

# *Intuitions*

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# Intuitions

**Critical Notice of *Intuitions*, Anthony Booth & Darrell Rowbottom (eds.) (Oxford University Press, 2014)**

James Andow

*Intuitions* is presented as a counterpart of *Rethinking Intuition* (DePaul and Ramsey, 1998). After 16 years, it revisits the topic of the place of intuitions in philosophy in light of two developments:

[T]he rise...of analytic metaphysics and of a school of philosophy that rejects both the preoccupation with ordinary language and the idea that the default methodology of philosophy is conceptual analysis...

[T]he nascent challenge from the cognitive psychologists has matured and evolved into a fully-fledged sub-discipline of philosophy, with its own journal<sup>1</sup>... Experimental Philosophy (Booth, 2014, 2)

I've focused my comments on two themes related to these two developments. In §1, I consider the extent to which the chapters represent a shift away from the assumption that intuitions and concepts play a central role in the epistemology of philosophy. In §2, I consider how experimental philosophy is best understood vs how it is represented in *Intuitions*.

Is *Intuitions* a good counterpart to *Rethinking Intuition*? Would I recommend it as the basis for a graduate class or reading group? Would I direct someone to it if they needed to catch up on the literature since DePaul & Ramsey? Yes, I would, albeit with some reservations which I'll explain in §2.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This comment is odd as experimental philosophy does not have its own journal. The only plausible candidates are *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* (formerly *European Review of Philosophy*) and *Philosophical Psychology*, but both predate experimental philosophy and many issues of each contain no experimental philosophy.

<sup>2</sup>Readers should perhaps note that *Intuitions* has been some time in the making (a number of chapters have been available since 2009). This does affect the importance of the contribution some chapters make to the literature. Given the delay, it is also a shame that there is almost no interaction between chapters.

# 1 Concepts in *Intuitions*

It might seem as if there has been a general shift away from certain ‘old assumptions’ about philosophical methodology. Booth presents *Intuitions* as occurring in the midst of shift away from one of the central concerns of *Rethinking Intuition*, that of concepts, conceptual analysis, and so on. Other chapters, e.g., by Cappelen’s chapter, seem to represent a related shift away from thinking that *intuitions* are central part of philosophers’ methodology.

I am tempted to think, however, that any shift which has happened has been a shift in terminology rather than a shift in assumptions about methodology. Two chapters in *Intuitions* prompted this thought: Lowe’s, and Johnson and Nado’s. Let me address them in turn.

Lowe tackles a similar task to Bealer (1998, 2002): to say something about how philosophical knowledge is possible. Prima facie their stories are radically different, as while Bealer hardly talks about anything other than concepts and intuitions, Lowe makes an effort to distance himself from any such talk. However, it strikes me that it is really *only* at first glance that Bealer and Lowe’s stories are dramatically different.<sup>3</sup>

Lowe argues rational beings are capable of metaphysical knowledge because they are capable of grasping the essences of at least some mind-independent entities.

...an entity’s essence is captured by an account of *what that entity is*, or *what it is (or would be) to be that entity*...by a so-called ‘real definition’... [this] is not, however, to be construed simply in terms of the possession or mastery of a certain concept... Concepts... may or may not be adequate to the real natures... of the things being thought of. (Lowe, 2014, 256).

How could we grasp these essences—these ‘real definitions’?

A real definition... is just a proposition of a special kind and, hence, the claim that we can understand at least some real definitions is no more problematic than the more general claim, which is surely incontestable, that we can, at least sometimes, understand propositions. (Lowe, 2014, 266) (emphasis removed)

So in other words, grasping a real definition looks a lot like Bealer’s talk of *determinate possession* of a concept (which one has when one possesses a concept without

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<sup>3</sup>There may be reason to think Lowe would have some sympathies with my comments. Lowe (2012, n3) says his criticisms don’t apply to Bealer’s ‘highly sophisticated theory of... *rational intuitions*’ (referring to Bealer, 2002) (but doesn’t discuss Bealer’s views further citing space limitations).

misunderstanding or incomplete understanding) (Bealer, 1996, 12).<sup>4</sup>

Johnson and Nado (2014) (J&N) discuss moderate intuitionism – the position that intuitions, though frequently led astray, somehow can't fail to be generally reliable. It is an attractive and widely endorsed position among philosophers, but lacks much of a theoretical underpinning. J&N attempt to find a theory which would explain the 'fragile connection to the truth' that such a position claims for intuitions. J&N begin their quest as follows:

A plausible place to start looking... is in language. Our tendency to assume that intuition must be generally reliable seems linked to the fact that it is impossible for our intuitions about the meanings of words to be utterly wrong. It's not at all plausible to suppose, for example, that 'dog' might in fact refer to cats. (Johnson and Nado, 2014, 68–69)

I thought a more natural starting point would be *concepts* since intuitions are a mental phenomenon (not linguistic). In fact, J&N agree. It is just that their survey of extant attempts to explain the reliability of intuitions in terms of a constitutive link with *concepts* leads them to set the conceptual route aside and explore a metasemantic route. I suggest that, in fact, the explanation they try to provide could be provided in terms of an account of concepts. (I'll go on to suggest that their strategy faces problems whether it is parsed in terms of concepts or metasemantics.)

What do J&N find unsatisfactory about the extant attempts to explain the reliability of intuitions in terms of concepts?

J&N first consider Goldman (2007). Goldman's approach suggests that intuitions are reliable because of our concepts in the following way: part of what it is to have a certain concept is to have certain classificatory dispositions (Goldman, 2007, 15). What is wrong with Goldman's approach? The concepts Goldman is thinking about are concepts 'as they exist in the subject's head'. A concept of X, in this sense, is the kind of thing whose application conditions could depart significantly/radically from the facts about which things are actually Xs. So, the problem is that Goldman can give no guarantee that intuitions provide reliable evidence about anything other than what is in an individual's head.

Next J&N consider Bealer (1996, 2000). As I mentioned above, Bealer appeals to determinate concept possession which gives one's judgments about the concept a 'strong modal tie' to the truth. As Bealer puts it, 'it is constitutive of determinate concept possession that intuitions involving the concept (tend to) be true' (Bealer, 1996, 12). What's

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<sup>4</sup>Another similarity is that, I think, both offer only an 'in principle' defence of metaphysical knowledge. Lowe's claim is that there is no in principle barrier to grasping real definitions because they are just like any other proposition. Lowe does sometimes suggest a slightly more substantive position, e.g., he says if we never grasped real definitions, 'we could never know anything at all' (Lowe, 2014, 265) But there is no easy inference of this kind to be had from a lack of metaphysical knowledge of essences to a lack of any knowledge.

the problem here? There's just no obvious reason to think that we often achieve determinate concept possession (i.e., possess concepts without misunderstanding or incomplete understanding). Indeed, Bealer doesn't argue otherwise.

So, J&N opt for a route which doesn't appeal to concepts. They appeal to the following metasemantic story (my reconstruction):

- (a) For all linguistic expressions, a linguistic expression E means some object, property, kind, relation, etc. X, in the mouth of speaker S iff S would be disposed to apply E to X if S had all relevant information.<sup>5</sup>
- (b) It is the righthand side of (a) which is important (does the grounding, is the more explanatory fundamental, or similar – J&N put the point various ways in the chapter).

How is this supposed to help J&N give the explanation they are looking for? J&N's basic idea is (i) our terms correctly apply to cases iff we are disposed (given full information) to apply the relevant terms to the relevant cases, and (ii) our intuitions concerning things like hypothetical cases and thought experiments are reliable but fallible indicators of such dispositions and thus reliable.

I suggest that J&N's apparent move away from talk of concepts is pretty non-substantive. J&N could replace their metasemantic (a) with this concept-based (a<sub>c</sub>):

- (a<sub>c</sub>) For all concepts, a concept C employed by an individual S picks out an object, property, kind, relation, etc., X, iff S would be disposed to apply C to X if S had all relevant information.

This could give J&N the same basic explanatory basis for moderate intuitionism: our concepts correctly apply to cases iff we are disposed (given full information) to apply the relevant concepts to the relevant cases; our intuitions in response to prompts are reliable but fallible indicators of such dispositions and thus reliable.

Moreover the relevant account of concepts has some *prima facie* plausibility. It seems to have sensible things to say about what is it to have a particular concept: it is to have a concept C and be such that were you in possession of complete information you would have certain dispositions concerning your classification of things as falling within the extension of C. Two parties might currently have the same concept of knowledge but significantly different dispositions concerning what they consider to be cases of knowledge (they might too have different concepts despite having the

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<sup>5</sup>Two notes here: (1) Sometimes J&N put this in terms of *all relevant information* but this variation is not important since 'relevant information' means 'items of information I such that, were S to be apprised of I, that would influence S's dispositions to apply E' (Johnson and Nado, 2014, 81). (2) J&N's metasemantic account has some interesting similarities to temporal externalism (see Jackman, 1999, 2005) which says 'the future behavior of an individual or his society can affect the content of his thoughts and utterances' (Jackman, 1999, 160). (For discussion, see Brown 2000; Stoneham 2003).

same dispositions). They might also have different ideas about knowledge, prototypes, theories of knowledge, and so on.

This concept-based story also promises to escape the traps which befell Goldman and Bealer's stories. My intuition that X knows that p is true just in case X and p stand in the relation that my concept of knowledge picks out. My concept of knowledge is constituted by my dispositions (given full information) to judge what falls within the extension of my concept. Intuitions are reliable indicators of these dispositions and so tend to be true.

However, whether told in terms of metasemantics or concepts, J&N's story is problematic. There are two worries which need to be addressed before either account can help underpin moderate intuitionism. (1) It is unclear that individuals have determinate *dispositions given complete information*. It seems that *S's dispositions given complete information* may not fix a single set of dispositions. There is no obvious reason to think I would be disposed to respond in the same way to receiving complete information in order  $\{i_1, i_2, i_3 \dots i_n\}$  and  $\{i_9, i_7, i_3 \dots\}$ . So it seems, according to these accounts, many (perhaps all) of my terms/concepts have indeterminate meanings/contents. I'm not sure we should be happy with that. (2) On either story, it needs to be that intuitions provide reliable evidence concerning our dispositions given complete information. But, this reliability is far from guaranteed. Perhaps all our language resembles the case of 'phlogiston'. Perhaps given full information our entire conceptual framework would be overhauled to the extent that every single concept in our current stock was abandoned. There's no in principle reason on offer to think our second-order dispositions aren't such that complete information would radically alter our first-order dispositions. So, it seems to be on the cards that our intuitions are currently very unreliable.

Without a response to these worries a J&N-style story, whether told in terms of metasemantics or intuitions, cannot succeed. According to either version of the story we have direct evidence about *current* first-order dispositions but there is no guarantee these resemble the dispositions *given full information* which provide the constitutive link with the truth conditions for our intuitions and which therefore *would* guarantee the reliability of intuitions. Some such connection needs to be provided before any such dispositional account can succeed (whether about concepts or metasemantics).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For the conceptual route, help might be found in an approach which J&N overlook, that of [Jenkins 2008, 2014](#). Jenkins seems provide exactly the right sort of connection to hook something like Goldman's concepts up to the world (in terms of the success/usefulness of certain concepts). More interaction between chapters would have been good here. [Jenkins 2008](#) takes up this approach in her chapter which directly follows J&N's and which explicitly talks about her 2008 account as being able to avoid the problem which [Goldman \(2007\)](#)'s account faces.

## 2 Experimental Philosophy in *Intuitions*

Here I make some comments about how experimental philosophy is best understood. First, I highlight a couple of reservations I have about how experimental philosophy is presented in the volume. Second, I outline some of the important contributions I think the volume does make to our understanding of the negative programme in experimental philosophy. Third, when I discuss Cappelen's contribution, I'll outline how I think experimental philosophy is best understood (in general, not just the negative programme).

### 2.1 Reservations

My reservations about the presentation of experimental philosophy in the volume begin in the introduction. Booth's introduction presents experimental philosophy as growing out of the critique of analytic methods, made by some in the 1990s, on the basis of certain psychological findings. I understand why Booth presents experimental philosophy in this way. Unsurprisingly, given the focus of the volume, the discussion of experimental philosophy in the volume almost exclusively concerns experimental philosophy's *negative programme*. 'The negative programme' is a name given to those elements in experimental philosophy which aim to challenge traditional philosophical methods including use of intuitions. However, this presentation of experimental philosophy introduces a risk that anyone not already familiar will walk away from *Intuitions* with a mistaken understanding of experimental philosophy. Why? Because (a) the vast majority of current experimental philosophy is not part of any 'negative programme' and (b) the work which is not in the negative programme is not helpfully presented as growing out of the 1990s critique.

I also had some reservations about how the negative programme itself is presented in the volume. Here's the primary version of the empirical challenge to the use of intuitions in philosophy with which I am familiar. Stage one involves using evidence that folk intuitions vary with irrelevant factors to argue that intuitions are less reliable than we typically assume in philosophy. Stage two involves replying to typical responses. Notably, these responses include the idea that somehow *philosophers'* intuitions might be immune to such variation. The reply to this response has two prongs: one involves arguing that the burden of proof is on the friend of philosophers' intuitions to demonstrate this supposed difference; the other involves going out and demonstrating that philosophers' intuitions are actually subject to many of the same problematic effects. This, or something similar, is the version of the empirical challenge which I think you must engage with if you want to take the challenge seriously. However, some of the chapters in the volume discuss rather different challenges.

For one example, Van Roojen considers a challenge which argues *we shouldn't use moral intuitions* on the basis of evidence that they are *somewhat* unreliable. Van Roo-



jen's objection to this challenge is pretty good (I won't get into details). However, I worry that by focusing solely on such a version of the challenge, Van Roojen risks strawmanning the negative programme. Respectable versions of the empirical challenge argue that intuitions are *not as reliable as philosophers typically take them to be* and advocate restricting their use. In relation to such versions, Van Roojen's position amounts to a complete concession rather than a defence, as he is okay with a retreat to the idea that intuitions are marginally more than 50% reliable.<sup>7</sup> (If there were an in principle reason to think intuitions must be more than 50% reliable, then Van Roojen's defence might get more traction. He offers none. This is a point where greater interaction between chapters might have been helpful since something of this kind is precisely what Johnson and Nado attempt to provide in their chapter.)

For another example, Pritchard considers a version of the challenge which focuses on *mismatches* between the intuitions to which philosophers appeal in the literature and those of philosophical novices (and which assumes such mismatches to show the former to be unreliable). Because Pritchard doesn't specify the target he has in mind, it is difficult to evaluate the value of his argument (he does mention [Nichols et al. 2003](#) and [Swain et al. 2008](#) but charitable interpretation suggests that he can't intend to attribute the argument he discusses to them). I'll stick my neck out, however, and say the argument Pritchard discusses is simply not the argument that anyone involved in the negative programme focuses on. So, Pritchard's chapter risks giving the unfamiliar a skewed picture of the state of play.<sup>8</sup>

A different way in which some of the chapters in *Intuitions* failed, to my mind, to capture the nature of the argument of the negative programme was that they fail to acknowledge—in a way which threatens the relevance of their arguments—the considerable extant body of work concerning the *expertise defence* of intuitions (to which I've contributed, [Andow forthcominga](#)). Two chapters in particular struck me as having this problem. First, Sorenson advances a version of the expertise defence, but, his objection is not novel and he doesn't acknowledge any of the many previous attempts to mount such a defence (notably, e.g., [Williamson, 2007, 2011](#)). Moreover, whether an expertise defence of some kind is plausible has been thrashed out in the methodological literature in recent years, and draws on established literatures on expertise. Yet, Sorenson's chapter shows next to no awareness of this. As a result, it risks giving

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<sup>7</sup>Note also, Van Roojen's 'defence' of intuitions really serves to render intuition-use immune from empirical critique. Since experiments can't demonstrate that intuitions about the truth/falsity of a particular claim are less than 50% reliable without some independent way to check the answer. And, part of the reason moral intuitionism was an attractive position in the first place was that it is far from obvious that we have any such resource—*pace* discussion in [Andow \(forthcominga\)](#).

<sup>8</sup>The chapter also contains unsupported claims about naïve intuitions about certain premises in arguments for scepticism. There is limited data on such intuitions, and Pritchard cites none, but what exists suggests they are much more ambiguous than he assumes ([Adeberg et al., forthcoming](#); [Buckwalter and Stich 2014](#); [Nichols et al., 2003](#); [Seyedsayamdoost, forthcoming](#)).

newcomers a skewed view of the state of the literature. Second, Pritchard urges that experimental philosophers interested in challenging the use of intuitions in philosophy should focus on challenging the assumption that philosophical training improves (rather than simply changes) philosopher intuitions or some relevant skill set required to have good intuitions. This too will strike those familiar with the literature as being a little strange. Since, experimental philosophers have long been doing what Pritchard recommends. The reason for disconnect with the literature may simply be the length of time *Intuitions* has been in press. Nonetheless, I urge that all newcomers interested in issues relating to intuitions, experimental philosophy and expertise start with Nado's excellent Philosophy Compass piece instead (Nado 2014).

## 2.2 Advances in Understanding the Negative Programme

Some work in *Intuitions* does advances our understanding of experimental philosophy's negative programme. Here are two examples:

Ichikawa distinguishes two distinct types of empirical challenge to intuition-use. One is the same basic challenge I outlined above: it starts with evidence that what intuitions one has depends on certain irrelevant factors and concludes that intuitions are less reliable than we often give them credit. The other starts with evidence that what intuitions one has depends on certain irrelevant factors and concludes that what intuitions we have is troublingly arbitrary. He calls the first *the defeater critique* (it is prompted by evidence of intrapersonal variation) and the second *the arbitrariness critique* (it is prompted by evidence of interpersonal variation). Ichikawa correctly points out that most extant discussion does not focus on the arbitrariness critique. However, it was an important part of the rhetoric in the early days of experimental philosophy and so is worth discussing (and Ichikawa's discussion is illuminating).<sup>9</sup>

Weinberg & Alexander (W&A) consider the *wrong type of intuitions* response to the first stage of the negative programme and argue that (i) philosophers who conceive of intuitions in certain 'thick' ways might well be vindicated in claiming that the data from experimental philosophy doesn't threaten philosophers' reliance on intuitions *on the grounds that the data don't concern intuitions in the relevant sense*; but (ii) conceiving of intuitions in such a thick way means that one faces a bunch of other methodological concerns which threaten philosophers' reliance on intuitions. In other words, relying on a thick characterization of intuition in order to resist the empirical threat to intuition-use risks a pyrrhic victory.

I largely agree with most of what W&A say.<sup>10</sup> However, in at least one respect, I

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<sup>9</sup>It would have been good, however, to see recognition that the evidence base for the arbitrariness critique now looks considerably less worrying than it once did, see, e.g., (Adleberg et al., forthcoming; Nagel et al. 2013; Seyedsayamdost, forthcoming) – I suspect the absence of this is due to the length of time *Intuitions* was in press but it is unfortunate nonetheless.

<sup>10</sup>I have written about W&A's paper elsewhere and make use of some of their observations ([Andow](#),

think the defender of intuitions can get away with more than W&A suggest. W&A suggest that a defender of intuitions' conception of intuitions really needs to pass a *manifestability condition*: one needs to be able to identify intuitions so-conceived (because a defender of intuitions has a problem if they conceive of intuitions in such a way that they can't distinguish good practice from bad – if they can't tell when philosophers are relying on intuitions). But, W&A understand the manifestability condition as being passed only if at the time of intuiting philosophers can tell, introspectively and from the armchair, whether their own 'intuitions' are genuinely intuitions of the right sort—this is too strict. Failing the manifestability condition so-understood isn't necessarily a problem for the defender of intuitions. It would be a problem if they were absolutely wedded to a practice in which philosophers work individually, from the armchair, introspectively, and without tolerance for revisiting their thinking at a later date. But it seems doubtful any defender of intuitions is wedded to *this* practice. W&A do make the point that defenders of intuition are generally interested in defending the *current practice* of relying on intuition rather than relying on intuitions simpliciter.<sup>11</sup> However, I am inclined to think that, even insofar as the defender of intuitions is absolutely wedded to defending *current philosophical practice*, they are not wedded to so insular a practice.

So I recommend that W&A relax their understanding of the manifestability condition along the following lines: a conception of intuition satisfies manifestability if there are available means by which intuition-using philosophers can in practice (rather than simply theoretically), and not necessarily as individuals, reliably detect whether something is an intuition so-conceived. This relaxation has to be preferable as it would be no big problem if, for instance, a fair number of 'intuitions' were only discovered to be non-intuitions after some back and forth in the philosophical literature and perhaps some empirical inquiry. It is far from obvious that philosophers need to be able to tell introspectively in the moment whether their own intuition is really an intuition (*pace* considerations raised in [Andow 2015b](#)).

### 2.3 $\phi$ -ing and $\psi$ -ing

Another question raised in the volume is to what extent experimental philosophy is premised on the idea that philosophers use intuitions at all. This work (a) is valuable and helps advance our understanding of experimental philosophy, (b) unfortunately provides another example of how discussion of experimental philosophy often misconstrues what it is all about. In the following, I address both these points.

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2015b).

<sup>11</sup>They also claim the *current practice condition* they consider does no heavy lifting, but I think that assumptions about current practice are built into how they understand manifestability: one needs to be able to identify intuitions so-conceived *in the course of doing philosophy as it is currently done*.

In the years since *Rethinking Intuitions*, an important trend has been for metaphilosophers to question the orthodox view that philosophers use intuitions as evidence. Some argue this has repercussions for experimental philosophy. For example, Cappelen (2012) argues experimental philosophy is a big mistake.<sup>12</sup> His argument goes something like this:

1. Experimental philosophy only has something to contribute to philosophy if philosophers use intuitions as evidence.
2. Philosophers don't use intuitions as evidence.
3. So, experimental philosophy has nothing to contribute to philosophy.

Ichikawa's chapter says some illuminating things about experimental philosophy in light of challenges such as Cappelen's. Ichikawa raises interesting questions about the nature of the negative programme in experimental philosophy. Ichikawa considers whether the two critiques he distinguished (see above) might weather such challenges. Ichikawa, I think rightly, thinks the defeater critique is not premised on the idea philosophers use intuitions as evidence, and so can resist this type of criticism. However, this time I think incorrectly, Ichikawa thinks that the arbitrariness critique can't make a similar move.

Why think the arbitrariness critique couldn't weather this criticism? Suppose two groups have different intuitions about knowledge. Suppose they do some epistemology. Suppose their having different intuitions has no effect on their theory choice. In that case, neither group need worry about the arbitrariness of their ideas about knowledge. However, what this illustrates is merely that the arbitrariness critique depends on the idea that *intuitions affect philosophers' theory choice*. This idea isn't the same as *philosophers use intuitions as evidence*. The causal claim is compatible with denying that either group uses intuitions *as evidence*.<sup>13</sup> Consequently I think, contra Ichikawa, that the arbitrariness critique can get traction whether or not philosophers actually use intuitions as evidence (because, the idea that philosophers' theorising isn't *affected* by what they find intuitive is pretty far-fetched). Nonetheless, Ichikawa's discussion of these issues is interesting and deserves to be given further attention.

Another chapter which takes up a similar theme is Cappelen's own contribution which defends his initial argument (above) against objections of the following form:

1. Even if philosophers don't use intuitions as evidence, they do use X (and that's what we meant all along by 'intuitions').

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<sup>12</sup>Although this criticism is made prominently by Cappelen (2012) it has been made by others too and needn't be made on the same grounds as Cappelen.

<sup>13</sup>Ichikawa focuses on the presentation of the arbitrariness critique in Weinberg et al. (2001); these same authors put their arguments in explicitly causal terms in Nichols et al. (2003).

2. Experimental philosophy investigates X, so can (i) provide evidence in the form of X, and (ii) undermine some extant appeals to X (by showing that they are sensitive to irrelevant factors).
3. So, it isn't true that experimental philosophy only has something to contribute to philosophy if philosophers use intuitions as evidence.

In essence, the objection is that experimental philosophers never put much stock in intuition-talk anyway and they can do without it. Cappelen's chapter argues experimental philosophers can't so easily do without intuition-talk. His strategy is to run through various different ways of reinterpreting experimental philosophers' intuition-talk—filling in that variable X—raising objections to all of them.

Again, Cappelen's discussion does raise interesting questions about the nature of experimental philosophy and the details of his argument deserve to be engaged with. Hopefully, however, I will be excused a bit more of a 'big picture' comment. One might suspect I would be sympathetic to Cappelen's position. For, like Cappelen, I am myself tempted to think the fixation on intuitions among metaphilosophers is a bit unfortunate (see, e.g., Andow forthcomingb). However, rather than being sympathetic, my reaction to the back-and-forth—between Cappelen (2012), critics, and Cappelen (2014)—is that both sides buy into a problematic understanding of what experimental philosophy is all about.

The problem is that both sides seem to accept that experimental philosophy is premised on the idea that philosophers  $\phi$  and experimental philosophy can help them  $\phi$  better. But I don't see things that way.<sup>14</sup> Experimental philosophy is not premised on the idea that philosophers commonly pursue some project which experimental philosophy can further. The premise is not that philosophers  $\phi$  and experimental philosophy can improve their  $\phi$ ing, but rather that philosophers don't  $\psi$  but should. (Probably not all of them should – certainly not all the time – and it mightn't be the only thing experimental methods are good for philosophically speaking. Nonetheless, philosophers should  $\psi$ .)

What are these projects which experimental philosophy wants to use empirical tools to further? What is it to  $\psi$ ? It is to try to make sense of *the way we think about philosophically interesting things* like morality, freewill, and so on—*how* we think, not simply *what*. Of course, I don't deny that we experimental philosophers generally understand survey responses to indicate *what* our participants think—participants' 'intuitions' if you like that sort of language. However, the reason we are interested in this is largely not because philosophers use intuitions as evidence. The aim is to use careful manipulation to get a better understanding of *how* participants think—their cognitive architecture, their ways of understanding the world, their ways of coming to think what

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<sup>14</sup>Read my published work and you perhaps wouldn't guess. I've often written as though I thought this was the case too. However, I've always been pretty clear deep down.

they think.

Don't believe me? Read the website!

...experimental philosophers actually go out and run systematic experiments aimed at understanding *how* people ordinarily think about the issues at the foundations of philosophical discussions.<sup>15</sup>

Many philosophers will be asking at this point, 'What next?... When does that contribute towards some philosophical project with which I am familiar?' And that's my point. Experimental philosophy isn't valuable only insofar it furthers the projects philosophers currently have.

Still don't believe me? Read the manifesto! Knobe and Nichols describe a familiar approach according to which what people think about something is considered philosophically relevant only insofar as it sheds light on the thing itself (their example, causation) and continue...

With the advent of experimental philosophy, this familiar approach is being turned on its head. More and more, philosophers are coming to feel that questions about *how people ordinarily think* have great philosophical significance in their own right... we do not think that the significance of [intuitions about causation] is exhausted by the evidence they might provide for one or another metaphysical theory. On the contrary, *we think that the patterns to be found in people's intuitions point to important truths about how the mind works*, and these truths—truths about people's minds, not about metaphysics—have great significance for traditional philosophical questions. (Knobe and Nichols, 2008, 11–12) (my emphasis)

Our dissatisfaction is not that philosophers use intuitions as evidence but fail to use appropriate tools. Our dissatisfaction is with a discipline which is largely no longer interested in making sense of the ways that ordinary people think about philosophically interesting things.

Still don't believe me?! Again, read the manifesto!

It used to be a commonplace that the discipline of philosophy was deeply concerned with questions about the human condition. Philosophers thought about human beings and *how their minds* worked... On this traditional conception, it wasn't particularly important to keep philosophy clearly distinct from psychology, history, or political science...

The new movement of experimental philosophy seeks a return to this traditional vision. Like philosophers of centuries past, we are concerned with

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<sup>15</sup>This can be found at the following address (last accessed 8th Jan 2014 – my emphasis): <http://pantheon.yale.edu/jk762/ExperimentalPhilosophy.html>.

questions about *how human beings actually happen to be*... we think that many of the deepest questions of philosophy can only be properly addressed by immersing oneself in the messy, contingent, highly variable truths about *how human beings really are*. (Knobe and Nichols, 2008, 3) (my emphasis)

Little has changed since the manifesto. Here are Buckwalter and Sytsma in their introduction to the forthcoming *Blackwell Companion to Experimental Philosophy*:<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary experimental philosophers return to these ways of doing philosophy. They conduct controlled experiments, and empirical studies more generally, to explore... *how we think about those phenomena*... This work helps us to understand our reality, who we are as people, and the choices we make about important philosophical matters that shape our lives. (Buckwalter and Sytsma, forthcoming) (my emphasis)

Of course, experimental philosophers do use the word ‘intuitions’ a lot and they sometimes attempt to justify their methodology in precisely the terms that Cappelen accuses them of doing.<sup>17</sup> My (self-)diagnosis is that this is simply an unfortunate result of trying to peddle experimental philosophy to the mainstream. Experimental philosophers too caught the ‘verbal virus’ of intuition-talk (Cappelen, 2012, 22).

Cappelen’s chapter is laudable for its attempt to look below the surface of experimental philosophers’ intuition-talk.<sup>18</sup> And perhaps, *perhaps*, he is right that it doesn’t make much sense. But this absolutely doesn’t mean that experimental philosophy is founded on a big mistake. Once experimental philosophy is properly understood it should be clear that Cappelen’s arguments are just off target.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 Wrapping up

Is *Intuitions* a good counterpart to *Rethinking Intuition*? I have some misgivings about giving a glowing commendation with no reservations. I really think that the reader

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<sup>16</sup>Buckwalter and Sytsma do emphasise that experimental philosophers sometimes aim to investigate phenomena themselves and argue that how we think about phenomena can cast light on the phenomena themselves—but none of this is premised on the claim that philosophers use intuitions as evidence.

<sup>17</sup>I have done it myself (Andow, 2014, 2015a,b; Roberts et al., 2014).

<sup>18</sup>It is something I do myself (Andow 2015c, under review. and Andow & Roessler under review.).

<sup>19</sup>Perhaps Cappelen’s real issue with experimental philosophy concerns a disagreement about how philosophy should be done, rather than about how it is done. Consider his sign-off: ‘Is [x-phi] a harmful activity? My answer... is a tentative ‘yes’. Not only does x-phi promote a false picture of philosophy... it will *change* philosophy’ (Cappelen, 2014, 285). Why else would it be legitimate for him to assume that change is negative?

risks walking away with a problematic understanding of experimental philosophy—particularly with respect to the nature and importance of the so-called negative programme. And I’d have rather seen certain chapters demonstrate a much greater awareness of the current state of the relevant literature (e.g., Sorenson’s). Nonetheless, the volume does collect together a number of valuable contributions to the literature, and, although most of these have been in circulation for a while, I would have bought it had I not received a free copy to review.

I haven’t touched on a number of chapters in the above. Let me quickly say something about them. [Chudnoff \(2014\)](#) argues that intuitions play a role in guiding action. [Sosa \(2014\)](#) urges the view that ‘A proposition is intuited when the subject is attracted to assent just through understanding it. Such... an intuition, is rational when it is owed to a competence manifest in the subject’s attraction to assent, one that reliably enough discerns the true from the false’ ([Sosa, 2014](#), 46). [Pust \(2014\)](#) raises objections to the arguments of those who claim that (a) *moderate rationalism*—the view that ‘a person’s having a rational intuition that p prima facie justifies them in believing that p’—needs empirical support, and (b) suitable support would ‘suffice to convince empiricists to abandon their opposition to rationalism’ ([Pust, 2014](#), 50). [Rowbottom \(2014\)](#), a chapter on the status of thought experiments in science, introduces the idea that thought experiments serve as *argument pumps*. [Jenkins \(2014\)](#), whose chapter did get a favorable mention above, does some great work putting names to various different ways philosophers use the word ‘intuition’ and ideas they associate with it. And [Turri \(2014\)](#) suggests an important amendment to the principle of charity we often employ when dealing with linguistic intuitions.

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Sorenson ends his contribution with some prophesies, here are mine:

1. Methodologists will start to explore to what extent there really has been a shift away from the idea that the default methodology of philosophy is conceptual analysis (or whether there’s only been a shift in terminology).
2. Methodologists will continue to talk about intuitions quite a bit—there’s no real harm in it. However, they’ll shift away from questions like ‘Are intuitions that p used as evidence that p?’ and ‘Are intuitions that p evidence that p?’ and towards questions about:
  - a) the value of making sense of how we think about philosophically interesting stuff, and
  - b) the role of intuitions in a more holistic and abductive model of philosophical enquiry.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>[Love \(2013\)](#) brings this theme out in [Alexander \(2012\)](#) and [Cappelen \(2012\)](#). It is also present in [Ichikawa and Jarvis \(2013\)](#). And was even present way back in DePaul & Ramsey in [Cummins \(1998\)](#).



3. Questions about how we think about philosophically interesting things will be more widely conceived of as part of the proper domain of philosophy.

(Okay, this is more of a wishlist than a list of prophecies.)

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