A Companion to Experimental Philosophy
Blackwell Companions to Philosophy

This outstanding student reference series offers a comprehensive and authoritative survey of philosophy as a whole. Written by today's leading philosophers, each volume provides lucid and engaging coverage of the key figures, terms, topics, and problems of the field. Taken together, the volumes provide the ideal basis for course use, representing an unparalleled work of reference for students and specialists alike.

Already published in the series:

1. The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy, Second Edition
   Edited by Nicholas Bunnin and Eric Tsui-James
2. A Companion to Ethics
   Edited by Peter Singer
   Edited by Stephen Davies, Kathleen Marie Higgins, Robert Hopkins, Robert Stecker, and David E. Cooper
   Edited by Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, and Matthias Steup
5. A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy (two-volume set), Second Edition
   Edited by Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit
6. A Companion to Philosophy of Mind
   Edited by Samuel Guttenplan
   Edited by Jaegwon Kim, Ernest Sosa, and Gary S. Rosenkrantz
   Edited by Dennis Patterson
   Edited by Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn
10. A Companion to the Philosophy of Language
    Edited by Bob Hale and Crispin Wright
11. A Companion to World Philosophies
    Edited by Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe
12. A Companion to Continental Philosophy
    Edited by Simon Critchley and William Schroeder
13. A Companion to Feminist Philosophy
    Edited by Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young
    Edited by William Bechtel and George Graham
    Edited by Helga Kahse and Peter Singer
16. A Companion to the Philosophers
    Edited by Robert L. Arrington
17. A Companion to Business Ethics
    Edited by Robert E. Frederick
18. A Companion to the Philosophy of Science
    Edited by W. H. Newton-Smith
19. A Companion to Environmental Philosophy
    Edited by Dale Jamieson
20. A Companion to Analytic Philosophy
    Edited by A. P. Martinich and David Sosa
21. A Companion to Genetics
    Edited by Justine Burley and John Harris
22. A Companion to Philosophical Logic
    Edited by Dale Jacquette
23. A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy
    Edited by Steven Nadler
24. A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages
    Edited by Jorge J. E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone
25. A Companion to African-American Philosophy
    Edited by Tommie L. Lott and John P. Pittman
26. A Companion to Applied Ethics
    Edited by R. G. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman
27. A Companion to the Philosophy of Education
    Edited by Randall Curren
28. A Companion to African Philosophy
    Edited by Kwasi Wiredu
29. A Companion to Heidegger
    Edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall
30. A Companion to Rationalism
    Edited by Alan Nelson
31. A Companion to Pragmatism
    Edited by John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis
32. A Companion to Ancient Philosophy
    Edited by Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin
33. A Companion to Nietzsche
    Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson
34. A Companion to Socrates
    Edited by Sara Ahmed-Rappe and Rachana Kanetkar
35. A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism
    Edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall
36. A Companion to Kant
    Edited by Graham Bird
37. A Companion to Plato
    Edited by Hugh H. Benson
38. A Companion to Descartes
    Edited by Janet Broughton and John Carriero
39. A Companion to the Philosophy of Biology
    Edited by Sahotra Sarkar and Aranya Plutynski
40. A Companion to Hume
    Edited by Elizabeth S. Radcliffe
41. A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography
    Edited by Aetzer Tucker
42. A Companion to Aristotle
    Edited by Georgios Anagnostopoulos
43. A Companion to the Philosophy of Technology
    Edited by Jan-Kyrre Berg Olsen, Stig Andur Pedersen, and Vincent F. Hendricks
44. A Companion to Latin American Philosophy
    Edited by Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otavio Bueno
45. A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature
    Edited by Garry L. Hayberg and Walter Jost
46. A Companion to the Philosophy of Action
    Edited by Timothy O’Connor and Constantine Sandis
47. A Companion to Relativism
    Edited by Steven D. Hales
48. A Companion to Hegel
    Edited by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur
49. A Companion to Schopenhauer
    Edited by Bart Vandenberghe
50. A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy
    Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel
51. A Companion to Foucault
    Edited by Christopher Felman, Timothy O’Leary, and Jana Sawicki
52. A Companion to the Philosophy of Time
    Edited by Heather Dyke and Adrian Bardon
53. A Companion to Donald Davidson
    Edited by Ernest Lepore and Kirk Ludwig
54. A Companion to Rawls
    Edited by Jon Mandle and David Reidy
55. A Companion to W.V.O Quine
    Edited by Gilbert Harman and Ernest Lepore
56. A Companion to Derrida
    Edited by Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor
57. A Companion to David Lewis
    Edited by Barry Loewer and Jonathan Schaffer
58. A Companion to Kierkegaard
    Edited by Jon Stewart
59. A Companion to Locke
    Edited by Matthew Stuart
60. A Companion to Ayn Rand
    Edited by Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Saltieri
61. A Companion to Experimental Philosophy
    Edited by Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter
Contents

Notes on Contributors ix
Acknowledgments xiv
Introduction 1

PART I: Experimental Philosophy: Past, Present, and Future 3

1 Experimental Philosophy and the Philosophical Tradition 5
   Stephen Stich and Kevin P. Tobia

2 Philosophical Criticisms of Experimental Philosophy 22
   Timothy Williamson

3 Experimental Philosophy Is Cognitive Science 37
   Joshua Knobe

4 Armchair-Friendly Experimental Philosophy 53
   Kaija Mortensen and Jennifer Nagel

5 Going Positive by Going Negative: On Keeping X-Phi Relevant and Dangerous 71
   Jonathan M. Weinberg

6 Early Modern Experimental Philosophy 87
   Peter R. Anstey and Alberto Vanzo

7 Nietzsche and Moral Psychology 103
   Daniel Telech and Brian Leiter
PART II:  Areas of Research  

A.  Free Will and Philosophy of Action  

8  The Folk Concept of Intentional Action: Empirical Approaches  
Florian Cova  
121  
9  Traditional and Experimental Approaches to Free Will and Moral Responsibility  
Gunnar Björnsson and Derk Pereboom  
142  
10  Free Will and Experimental Philosophy  
Hoi-Yee Chan, Max Deutsch, and Shaun Nichols  
158  

B.  Moral and Political Philosophy  

11  Solving the Trolley Problem  
Joshua D. Greene  
175  
12  The Adaptive Logic of Moral Luck  
Justin W. Martin and Fiery Cushman  
190  
13  Metaethics: Traditional and Empirical Approaches  
Alexandra Plakias  
203  
14  Aspects of Folk Morality: Objectivism and Relativism  
Hagop Sarkissian  
212  
15  The Behavior of Ethicists  
Eric Schwitzgebel and Joshua Rust  
225  
16  Experimental or Empirical Political Philosophy  
Nicole Hassoun  
234  
17  Ownership Rights  
Shaylene E. Nancekivell, Charles J. Millar, Pauline C. Summers, and Ori Friedman  
247  

C.  Philosophy of Mind  

18  Attribution of Consciousness  
Justin Sytsma  
259  
19  A Unified versus Componential View of Understanding Minds  
Lily Tsoi  
279  
20  The Group Mind: In Commonsense Psychology  
Bryce Huebner  
292  
21  Synesthesia as a Challenge for Representationalism  
Berit Brogaard  
306  
22  Naturalistic Approaches to Creativity  
Dustin Stokes and Elliot Samuel Paul  
318
D. Epistemology

23 Knowledge Judgments in “Gettier” Cases
   John Turri

24 Experiments on Contextualism and Interest Relative Invariantism
   Ángel Pinillos

25 Evaluative Effects on Knowledge Attributions
   James R. Beebe

---

E. Philosophy of Language

26 Reference
   Mike Dacey and Ron Mallon

27 Experimental Pragmatics in Linguistics and Philosophy
   Mark Phelan

28 Generics and Experimental Philosophy
   Adam Lerner and Sarah-Jane Leslie

---

F. Metaphysics

29 Experience, Metaphysics, and Cognitive Science
   L.A. Paul

30 Experimental Philosophy and Causal Attribution
   Jonathan Livengood and David Rose

31 Causal Models and Screening-Off
   Juhwa Park and Steven A. Sloman

32 Causal Search, Causal Modeling, and the Folk
   David Danks

---

G. Philosophy of Science

33 Experimental Philosophy of Science
   Edouard Machery

34 Explanation
   Tania Lombrozo

35 The Concept of Innateness as an Object of Empirical Enquiry
   Richard Samuels

---

H. Logic and Reasoning

36 Experimental Philosophical Logic
   David Ripley
Notes on Contributors

**Joshua Alexander** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Siena College, where he also directs the cognitive science program. His work focuses primarily on the nature of philosophical cognition and intellectual disagreement. He is the author of *Experimental Philosophy – An Introduction* (Polity, 2012).

**Peter R. Anstey** is ARC Future Fellow and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. He specializes in early modern philosophy and is the author of *John Locke and Natural Philosophy* (Oxford, 2011).

**James R. Beebe** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University at Buffalo and Director of the Experimental Epistemology Research Group.

**Gunnar Björnsson** is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies at Umeå University and Coordinator of the Moral Responsibility Research Initiative at the University of Gothenburg. His research focuses on issues in metaethics, moral psychology, and moral responsibility.

**Berit Brogaard** is Professor of Philosophy at University of Miami, Director of the Brogaard Lab for Multisensory Research and Professor II at University of Oslo.

**Wesley Buckwalter** is Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Waterloo.

**Hoi-yee Chan** is a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Arizona.

**Edward T. Cokely** is Presidential Research Professor and Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Oklahoma, specializing in the Psychology of Skilled and Informed Decision Making. He also serves as research faculty at the MaPlanck Institute for Human Development (DE) and the National Institute for Risk and Resilience (USA), and is co-managing director of RiskLiteracy.org.
Florian Cova is a postdoctoral researcher at the Swiss Centre for Affective Sciences at the University of Geneva.

Fiery Cushman is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Harvard University.

Mike Dacey is a graduate student in the Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology Program at Washington University in St. Louis.

David Danks is Professor of Philosophy & Psychology at Carnegie Mellon University. His main areas of research are computational cognitive science, philosophy of cognitive science, and machine learning. He is the author of *Unifying the Mind: Cognitive Representations as Graphical Models* (MIT Press) and articles in numerous journals.

Max Deutsch is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong.

Igor Douven is Director of Research at the French National Centre for Scientific Research.

Matt L. Drabek is Content Specialist at ACT, Inc. and Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at The University of Iowa. He is the author of *Classify and Label: The Unintended Marginalization of Social Groups* (Lexington Books, 2014).

Adam Feltz is Assistant Professor of Psychology and Applied Ethics at Michigan Technological University where he directs the Ethical Decision-Making and Ethical Naturalism Laboratory and is co-managing director of RiskLiteracy.org.

Carrie Figdor is Associate Professor of Philosophy and core faculty in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Neuroscience at the University of Iowa. Her primary research is in philosophy of psychology and neuroscience, philosophy of science, and philosophy of mind. She is also coauthor, with Molly Paxton and Valerie Tiberius, of ‘Quantifying the Gender Gap: An Empirical Study of the Underrepresentation of Women in Philosophy’ (*Hypatia*, 2012).

Ori Friedman is Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Waterloo.

Joshua D. Greene is Professor of Psychology at Harvard University.

Nicole Hassoun is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Binghamton University. She has published widely in journals such as *American Philosophical Quarterly, Journal of Development Economics, Australasian Journal of Philosophy,* and *Philosophy and Economics*. Her book *Globalization and Global Justice: Shrinking Distance, Expanding Obligations* was published with Cambridge University Press in 2012 and her manuscript *Global Health Impact: Extending Access on Essential Medicines for the Poor* is under contract with Oxford University Press.

Bryce Huebner is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University.

Joshua Knobe is Professor of Cognitive Science and Philosophy at Yale University.

Brian Leiter is Karl N. Llewellyn Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the Center for Law, Philosophy, and Human Values at the University of Chicago.

Adam Lerner is a graduate student in Philosophy at Princeton University.
Sarah-Jane Leslie is Class of 1943 Professor of Philosophy, Director of the Program in Linguistics, and Founding Director of the Program in Cognitive Science at Princeton University. She is also affiliated with the Department of Psychology, the University Center for Human Values, and the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies.

Jonathan Livengood is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Psychology of Philosophy Laboratory at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is coauthor of The Theory and Practice of Experimental Philosophy (Broadview, 2016), with Justin Sytsma, in addition to numerous articles.

Tania Lombrozo is Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as an affiliate of the Department of Philosophy and a member of the Institute for Cognitive and Brain Sciences. Her research focuses on explanation, abductive inference, causal reasoning, learning, conceptual representation, and social cognition.

Edouard Machery is Professor in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh, Associate Director of the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh, a member of the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition (University of Pittsburgh-Carnegie Mellon University), and Adjunct Research Professor, Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. He is the author of Doing without Concepts (OUP, 2009) as well as the editor of The Oxford Handbook of Compositionality (OUP, 2012), La Philosophie Expérimentale (Vuibert, 2012), Arguing about Human Nature (Routledge, 2013), and Current Controversies in Experimental Philosophy (Routledge, 2014). He has been the editor of the Naturalistic Philosophy section of Philosophy Compass since 2012.

Ron Mallon is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology Program at Washington University in St. Louis.

Justin W. Martin is a graduate student in psychology at Harvard University.

Charles J. Millar is a law student at the University of Toronto.

Kaija Mortensen is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Randolph College. Her work focuses on intuitions, thought experiments, and the nature of philosophical expertise.

Jennifer Nagel is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto.

Shaylene E. Nancekivell is a graduate student in psychology at the University of Waterloo.

Shaun Nichols is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arizona.

Juhwa Park is Research Fellow at Korea Institute for National Unification.

L.A. Paul is Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and Professorial Fellow at Arche, the University of St. Andrews. She is the author of Transformative Experience (OUP, 2014) and coauthor, with Ned Hall, of Causation: A User’s Guide (OUP, 2013).

Elliot Samuel Paul is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Barnard College, Columbia University. He is coeditor of The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays (Oxford University Press, 2014) and cofounder of The Creativity Post (creativitypost.com).
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Derk Pereboom is Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University.

Mark Phelan is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Lawrence University.

Ángel Pinillos is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Arizona State University.

Alexandra Plakias is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Hamilton College.

David Ripley is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut.

David Rose is a graduate student in philosophy at Rutgers University.

Joshua Rust is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Stetson University.

Richard Samuels is Professor of Philosophy at The Ohio State University.

Hagop Sarkissian is Associate Professor of Philosophy at The City University of New York, Baruch College. His research spans topics in ethics, moral psychology, classical Chinese philosophy, and comparative philosophy. His work has been translated into Chinese and Korean.

Jonah N. Schupbach is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah. His research interests include epistemology (formal and mainstream), logic, and the psychology of human reasoning. He has published numerous articles in top journals, including The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Philosophical Studies, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, and Philosophy of Science.

Eric Schwitzgebel is Professor of Philosophy at the University of California at Riverside. His most recent book is Perplexities of Consciousness (MIT, 2011).

Steven A. Sloman is Professor of Cognitive, Linguistic and Psychological Sciences at Brown University.

Stephen Stich is Board of Governors Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at Rutgers University. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a recipient of the Jean Nicod Prize, and was the first recipient of the Gittler Award for Outstanding Scholarly Contribution in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, awarded by the American Philosophical Association.

Dustin Stokes is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah.

Pauline C. Summers is a graduate student in psychology at the University of Waterloo.

Justin Sytsma is Senior Lecturer in the philosophy programme at Victoria University of Wellington. His research focuses on issues in philosophy of psychology and philosophy of mind. As a practitioner of experimental philosophy, Justin’s research into these areas often involves the use of empirical methods. He is co-author of The Theory and Practice of Experimental Philosophy (Broadview, 2016), with Jonathan Livengood, in addition to numerous articles.

Daniel Telech is a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Chicago.

xii
Kevin P. Tobia is a graduate student in philosophy at Yale University.

Lily Tsoi is a graduate student in psychology at Boston College.

John Turri is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Member of the Cognitive Science Program at the University of Waterloo. He directs the Philosophical Science Lab.

Alberto Vanzo is AHRC Early-Career Research Fellow of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Warwick. He works on Kant’s philosophy, early-modern natural philosophy, and the history and methodology of philosophical historiography.

Jonathan M. Weinberg is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arizona.

Timothy Williamson is the Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford University. His publications include *Identity and Discrimination, Vagueness, Knowledge and its Limits, The Philosophy of Philosophy, Modal Logic as Metaphysics, Tetralogue*, and about 200 academic articles on logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language. He has held visiting positions at MIT, ANU, Canterbury University (NZ), Princeton, UNAM (Mexico), Chinese University of Hong Kong, University of Michigan, and Yale.

Jennifer Cole Wright is Associate Professor at the College of Charleston. Her area of research is moral development and moral psychology more generally. Specifically, she studies meta-ethical pluralism, the influence of individual and social “liberal vs. conservative” mindsets on moral judgments, and young children’s early moral development. She coedited, with Hagop Sarkissian, *Advances in Experimental Moral Psychology* and is currently coauthoring a book titled *Virtue Measurement: Theory and Application* with Nancy Snow.
Acknowledgments

This volume would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. We would like to thank Edouard Machery and Joshua Knobe, who served as Advisory Editors on this project, and Liam Cooper, Sally Cooper, and Roshna Mohan at Wiley-Blackwell for their work during various stages of production. We are grateful to all contributors for sharing their research with us, and for all those who served as anonymous reviewers. Finally, we acknowledge that this research was supported by a Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship awarded to Wesley Buckwalter through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
Introduction

Experimental philosophy is a way of doing philosophy. The basic idea is to use empirical methods and techniques typically associated with the sciences to help investigate philosophical questions. This is a very broad and inclusive definition of experimental philosophy. While it has been defined in various ways, often more narrow in scope, the guiding notion behind experimental philosophy is that observation and experimentation are tools that can be used to conduct philosophical inquiry. The purpose of this volume is to introduce you to the empirical approaches being used in philosophy and the ways that these approaches benefit philosophical inquiry.

The idea that philosophy can benefit from empirical inquiry is not new. As far back as Ancient Greece, philosophers called on empirical observations to inform their philosophical accounts. One clear example is Aristotle’s systematic investigations of animals in *History of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*. One goal Aristotle had in these works was to understand what is distinct about human beings by comparing and contrasting their biological features to those of non-human animals. Aristotle also thought that empirical observations were relevant to philosophy in another way. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he claimed that the best approach to philosophy was to find a balance between different views about a philosophical topic “in the light not only of our conclusion and our premises, but also of what is commonly said about it” (1098b, 9–10). Of course, the best way to learn what is commonly said about a topic is also by making observations, and by listening to views that don’t just come from one particular person or group.

Other philosophers, like David Hume, focused on the use of empirical methods in the study of human nature. Hume wrote in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that “we can hope for success in our philosophical researches” by studying “all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life.” Hume thought we could begin to understand philosophical phenomena, like morality, perception, or causation, by first studying our own minds. When it comes to studying the human mind, Hume claimed that it was “impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities
otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular
effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations” (Book I, 6–8).

These examples illustrate two ways in which empirical methods can be used to inform
philosophical inquiries. They can be used to directly investigate philosophical phenomena. They
can also be used to understand how we think and talk about those phenomena. Both of these
approaches are well represented in the history of philosophy. To give but a few more examples,
René Descartes’ dissections of ox eyes informed his theory of visual perception, while Isaac
Newton’s theory of colors was informed by his observations of the reflections, refractions, and
inflections of light through a prism. These philosophers each employed empirical methods even
though they are often associated with very different philosophical traditions.

Contemporary experimental philosophers return to these ways of doing philosophy. They conduct
controlled experiments, and empirical studies more generally, to explore both phenomena of
philosophical interest and how we think about those phenomena. In doing so, they use a wide range
of techniques that were unavailable to philosophers such as Aristotle, Descartes, Newton, and Hume.
These techniques borrow from approaches to empirical study developed in psychology, cognitive
neuroscience, linguistics, behavioral economics, and computer science, among other fields. These
approaches have utilized both basic techniques of science as well as the latest technological develop-
ments such as brain imaging, big-data searches, advanced statistics, and causal modeling. Today
experimental philosophers continue to find new and exciting ways of combining questions and tech-
niques from both the sciences and philosophy. 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.
Experimental philosophers also argue that these kinds of studies can provide insight into philosophical
phenomena themselves, though the details vary from one philosophical issue to another.

This volume provides a handbook to these developments in experimental philosophy. It is sep-
parated into two parts. The first part situates experimental philosophy within Western philosophy,
both currently and historically, and explores the various motivations for and impact of the exper-
imental turn in philosophy. Though there is a long historical precedent for experimental philos-
ophy, some philosophers have objected to the application of empirical methods in philosophical
inquiry. This section includes some of the leading proponents as well as prominent critics of
experimental philosophy. They discuss different conceptions of experimental philosophy and,
more generally, the impact the practice has for philosophical methodology. Together we hope that
these chapters will give the reader a sense of different perspectives on and approaches to experi-
mental philosophy that are found within the discipline today.

The second part of the volume surveys some of the most important work that has been done by
contemporary experimental philosophers. These chapters detail the application of empirical
methods to questions from nearly every major sub-discipline of academic philosophy. Research areas
include central topics in the philosophy of action, moral and political philosophy, philosophy of
mind, epistemology, philosophy of language, metaphysics, logic, and metaphilosophy. These chap-
ters not only review the empirical research that has been conducted surrounding a particular
philosophical question but also describe several ways in which future empirical research might con-
tribute to philosophical inquiry. It is our hope that these chapters will serve as both an introdution
to this research and a research tool that will help guide future experimental study in philosophy.

Wesley Buckwalter
University of Waterloo

Justin Sytsma
Victoria University of Wellington
Part I

Experimental Philosophy
*Past, Present, and Future*
1

Experimental Philosophy and the Philosophical Tradition

STEPHEN STICH AND KEVIN P. TOBIA

1.1 Introduction

The term “experimental philosophy” has no standard or widely agreed-upon definition, and recent writers have proposed very different accounts of how the term should be used (Knobe and Nichols 2008; Alexander 2012; Rose and Danks 2013; Alfano and Loeb, 2014; Knobe this volume). On the usage we prefer, the term has a broad extension and very fuzzy boundaries: experimental philosophy is empirical work undertaken with the goal of contributing to a philosophical debate, though of course that may not be the only goal. Sometimes people doing experimental philosophy conduct experiments, and sometimes they don’t. Philosophically motivated ethnography like Richard Brandt’s pioneering study of Hopi ethics (Brandt 1954) and John Ladd’s study of the moral code of the Navaho (Ladd 1957) certainly count as experimental philosophy, on our interpretation of the term. Indeed, we think that Brandt and Ladd have a good claim to being the first important contributors to contemporary experimental philosophy. Many experimental philosophers are philosophers by training and professional affiliation, but some of the best work in experimental philosophy has been done by people who do not have advanced degrees in philosophy and do not teach in philosophy departments. The work on altruism by social psychologist Daniel Batson is, in our view, one of the very best examples of experimental philosophy to date (Batson 1991, 2011).

During the past decade, the term “experimental philosophy” has often been used in a much more restricted way. On that more restricted interpretation, which we will adopt for the remainder of this chapter, experimental philosophy is the empirical investigation of philosophical intuitions, the factors that affect them, and the psychological and neurological mechanisms that underlie them. This characterization of experimental philosophy immediately raises a pair of questions:

1 What are philosophical intuitions?
2 Why do experimental philosophers want to study them using the methods of empirical science?
Our goal in the remainder of this chapter will be to explore answers to these questions and explain how these answers link experimental philosophy to the philosophical tradition.

1.2 What Are Philosophical Intuitions?

We’ll begin with the first question, around which a lively controversy has erupted, with different philosophers defending quite different accounts (Bealer 1998; Goldman 2007; Ludwig 2007; Pust 2000; Sosa 2007a; Williamson 2004; for a useful overview, see Alexander 2012). We think that the best way to approach this question is to focus on paradigm cases – uncontroversial examples of the appeal to intuitions in philosophical argument. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, episodes like the following have played an important role in philosophical argument. A philosopher describes a situation, sometimes real but more often imaginary, and asks whether some of the people or objects or events in the situation described have some philosophically interesting property or relation, for example:

- Is the action described morally wrong?
- Does the person described know that she will not win the lottery?
- When the speaker in the story uses the word “water” does the word refer to H₂O?
- Does the “Chinese Room” exhibit real intentionality?

When things go well, both the philosopher and her audience will agree on an answer, with little or no conscious reflection, and they will take the answer to be obvious. The answer will then be used as evidence for or against some philosophical thesis. The mental states that underlie episodes of this sort are paradigm cases of philosophical intuitions.

Examples of this strategy of argument can be found in the writings of many historically important philosophers. Here is a well-known passage from Plato’s Republic in which Socrates uses the strategy in a conversation about the nature of justice.

Well said, Cephalus, I replied: but as concerning justice, what is it? – to speak the truth and to pay your debts – no more than this? And even to this are there not exceptions? Suppose a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he asks for them when he is not in his right mind, ought I to give them back to him? No one would say that I ought or that I should be right in doing so, any more than they would say that I ought always to speak the truth to one who is in his condition.

You are quite right, he replied.

But then, I said, speaking the truth and paying your debts is not a correct definition of justice.

Quite correct, Socrates. (Plato, 1892, I, 131, 595; italics & boldface added)

In the italicized sentence, Socrates sets out the imaginary situation and poses a question about justice. In the next sentence (in boldface), he reports his own intuition and confidently asserts what contemporary philosophers typically assume, namely that everyone who was confronted with the question would share his intuition. Cephalus reports the same intuition and agrees that the intuition would be shared by everyone. Then Socrates argues that the intuition shows that the account of justice that Cephalus has offered is mistaken.

Lots of examples like this can be found in more recent philosophy; they are particularly abundant in many areas of contemporary “analytic” philosophy. Here is a very brief catalog:
In metaphysics, debates about personal identity still invoke intuitions about Locke’s famous example of the prince and the cobbler, along with a wide variety of more recent cases in which brains are transplanted, memories and whole bodies are duplicated, and people use Star Trek teletransporters.

In ethics, intuitions about wayward trollies, organ harvesting, Roman circuses, inquiring murderers, children drowning in bathtubs, violinists whose survival requires being connected to someone else for nine months, and a host of other cases fill the literature.

In discussions of free will, philosophers often invoke intuitions about people locked in prison cells, people with brain implants controlled by evil scientists, people who dislike their own desires, and a variety of other cases.

In epistemology, appeal to intuitions about lottery cases, fake barn cases, stakes cases, and a seemingly endless variety of Gettier cases abound.

In the philosophy of language, philosophers rely on intuitions about sorites cases, Twin Earth cases, Gödel cases, and arthritis cases, among many others.

Elsewhere in the philosophy of language, when working out the semantics of philosophically important expressions, intuitions about what a sentence entails (or does not entail) are crucial. For example, Donald Davidson (following Anthony Kenny) famously argued that we have the intuition that (i) “Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom with a knife at midnight” entails (ii) “Jones buttered the toast,” and that poses a problem for philosophers who would analyze (i) as containing a five-place predicate (Davidson 1967).

In the philosophy of mind, intuitions about inverted spectrums, zombies, Chinese Rooms, and Mary the neuroscientist who has never seen the color red are widely invoked.

In the philosophy of science, intuitions about explanation (the height of the flagpole explains the length of the shadow, but the length of the shadow does not explain the height of the flagpole) and confirmation (a black raven confirms the generalization that all ravens are black, but a white piece of chalk does not) play a central role in supporting or challenging theories of explanation and confirmation.

This list is, of course, far from complete. It would be an easy task to add dozens of additional examples.

What do the intuitions invoked in these examples have in common? As noted earlier, when things go well, people who are asked about these cases find themselves almost immediately disposed to offer an answer, though they are not consciously aware of engaging in any reasoning that leads them to that answer. We are inclined to think that this is all that these cases have in common. Thus we endorse a broadly inclusive account of philosophical intuition. On this point, we agree with Timothy Williamson, who maintains that more restrictive accounts of philosophical intuition will not reflect the way the term “intuition” is invoked in contemporary philosophy.

Although we could decide to restrict the term “intuition” to states with some list of psychological or epistemological features, such a stipulation would not explain the more promiscuous role the term plays in the practice of philosophy. (Williamson 2007, 218)

Of course, it could turn out that most or all of the mental states that philosophers have called “philosophical intuitions” share interesting psychological properties that can’t be detected without careful empirical work. But in an important recent paper, Jennifer Nado (2013a) argues that this is not the case. Nado reviews a growing body of scientific evidence suggesting that “the mental states which are generally assumed to fall under the category of ‘intuition’ likely comprise a highly heterogeneous group; from the point of view of psychology or of neuroscience, in fact, ‘intuitions’ appear to be generated by several fundamentally different sorts of mental...