition’, but on a particular type of *activity*—‘philosophers’ appeals to intuition’. By focusing on how intuition is *used* rather than the merits of intuition itself, Weinberg claims that we can criticize philosophical methods while accepting that intuition is reasonably reliable, capable of producing justified belief, and so on. We can thus say that everyday uses of intuition are perfectly acceptable; Weinberg explicitly excludes ordinary categorization judgments on the grounds that “by and large they are in fact hopeful...[they] usually possess a great deal of external corroboration and internal coherence, for example” (Weinberg 2007, 335).

I think this move has promise, but it needs a little tweaking. Weinberg’s stated strategy is to focus on practices, rather than the features of intuition itself. This strategy has the *potential* to avoid the difficulty Williamson raises—rather than attempting to find some distinguishing feature between ‘ordinary’ intuition and ‘philosophical’ intuition (which may be impossible), we appeal to a feature that distinguishes ordinary epistemic practices from philosophers’ epistemic practices. Unfortunately, philosophers’ methods of using intuitions are in fact probably much *more stringent* than the practices surrounding everyday uses of intuition. We philosophers are likely to check our intuitions with our peers, to reflect deeply on those intuitions, and so forth. None of those practices standardly occur in everyday concept application. Thus, Weinberg’s claim that ordinary categorization judgments possess greater external corroboration and internal coherence cannot plausibly be an appeal to the superiority of everyday *practices*; instead he simply seems to appeal to some intrinsic difference between ordinary and philosophical intuitions. But then we have no longer answered Williamson’s complaint that there *is* no clear line between ‘ordinary’ and ‘philosophical’ intuitions. So we still face a problem—the strategy of focusing on practices rather than intuition’s inherent epistemic features seems promising, but any criticism of philosophers’ practices is likely to apply just as easily to everyday practices.

One might, however, modify this approach. Rather than arguing that ordinary practices are better than philosophical ones, we might argue that the epistemic standards relevant to philosophical activity are simply *much higher* than those relevant to, e.g., everyday concept application—and that criticisms of a philosophical practice therefore don’t automatically apply to analogous ordinary practice.⁸ Scientists, for instance, plausibly hold abnormally elevated standards for admissible evidence: as an example, if an experimental finding has not been shown to possess a *p* value of .05 or lower, scientists generally do not treat it as evidence. But surely, the suggestion that this practice is appropriate does not threaten to generalize to skepticism—one is not thereby suggesting that statistical analyses ought to be run before, say, one draws a generalization about the tendency of the 10:46 train to run a few minutes late. It’s reasonably plausible that something similar can be said of philosophical practice. Of course, the case for higher standards would have to be

⁸ One could interpret this as a contextualist claim—what counts as ‘knowing’ shifts in philosophical contexts. In fact, I think it’s more plausible to claim that philosophy simply aims at an epistemic state that is higher than knowledge; we might call it knowledge*. For current purposes it makes little difference—the present aim is just to hint at possible routes for avoiding the skeptical conclusion.

argued, and the details of those standards would have to be articulated (do all appeals to intuition in philosophy have to meet a higher standard? Only some?).⁹ This is one way, then, where arguments against Centrality do show that there is further work to be done in articulating experimental philosophy's argumentative strategy—but it is certainly not obvious that Williamson's points doom the project.

3 The Argument from Antipsychologism: Intuitions, or propositions?

Let's turn to our second argument, which I have called the Argument from Antipsychologism. Recall that we characterized Centrality as follows: philosophers centrally rely on intuitions as evidence. The notion of relying on something as evidence, however, takes a fair bit of unpacking. Do we mean to claim that intuitions in fact *are* evidence? This would be denied by many experimental philosophers, despite claims by Cappelen and Deutsch that experimental philosophers endorse Centrality. Do we instead mean to claim that philosophers *believe* intuitions to be evidence? If this is what is intended, it is difficult to see how experimental philosophy would be undermined by its falsity. After all, philosophers may be mistaken about what they do (Cappelen even explicitly claims as much). They may *believe* their views to be fully free of reliance on intuition; but appeal to intuition may nonetheless form a substantive part of their argumentation.

Neither of these, then, is a particularly interesting reading of the Centrality hypothesis. The sense we give to 'rely on intuitions as evidence' must be one that is compatible with intuitions in fact failing to be evidence, and that goes beyond a claim about philosophers' beliefs to suggest something about the actual *practices* philosophers employ. There are several possible interpretations that fit this criterion. Here is one: philosophers make use of claims about intuitions as premises in their arguments, either explicitly or implicitly. Consider, for example, the following as a reconstruction of Gettier's argument against the justified true belief account of knowledge:

1. It is intuitive that Smith (the protagonist of Gettier's examples) has a justified true belief that is not knowledge.
2. Smith has a justified true belief that is not knowledge.
3. It is possible for an agent to possess justified true belief that is not knowledge.
4. The JTB account of knowledge is false.

On this way of parsing Gettier's argument, Gettier makes use of a claim about intuitions as evidence in support of his conclusion. Premise 1 states the crucial 'intuition-fact'; this premise is used as evidence in support of premise 2, which is then used to undermine the JTB account. One interpretation of the Centrality

⁹ In previous work Nado (2015) I argued not that philosophical activity employs higher epistemic standards than ordinary activity, but that it is more 'epistemically demanding'—that one needs a more reliable data source to meet the goals of philosophy than one needs to meet the goals of everyday inquiry. See also Alexander and Weinberg (2014) for a similar view. I now think that both theses are true, and that the greater epistemic demandingness is in part what necessitates the use of higher epistemic standards.

hypothesis, then, might be that philosophical arguments generally proceed more or less in this way—that is, they make use of intuition-facts as premises.

Deutsch (2009, 2010) attributes this sort of view of philosophical argumentation to experimental philosophers (and to many other philosophers besides), and claims that it badly misconstrues the actual structure of such arguments. There's no reason to believe, Deutsch claims, that Gettier's argument relies on such an appeal to intuition. The word 'intuition' is nowhere mentioned in Gettier's article; it seems much more plausible to interpret Gettier as appealing directly to the fact that Smith does not know. On Deutsch's interpretation, Gettier does not use intuition as evidence for this claim—and it's a good thing he does not, for Deutsch notes that facts about what is or is not intuitive to some person or group are completely irrelevant to Gettier's ultimate conclusion. Gettier's topic is the nature of knowledge. Psychological facts about intuitions are neither here nor there; what matters is not whether Gettier's counterexamples are intuitive, but whether they are genuine counterexamples. This is what I refer to as the Argument from Antipsychologism.

Williamson (2007) presses a similar argument, criticizing the tendency of philosophers to 'psychologize' their evidence. Our evidence, Williamson urges, does not consist solely of psychological facts about our own beliefs or intuitions—our evidence includes the fact that Smith does not know. If our interlocutor disagrees about Smith's epistemic state, we might feel pressed to retreat to a less contentious proposition which merely reports the occurrence of an intuition that Smith does not know. But Williamson claims that it's hard to see how to get from such a psychological premise to a conclusion about the nature of knowledge. This psychologization of the evidence should, therefore, be resisted. Again, the relevant conception of 'Centrality' seems to be one according to which intuition-facts serve as premises.

Finally, we might read parts of Cappelen (2012) as urging something like this complaint, though somewhat less explicitly. Much of that book is devoted to debunking the 'argument from philosophical practice'—that is, the argument that an analysis of philosophical practice will provide us with evidence in favor of the Centrality hypothesis. Cappelen examines several well-known thought experiments in order to demonstrate that no appeal to intuition is made during the course of the argument. Instead, Cappelen claims, philosophers directly appeal to non-intuition facts.

Note that although Williamson's, Deutsch's, and Cappelen's arguments resemble one another, on closer inspection they differ in aim. Williamson's claim is that we *ought* not to conceive of our evidence as consisting of intuition-facts; but he admits that many philosophers in fact do conceive of their evidence in this way. Deutsch, meanwhile, wants to argue that philosophers do not conceive of their evidence as consisting of intuition-facts. And Cappelen, when comparing Williamson's views on 'psychologization' to his own, notes that his case studies provide "no evidence that judgments about cases rely on appeals to the writers' psychological states... [w]e typically do exactly what Williamson says we *should* do" (Cappelen 2012, 204). In other words, Williamson claims that philosophers treat their evidence as consisting of intuitions (though they are mistaken); Cappelen and Deutsch agree that

psychologization is a mistake, but deny that philosophers tend to commit it. One argument aims at showing what our evidence is; the other has to do with philosophers' beliefs about their evidence.

There are, therefore, two somewhat different threads running through these arguments. The first is the observation that philosophers often do not explicitly appeal to intuition in the course of their arguments—instead, they appeal directly to facts about knowledge, about morality, and so forth. The second is the observation that the link between intuition-facts and, say, epistemological facts is not obvious—and that we ought, therefore, to treat the epistemological facts as evidence in their own right.

The second of these observations, far from undermining the motivations of experimental philosophy, in fact supports the basic criticisms of intuition that many experimental philosophers have urged. It tells against the claim that intuitions *are* evidence, rather than the claim that philosophers *use* intuitions as evidence. We have, however, already ruled this out as the relevant reading of the Centrality hypothesis. Let's concentrate, then, on the first thread of the argument. Would showing that philosophers do not use intuition-facts as premises in their arguments suffice to show that philosophers do not use intuitions as evidence? Well, that depends, again, on the particulars of the interpretation we give to the Centrality hypothesis. To start, it depends on how we construe the nature of evidence.

Williamson's view on evidence is well-known—he takes our evidence to consist of all and only the propositions we know. This, of course, places a crucial restriction on what can count as evidence—our evidence, for Williamson, must be *propositional*. As for Deutsch, though he does not offer an explicit theory of evidence, he consistently speaks of evidence in terms of premises from which one infers a desired conclusion. Again, given that the idea seems to be that to treat something as evidence is to appeal to it as a premise in an argument, the conception of evidence seems to be propositional. Cappelen, meanwhile, claims that he wishes to be neutral between accounts of evidence.

Suppose we were to follow Williamson and Deutsch in taking evidence to be propositional. On a very literal reading of 'philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence', then, that hypothesis immediately becomes a complete non-starter. On a propositional view, it's *obvious* that intuitions cannot be used as evidence—intuitions are mental states, not propositions. A fan of a non-propositional view of evidence might, therefore, get off the boat right here—she might object to the argument on the grounds that the intuition deniers establish their conclusion only by assuming their favored view of evidence.

I myself have no real horse in the race with regard to the question of which conception of evidence is appropriate for metaphilosophical discussions. However, Williamson's arguments for in favor of taking evidence to be propositional do strike me as *prima facie* fairly compelling (see e.g. Williamson 1997, 2000). Suppose, then, that we grant the propositional view of evidence for current purposes. There's still plenty of room to question the notion of 'relying on as evidence' being appealed to here.

If the hypothesis that philosophers use intuitions as evidence is to have any plausibility at all on a propositional view of evidence, obviously we must interpret it

as claiming that philosophers use certain propositions *associated with* intuitions as evidence. Deutsch and Williamson have characterized the relevant propositions as those that express intuition-facts—that is, propositions of the form “I intuit that p” or “p is intuitive”. But there’s another obvious possibility—the relevant propositions could simply be ones expressing the content of the intuition. In other words, the relevant hypothesis might be that philosophers use *intuited propositions* as evidence.¹⁰

And surely, many philosophers conceive of intuitional evidence in exactly this way. As Jessica Brown and Jonathan Ichikawa have both pointed out (Brown 2011, Ichikawa 2014), George Bealer is explicit on this point—“when I say that intuitions are used as evidence, I of course mean that the contents of the intuitions count as evidence” (Bealer 1998, 205). If the hypothesis is taken this way, there is no conflict between the claim that Gettier used an intuition as evidence and the claim that Gettier’s primary evidence was *that Smith does not know*—so long as that proposition is, indeed, intuited.

But of course, the mere claim that philosophers use intuited propositions as evidence is fairly weak; it might be the case that intuited propositions are used as evidence but not *because* they are intuited. An intuited proposition might have evidential status for reasons that have nothing to do with intuition; the commutativity of addition is intuitive, but it is also provable from the Peano axioms—and its evidential status might be due to this latter fact. Here is a more interesting question: do philosophers treat the relevant propositions as evidence *because they are intuited*? Note that this need not imply that the philosophers explicitly hold beliefs about intuition; a child with no notion of intuition might nonetheless hold a moral belief *because* she intuited it.¹¹ The most natural way to put this, I think, is as a question of whether philosophers rely on intuition as a *source of evidence*.

Note that issues of ‘psychologization’ immediately become irrelevant when the Centrality thesis is conceived of in this way. Few would deny that we rely on perception as a *source* of evidence on a daily basis. Does this admission ‘psychologize’ our evidence? Surely not—the evidence consists of external-world facts such as ‘it is sunny today’ and ‘we are out of milk’, and the source of that evidence is a certain mental state. This is not to suggest that I take Williamson to be confused about such matters. His target is a certain conception of philosophical evidence, and against that conception his arguments are persuasive. The rejection of that conception of evidence, however, has little bearing on the validity of the experimental philosophy enterprise. Quite clearly, empirical studies of the psychological processes underlying perception are relevant to an assessment of

¹⁰ This point has also been made by Ichikawa (2014); he also distinguishes, as I do below, between the claim that philosophers use intuited propositions as evidence and the claim that they use intuited propositions as evidence *because those propositions are intuited*. However, while I believe that philosophers frequently *do* use intuited propositions as evidence because they are intuited, Ichikawa disagrees.

¹¹ For the moment the interpretation of ‘because’ will be left open; one might interpret it in a purely causal fashion or in the sense of ‘having a reason’. Section 3 will return to the question of whether a purely causal interpretation suffices to defend the project of experimental philosophy.

our evidential resources. A scientist's evidence might consist of the fact that the litmus strip turned blue, rather than facts about her own perceptual experiences. But nonetheless, facts about e.g. the effect of lighting on color perception are clearly relevant to an assessment of the scientist's conclusions—they might undermine her claims to possess evidence.

But is it perhaps wrong to assume that philosophers use intuition even as a *source* of evidence? Cappelen, after all, mentions the 'source of evidence' view as a possible interpretation of Centrality, and he clearly intends his arguments to undermine that interpretation, as well. As noted earlier, Cappelen points out that when terms like 'intuitive' or 'intuitively' appear, they are typically used to 'hedge' a claim or to flag it as being in the 'common ground'. And we've seen that Deutsch points out that Gettier never once uses the term 'intuition'. It seems, then, that actual philosophical texts show little by way of explicit acknowledgement of any sort of reliance on intuition whatsoever.

However, if we adopt the 'source of evidence' interpretation of Centrality, I doubt that such observations provide much insight. I suppose it is arguable that we expect authors to explicitly mention each of the *premises* upon which their argument rests (at least when those premises are not obvious). But we certainly do not expect that one will always mention the *source* of each piece of evidence one employs. I might easily, for instance, argue from the fact that the sky is cloudy to the conclusion that it will rain today without mentioning that my reason for holding my premise comes from visual observation. This may be because the source is obvious; but it need not be so. Sometimes the opposite may even be true—I may simply not know the source of my evidence (perhaps I have forgotten).

Cappelen mentions this exact issue, and thus also argues against the existence of less direct evidence for reliance on intuition—namely, evidence of appeal to certain 'diagnostic features' for intuitiveness such as special 'intellectual seeming' phenomenology or 'rock-bottom' epistemic status. But in doing so, he similarly relies on philosophers' written reports—apparently expecting that a philosopher who uses intuitions as (a source of) evidence will explicitly mention e.g. special phenomenology—that they will “say things like, ‘Note that the judgment that *p* is accompanied by the special and important phenomenology’” (Cappelen 2012, 118). While he notes that this isn't the only possible evidence for reliance on special phenomenology, in practice Cappelen places heavy weight on the absence of explicit textual appeal to the 'special features' he identifies.¹²

I fail to see how this is any more plausible, however, than the expectation that philosophers will make direct statements of reliance on intuition. Indeed, it strikes me as much less plausible. When arguing from a visually-justified premise, I *may* in some cases mention that the source of my information is vision—but I will almost certainly *not* mention any particular epistemological features that vision may possess. The following, for instance, would be extraordinarily odd: “It will rain

¹² 'Rock' status is somewhat of an exception here—instead of appeal to explicit mention, Cappelen employs a 'Rough Guide to Rock Detection', according to which the presence of argumentation is evidence of the absence of Rock status. We'll return to this in the section on the Argument from Argumentation.

soon, because the sky is cloudy today. Note that your judgment that the sky is cloudy is accompanied by special and important visual phenomenology". This simply isn't how arguments tend to proceed.

Not only are such statements generally fairly unnecessary, but in addition one may not always be in a position to make such statements in the first place. Explicit awareness of the distinctiveness of vision's phenomenology is not a prerequisite for justified assertion of a perceptually-based claim. Again, it's not even required that one is aware of the source of one's claim; one might simply be confident in one's judgment without reflecting on the reasons why. Alternately, and more plausibly in the case of a philosopher, one might simply be content to ascribe one's judgment to intuition without reflecting on (say) whether it is conceptual competence that makes the relevant mental state a case of intuition. In other words, suppose (almost certainly contrary to fact) that the essential defining feature of intuition is that it is based in conceptual competence; it in no way follows that a philosopher who relies on intuition will recognize this—not even if she *explicitly believes* herself to be relying on intuition, which I take it is not even a prerequisite for *in fact* relying on intuition. It simply seems to me that we can infer exactly nothing from the absence of explicit appeal to features of intuition in philosophical texts.

I have, perhaps, been rather unfair to Cappelen here. Cappelen does not intend his arguments to provide definitive evidence against Centrality—instead, he merely aims to shift the burden of proof. He presents his observations as undermining the only obvious arguments *in favor* of centrality—as he terms them, the 'Argument from Intuition Talk' and the 'Argument from Philosophical Practice'. Yet I have not been terrifically unfair, for if I am correct about the above then the arguments Cappelen targets were never particularly plausible arguments for Centrality to begin with.¹³ It strikes me that the *most* plausible argument for Centrality is one that Cappelen does not explicitly discuss. We might call this the 'Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options'. The argument consists of the simple observation that, in many cases, there just aren't any obvious extra-intuitive sources for our philosophical beliefs. When I consider the Gettier case, I surely don't have a visual experience upon which I base my subsequent belief that the protagonist of the case fails to know. Nor an auditory experience, nor a memory, nor an introspection, and so forth. I seem to simply know, though I cannot say how. Invoking intuition as the evidential source at least takes a step towards an explanation of how this might be so.¹⁴ Something like this argument seems to lie behind replies to Cappelen that characterize intuition in what Weinberg and Alexander call a 'thin' sense (e.g. Chalmers 2014, Weinberg 2014, Weinberg and Alexander 2014).¹⁵ My impression

¹³ Further, Cappelen does *explicitly* claim that absence of the features he discusses is evidence for absence of reliance on intuition; and that his case studies show that there is no reliance on those features (see Cappelen 2012, p. 114). If I'm right about the above, then this is about as plausible as the claim that absence of explicit appeal to the phenomenal features of vision is evidence of an absence of reliance on vision.

¹⁴ Not necessarily a very large step, of course.

¹⁵ Jonathan Ichikawa (2013) also discusses what he calls the "What else?" argument; he does not himself endorse the argument, though he does claim that Cappelen's critique does not suffice to undermine it.

is that it is at least tacitly endorsed by most pro-Centrality philosophers; a great many philosophical propositions have been standardly assumed to be a priori, and intuition is very frequently held (by rationalists, at least) to be the only viable option for explaining how we get at such truths.¹⁶

Now, there's plenty that we might say about the merits of the 'Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options'. For a certain narrow class of cases, it has some plausibility. It is indeed difficult (not to say impossible) to find any other source underlying our belief in *modus ponens*, for instance, or in basic mathematical propositions. But for most areas of philosophical inquiry, the situation is far less clear. As Williamson has noted, some of the propositions philosophers have called 'intuitive' are straightforwardly perceptual. In other cases, there is significant room for debate over the true source—consider, for instance, perceptual models of our knowledge of moral facts (e.g. Audi 2013).

What we can say, however, is that the plausibility of the Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options hinges pretty squarely on whether or not there are other plausible options on offer. In other words, were Cappelen merely to point to the lack of explicit references to intuition without providing an alternate account of how philosophers come to the relevant beliefs, the Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options would imply that the burden of proof is *not* on the proponent of Centrality. Cappelen does, however, offer an alternative picture; as does Deutsch. Roughly, both claim that the relevant beliefs are generally backed up by arguments. This is the Argument from Argumentation.

4 The Argument from Argumentation: Just what are our methods, anyway?

When discussing the implications of their (2004) finding on cross-cultural variation in intuitions about reference, Mallon et al. (2009) characterize theories of reference as being constrained by the 'method of cases':

“The method of cases: The correct theory of reference for a class of terms T is the theory which is best supported by the intuitions competent users of T have about the reference of members of T across actual and possible cases” (Mallon et al. 2009, 338).

Something like this 'best fit' picture seems to be implicit in many philosophers' understandings of their own methodology. And indeed, the picture does make sense of the apparent decisiveness of certain intuitive counterexamples like Gettier's cases. Such a picture quite obviously implies that intuited propositions are treated as

¹⁶ Note that even a critic of intuition can invoke this sort of argument to support Centrality. She might claim that philosophers standardly view intuition as the only way to justify a certain class of philosophical beliefs, and that they therefore standardly accept those beliefs when and only when they are intuitive. Nonetheless (the critic continues), intuition does not justify that class of beliefs and philosophical practice should therefore be revised—either by admitting that the relevant class of beliefs cannot be justified, or by admitting that there are other ways to become justified in holding those beliefs.

evidence (and that they are so treated because they are intuited). In fact, it seems to suggest that one can only deny evidential status to an intuited proposition if it cannot be accommodated within the theory that otherwise provides the best possible fit with intuition.

Further, second-hand synopses of paradigm thought experiments standardly portray them as mere ‘intuition pumps’, in a way that fits quite well with the ‘method of cases’ picture of philosophical inquiry. One considers the scenario described in the thought experiment, and—poof!—an intuition arises. The intuited proposition is then enshrined as part of the set of propositions for which theory must provide a ‘best fit’, potentially leaving the corpse of an otherwise promising theory in its wake.

On the picture given above, though reasoning may occur in the process of constructing a theory to fit the data, it does not occur during the actual experimentation (or ‘data gathering’). Deutsch and Cappelen, however, both offer alternative pictures of philosophers’ use of thought experiments, emphasizing the role of argumentation and minimizing the role of brute intuition-mongering. Though I think they are right to question the method of cases model, the alternative pictures they offer don’t eliminate the need for intuition; and they don’t eliminate the need for experimental philosophy, either.

Cappelen denies that we can give a general ‘theory’ of thought experiments. He notes, rightly, that different cases operate in different ways. For the purposes of a defense of experimental philosophy, however, it suffices that some non-negligible proportion of thought experiments rely in some non-negligible way on intuitive judgments.¹⁷ I’ll focus here on a single case where I find Cappelen’s proposed characterization to be problematic: Lehrer’s Truetemp case.

Cappelen claims that, after presenting the thought experiment, Lehrer proceeds to offer arguments in support of the judgment that Mr. Truetemp does not know. The primary argument, according to Cappelen, is given in the following passage: “More than possession of correct information is required for knowledge. One must have some way of knowing that the information is correct” (Lehrer 2000, 188). Cappelen’s claim is that this sentence forms a premise in an argument to the conclusion that Mr. Truetemp does not know.

There are several things to say about this characterization of Lehrer’s thought experiment. First, as Cappelen notes, there is an alternate interpretation according to which the judgment on the Truetemp example is being used as evidence for the principle outlined in the quote above, rather the other way around. Second, as others have noted, the presence of argumentation is compatible with reliance on intuition (see e.g. Chalmers 2014, Weinberg 2014). I’m inclined to agree with both these points, but an even more obvious and serious issue is lurking here—how does

¹⁷ Of course, the fewer such thought experiments there are, and the smaller intuition’s role in their use, the less dramatic the impact experimental philosophy will have. But the picture of experimental philosophy as dooming the discipline—burning the armchair, if you will—was always a bit too theatrical. It makes for good press, but it also threatens to write a check it can’t cash. To my eyes experimental philosophy is still in the position to make a variety of more modest, yet still crucially important, critical contributions to our methodological practices.

Cappelen's characterization do anything more than push the problem back a step? The principle that Cappelen takes to be a premise is in just as much need of justification as the claim that Mr. Truetemp does not know. How is it to be justified, other than via intuition?¹⁸

Cappelen would presumably claim that the principle is 'in the common ground'—it is one of the propositions that we all agree on before theorizing begins. Every argument needs to start from somewhere, after all. Cappelen denies that such common-ground propositions need be intuitions. Such common-ground claims can have any evidential source whatsoever: "when I talk to my brothers it is common ground that Eftang is located more than 1 mile outside Sandefjord" (Cappelen 2012, 119). But note that this doesn't rule out the possibility that, in many of the relevant philosophical cases, the source *is* in fact one of that motley group of psychological processes that have generally been classed under 'intuition'. Is the burden of proof on the proponent of Centrality to show that the relevant claim really is derived from some such process? Cappelen would presumably say so, but as we noted earlier the Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options plausibly presses the burden of proof back on Cappelen. Unless he can give a plausible alternate source (perception? yet more inference?), the Argument from Argumentation falls flat here.^{19,20}

Interestingly, Deutsch is happy to admit that intuition is, in some way, involved in our knowledge of the propositions that feature in philosophical argumentation. In a discussion of Kripke's Gödel-Schmidt thought experiment, Deutsch writes that "the causal source of Kripke's judgment about the Gödel case is intuition; this much is fairly clear" (Deutsch 2009, 451). The *causal* source of a judgment, however, must be distinguished from the *justificatory* source. Deutsch goes on to note that Kripke offers several arguments in support of the judgment he gives on the Gödel case—for instance, the argument that on a descriptive view of names certain sorts of error become impossible. It is these arguments that ultimately justify Kripke's claim about the referent of 'Gödel'.

Similarly, Cappelen offers the following, as a bit of an afterthought:

"There's at least a pre-theoretically useful distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification. This book has focused solely on the role of intuitions in the latter. I have said nothing about whether something

¹⁸ Chalmers (2014) and Weinberg (2014) make similar points.

¹⁹ See also Weinberg (2014) on 'intuition escape clauses'.

²⁰ In his replies to critics (Cappelen 2014a), Cappelen notes that Weatherson's notion of 'Socratic knowledge' (Weatherson 2014) might be used to explicate the source of much of our common ground claims. As Cappelen uses the concept, it appears to cover something like those propositions which we are put into a position to know due to preexisting tacit knowledge (e.g., though I have not been previously presented with a given thought experiment, I can in some way make use of tacit knowledge I already possess to come to an immediate judgment about the thought experiment). Again, however, that leaves the question of how the tacit knowledge is acquired. I find it overwhelmingly plausible that in many cases the relevant tacit knowledge will be due to one of the various psychological processes that are frequently labeled 'intuition'. But even this isn't required—all that's required is that in some non-negligible proportion of such cases the source of the tacit knowledge is the same as that which underlies the folk judgments studied by experimental philosophers. We'll return to this shortly.

that some philosophers would label ‘intuition’ could play a significant role in the context of discovery. It is not implausible that something reasonably labeled ‘intuitive’ can serve as a creative starting point for many cognitive activities, including philosophizing. Even if this is true, it provides no support for Centrality” (Cappelen 2012, 230).

Again, there seems to be an admission that intuition can form at least part of the causal source of many of our philosophical beliefs—but a denial that it serves as the justificatory source for those beliefs.

Appealing to this sort of distinction does not, I think, fully avoid the issue. It may well be that philosophers standardly try to justify their intuitively-held beliefs via argument. The trouble is that arguments—even good arguments—are cheap. The fact that someone has come up with a good argument for a claim doesn’t (more’s the pity) guarantee that the claim is correct. As every philosopher knows, for any given philosophical problem there tend to be good arguments for multiple different solutions. Intelligent people can generally quite easily produce convincing arguments in favor of *whatever* position they are currently inclined to hold. Unfortunately, they rarely invest nearly as much effort into attempts to produce arguments for the views they are *not* currently inclined to hold.

Thus, suppose that Western philosophers are inclined to hold a certain ethical view E due to its intuitiveness, and suppose that the intuitiveness of E is deeply influenced by contingent features of one’s cultural background. Likely, the philosophers will construct a multitude of clever arguments in support of E; but had their cultural background caused them to find E* intuitive instead, they likely would constructed clever arguments in support of E*. In other words, when considering the merits of E, the intuitiveness of E will quite plausibly lead the philosophers to invest their cognitive resources in attempts to find support for E rather than E*.

There is a name for this—confirmation bias. I see no reason to assume that philosophers are not more or less as prone to it as other folk. Over the past two millennia, generations of Western philosophers have undertaken to defend the tenets of Christianity; rather fewer have constructed arguments in support of Hinduism. Many of the various apologetics that have emerged from these philosophers are quite sophisticated and compelling. Nonetheless, the degree to which cultural upbringing shaped their inquiry is *prima facie* a cause for concern. One could multiply *ad infinitum* cases where a philosopher argues for some proposition p, but has plausibly neglected to sufficiently consider alternatives to p due to contingent features of his or her cultural milieu. Aristotle argued in support of slavery—would he have done so had he not been immersed in the social practices of the Greek polis?

Note that I do not say that the influence of such contingencies as one’s cultural background implies that one’s beliefs are unjustified. This is *one* possible way of treating the problem of cultural bias—we might claim that the existence or awareness of such bias serves as a defeater for justification. In fact, I suspect this is far too strong. Confirmation bias likely affects a great deal of our cognitive lives, and denying justification to any belief affected by it would likely lead to a vast reduction in our evidential assets. I suggest, then, that most philosophers are (at least

to some degree) justified in holding the beliefs that intuition has led them to, especially if they have been subjected to reflection and argumentation.²¹ Should they nonetheless be deeply concerned about the impact of bias on their beliefs, once the plausible existence of such a bias has been demonstrated? And should they attempt to counteract it? It seems obvious to me that they should. Suffice it to say, then, that many philosophers' epistemic positions would be greatly improved were they to become aware of and attempt to adjust for the cultural factors which influence their beliefs—and this would be true even if said adjustment leads to no revision in the actual positions they hold.

I've focused on cultural factors, but similar observations hold for other biases such as framing effects, order effects, emotional biases and the like. Insofar as such factors influence what seems intuitive to a person, they are likely to influence what beliefs the person will hold—and reflection and argumentation are far more likely to reinforce such beliefs than to overturn them. Experimental philosophy studies have indicated that at least in some cases, such influence exists among non-philosophers; if we admit that philosophers rely on intuition at least in the context of discovery, it's plausible that such factors affect philosophers as well. This is a cause for concern, and neglecting to at least attempt to correct for it is simply not in keeping with the spirit of philosophy. If all this is correct, then the project of experimental philosophy is justified even if intuition plays little role in the 'context of justification'.

5 Conclusion

After examining what I take to be the three most common arguments against Centrality, I conclude that none of them invalidates the project of experimental philosophy. But what of Centrality itself? I think we must agree that it is, at best, a misleading and oversimplistic characterization of philosophical practice. The notion of an intuition is really quite a mess, and the 'method of cases' plausibly isn't even close to an accurate characterization of philosophical activity. Yet there is *some* truth to Centrality; it's plausible that many of the beliefs philosophers hold are held primarily because of certain psychological processes which are fairly automatic and unreflective (though they may have little more in common than this). Argumentation may in many cases supplement (or more rarely undermine) this initial 'intuitive' pull towards belief. But it is unlikely that it wholly eliminates the effect our intuitions have on our ultimate system of beliefs. Nothing more than this is needed to justify the project of experimental philosophy.

Rejection of the picture offered by Centrality means that experimental philosophers (and other participants in the methodology debates) have some serious work to do. As the intuitions deniers have urged, philosophers on both sides of these debates have been operating with an inaccurate picture of how philosophy proceeds. They have tended to speak of intuition as a single, homogenous capacity rather than

²¹ Aristotle's view on slavery plausibly falls under the class of exceptions to this generalization.

as a myriad of vastly different processes, none of which is unique to philosophical inquiry. They have sometimes drawn overambitious conclusions, frequently due to this very tendency to reify intuition. They have often used words like ‘evidence’ unreflectively, frequently suggesting implausible views of intuition’s epistemological role. And they have frequently adopted a ‘method of cases’ picture of philosophical theorizing which neglects the role of argumentation and reflection. Plausibly, part of the solution to this trouble is more experimental philosophy. Experimental philosophy can contribute to an understanding of the psychological processes we’ve referred to as ‘intuitive’. It can also contribute to an understanding of the ways in which philosophers reason differently from the folk. The metaphilosophical failings the intuition deniers have uncovered concern, primarily, descriptive claims about how philosophers in fact do what they do. The work required to correct such failings will inevitably be largely empirical.

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