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Different Voices, Perfect Storms, and Asking Grandma What She Thinks: Situating Experimental Philosophy in Relation to Feminist Philosophy

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Abstract

At first glance it might appear that experimental philosophers and feminist philosophers would make good allies. Nonetheless, experimental philosophy has received criticism from feminist fronts, both for its methodology and for some of its guiding assumptions. Adding to this critical literature, I raise questions concerning the ways in which “differences” in intuitions are employed in experimental philosophy. Specifically, I distinguish between two ways in which differences in intuitions might play a role in philosophical practice, one which puts an end to philosophical conversation and the other which provides impetus for beginning one. Insofar as experimental philosophers are engaged in deploying “differences” in intuitions in the former rather than the latter sense, I argue that their approach is antithetical to feminist projects. Moreover, this is even (and perhaps especially) the case when experimental philosophers deploy “differences” in intuitions along lines of gender.

Keywords: experimental philosophy, women in philosophy, diversity in philosophy, metaphilosophy

At first glance it might appear that experimental philosophers and feminist philosophers would make good allies. After all, both sets of projects draw on methods from other disciplines for which they have both been accused from some quarters of being less philosophical, or even not philosophical at all, and both seek in some form or another to shake up the discipline of philosophy. Moreover, some experimental philosophers have explicitly expressed a concern for issues of diversity and gender in philosophy, which would seem to put them in line with feminist philosophical projects. Nonetheless, experimental philosophy has received criticism from feminist fronts, both for its methodology and for some of its guiding assumptions.

For example, Lisa Schwartzman calls attention to the way in which experimental philosophy does not interrogate structures and institutions that might

encourage particular intuitions over others. Schwartzman connects this absence to individualist assumptions and to an atomistic view of the individual underlying particular experimental approaches to philosophical questions (Schwartzman 2012, 308-310), making it antithetical to many feminist projects insofar as atomistic and individualist views of the subject have obscured, among other things, the degree to which human beings are interdependent and rely upon the unacknowledged labor of women and other non-dominantly situated persons.¹

From a different angle, Louise Antony is critical of and raises serious concerns about the idea, forwarded by some experimental philosophers, that “differences in intuition” might contribute to the demographic gender imbalance found in academic philosophy. Antony criticizes this idea on two fronts, questioning the degree to which the methodologies purporting to find gender differences are rigorously scientific (Antony 2012, 243-9) and raising the possibility that talk of “different voices” might do more harm than good insofar as it may inadvertently (but no less powerfully) contribute to the more rigorously empirically demonstrated phenomena of implicit bias and stereotype threat (233-6). Given the evidence, Antony cautions, we ought to take a “perfect storm” approach to questions of diversity in philosophy, identifying and analyzing the ways in which forms of discrimination might converge, interact, and intensify within the discipline (250-1).

While I share a number of these concerns, I have reservations about casting the question of whether intuitions might play a role in philosophy’s demographics as a choice between “different voices” and “perfect storms,” as Antony has done. I agree that a “perfect storm” approach is warranted. Still, I think Antony is too quick to align Buckwalter and Stich’s 2014 essay “Gender and Philosophical Intuition” with a concern for different *philosophical* voices. Neither Buckwalter and Stich nor Antony go so far as to designate the possible differences in question as philosophical. However, there is more than one way to understand the meaning of “different voices,” and it is here that I think feminist and other philosophers concerned with philosophy’s demographics ought to pay very close attention. As I aim to show, the way so-called gender and cultural “differences” are understood by some experimental philosophers is not at all compatible with feminist projects, including those feminist projects that take seriously differences in social position (differences between women and men, as well as differences among women). Moreover, how and why so-called gender and cultural “differences” are deployed by these experimental philosophers is not only incompatible with, but also seriously antithetical to, feminist philosophical concerns.

¹ See for example, Baier (1985); Campbell (2003) and (2014); Code (1991), (1995), and (2006); Collins (2008); Kittay (1999); Lugones (2003); MacKenzie and Stoljar (2000); and Meyers (1996).

Experimental philosophy interrogates the role of claims taken to be obvious within philosophy and specifically within philosophical thought experiments. Because thought experiments often, but not always, point to something philosophers take to be obvious (e.g., that Gettier examples “obviously” do not qualify as cases of knowledge), the primary method of experimental philosophy is to present such thought experiments to non-philosophers to see whether they find obvious what a philosopher would through the use of surveys that ask things like “does this count as knowledge, yes or no?”

Before I give further details to and analysis of the experimental approach, however, I recount here my initial response to hearing that experimental philosophers had purportedly found differences in judgments about traditional thought experiments that fell along lines of gender and culture. I should stress at the outset that subsequent research² has failed to replicate the findings of the two studies that are the catalyst to the narrative I provide here, seriously calling into question the data they provide. Nonetheless, I recount my own initial response to these studies for three reasons.

First, I do share Antony’s concern that emphasizing differences may in some cases compound rather than alleviate philosophy’s lack of demographic diversity. My own response to *talk* of differences (as opposed to actual differences) illustrates at least one kind of frustration that such emphasis can elicit.

Second, my account also demonstrates a way of responding to differences in philosophical intuitions that, as I shall argue later in this paper, is missed and even possibly obscured by the experimental approach.

Third, by demonstrating an alternative response to possible differences in philosophical intuitions, my account illustrates how narratives, like thought experiments, can be philosophically informative, calling philosophical attention to avenues of inquiry not yet considered.

I. A Story About Differences in Intuition, or a Thought Experiment of Sorts...

It sometimes happens that scientific data that appear to justify or explain current social relations (for example, that women and men think differently, or that Western minds are somehow different from non-Western minds) receive a great deal of attention and traction,³ while subsequent studies that provide data

² See for example, Adleberg, Thompson, and Nahmias (2014); Kim and Yuan (Forthcoming); Seyedsayamdost (2012); Seyedsayamdost (2014); and Nagel, San Juan, and Mar (2013).

³ Interestingly, I “received word” that experimental philosophers were investigating differences in intuitions along gender lines well before Buckwalter and Stich’s article hit the press. The single footnote in Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich’s

contradicting such research do not garner the same interest, instead fading into the background, if they are noticed at all. So while there seems to be a good deal of evidence that there are *not* differences in philosophical intuitions that fall along lines of gender and culture,⁴ the claim that there might be remains live in some philosophical circles. Thus I found myself at a major philosophical conference, amidst fervent discussions of how (or whether) gender and cultural differences yielded differences in judgments concerning Gettier examples. In particular, it appeared at the time (although this is now disputed) that a statistically significant number of women and of East Asians judged Gettier cases to be cases of actual knowledge.⁵

It is a peculiar experience (although perhaps not uncommon to those complexly situated within relations of dominance and subordination) to be told that a statistically significant number of “people like you”⁶ make certain judgments that

“Normativity and Epistemic Intuition” that “we are confident that gender differences will be an important area for further exploration” (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2008, 45, footnote 30) caused enough buzz about “gender differences” at one conference I attended to move me to devote some time to considering their arguments. It is for this reason that I initially focused on the Buick/Pontiac Gettier case even though the purported “difference” found was between Western students and East Asian students.

⁴ Again I direct the reader to Adleberg, Thompson, and Nahmias (2014); Kim and Yuan (Forthcoming); Seyedsayamdost (2012); Seyedsayamdost (2014); and Nagel, San Juan, and Mar (2013).

⁵ While “Normativity and Epistemic Intuition” treats differences between U.S. and East Asian students’ intuitions, the idea that there *might* be differences that fell along lines of gender and the fact that Buckwalter and Stich were beginning to investigate such differences was enough to cause discussions at this conference to elide the two. Why conference participants zeroed in on Gettier examples (“Normativity and Epistemic Intuition” treats other types of thought experiments as well), I am not sure. Nonetheless at the conference I attended the result was much debate over the implications of whether “East Asians and women have different intuitions about Gettier examples.”

⁶ To be fair, the people tested and discussed by experimental philosophers are typically (although not always) ones who have *not yet* taken (or have taken only one) philosophy class. So it might be objected that the category of persons under discussion is not one to which I belong, since I am a professional philosopher. In response to this potential objection: first, at one point in time I was a woman in her first philosophy class and so the puzzlement still remains, “my past self found thought experiments in my first philosophy class intriguing and thought provoking,

do not make any sense to you at all whatsoever.⁷ When one is not a member of the group in question, one can “make sense” of the apparent incomprehensibility of members of the other group by recourse to things like cognitive and/or cultural differences between groups. But when you are a member of the group in question, this strategy does not work very well, since it is *as members* of the group to which you belong that these people are said to be making the judgments.⁸

When the groups in question are highly essentialized—i.e., when you are aware that there is a cognitive tendency among all parties involved to make the “presumption that all members of the kind share a fundamental and explanatory nature, which licenses broad generalizations about all members of the kind and underwrites projections of properties observed in one member to other members of

so what on earth is going on with these women?” Second, distinguishing persons with regard to whether they have studied philosophy does not produce essentialized categories in the way that dividing them according to gender does; consequently the gender division often becomes the more salient feature in such conversations. And third, as it happens, the manner in which the discussions took place at the conference I attended *did* tend to frame the issue as being about “women and East Asians...” such that this was in fact the claim that I was confronted with.

⁷ I would distinguish this experience from cases where one disagrees in judgment, but can at least make sense of the other’s judgment. When one cannot even begin to think of reasons another could hold for making a particular judgment, one is at a loss for how to understand another’s judgment. Fortunately, one thing an epistemic agent can often do in these kinds of cases is to ask the other person why they make a particular judgment and not another. In such cases, parties stand to learn something about the world from one another. However, structures of domination and subordination might make these kinds of epistemic pursuits particularly difficult. While there is a wealth of feminist philosophical literature on this very topic, I direct the reader unfamiliar with this literature to Dotson (2011), Narayan (1988), and Young (1997).

⁸ One might have recourse to considering oneself “exceptional” in some sense, grouped with, but not really akin to, those others who do not make sense. One might, for example, consider oneself (and even be considered by others) to be an “honorary member” of the group to which one is not normally classified as belonging. When the group one *is* otherwise said to belong is non-dominantly situated in relation to the group one is granted “honorary” membership, this “honorary” membership (e.g. honorary male, honorary white, or “not like most women,” “not like most blacks” etc.) raises one’s own individual status at the expense of reinforcing relations of domination. For this reason, I think honorifics of this sort ought to be resisted and questioned.

the kind” (Antony 2012, 241)—an extreme cognitive dissonance can result.⁹ On the one hand, you are categorized with these others who are making a particular judgment and you are aware that their membership in your group is being invoked as somehow significant to their making this judgment. Moreover, the grouping invoked and to which you belong is one that is widely seen and experienced as being fundamental to who a person is,¹⁰ so that your being categorized in this way is not something you can simply ignore.

On the other hand, the judgment being attributed to people *as members* of the group to which you belong really makes *no sense* to you. And so, confronted with the idea that there could, in some possible world, be a state of affairs where a statistically significant number of women judge Gettier examples to be cases of actual knowledge, I attempted to make sense of the situation by manipulating Gettier examples into cases that I could maybe somehow see as possible candidates for knowledge, even if in the end I might still judge them not to be knowledge.¹¹

For example, when presented with the case in which Bob holds the belief that his friend, Jill, owns an American car because Bob has known Jill to have driven a Buick for many years, but is wholly unaware that Jill’s Buick was recently stolen and replaced by her with a Pontiac, I wondered whether those who answered “yes, Bob

⁹ For in such cases the stakes are raised. Groups that are essentialized are typically, if not always, situated non-dominantly in relation to others—it is precisely because of relations of dominance that cognitive tendencies that unfairly erase one’s status as an individual can be maintained. Still, it strikes me as interesting, and worth noting, that one *could* experience cognitive dissonance and care a great deal about why a significant number of persons regardless of social category make a particular judgment that appears to make no sense. In doing so, one would, I think, need to consider what is at stake given these differences of judgment, and depending on stakes and context, approach the difference in a variety of ways, e.g. by locating a cause, trying to generate reasons that could support the judgment, or simply asking, “why do you judge things this way instead of that?”

¹⁰ Please note that I am not claiming that gender *is* fundamental to who people are. There is serious disagreement among feminists as to how fundamental gender in fact is. Still, it seems fairly uncontroversial to make the claim that gender identity is something our current socio-historical situation forces one to at least be cognizant of in a variety of ways and for a good deal of one’s lifespan.

¹¹ I grant that this is not the *only* way to make sense of the situation. As it happens, this is the way *I* attempted to do so. Moreover, I think trying to view a situation, imagined or otherwise, in a manner whereby one *might* have a different intuitive judgment than one actually has is an important cognitive activity, a point for which I will argue later in the paper.

does know that Jill owns an American car” if probed further as to why they think so, might answer something along the lines of, “Bob and Jill have been friends for many years, at least as many years as Bob has known Jill to drive a Buick, so perhaps Bob has very good reason to believe Jill would never drive anything but an American car. For example, maybe he knows Jill is partial to “buying American,” so he has good reason to believe that, should she ever have need to do so, Jill would only ever replace her Buick with another American car. And sure enough when faced with this situation that is exactly what Jill did. . .”¹²

Of course, that’s not how Gettier cases are supposed to work, but as with any described situation (including those presented in thought experiments) we are given a sketch and the mind fills in various details, attending to some parts of the situation described and not others in a variety of ways. I therefore wondered if something like this might be going on in the specific instances where differences in intuitions about Gettier cases were purportedly found. That different groups of people might habitually draw on particular background assumptions to make sense of the world (which when taken seriously by people who habitually draw on different background assumptions, would help this second group to attend to different aspects of the world than they normally do) is a little less troubling to me than the claim, “a lot of people like you don’t judge Gettier examples the way a philosopher would.” After all, presenting thought experiments to people devoid of any context with which to make sense of the scenarios as highlighting one thing as opposed to another seems highly likely to result in divergent understandings of those thought experiments, which could, in a way, be interesting.

Given the buzz surrounding the “different voices” hypothesis, I was curious and wondered if anyone had done more qualitatively oriented research to see what people had to say about why they judged Gettier examples one way as opposed to another. As it happens, I subsequently found myself at another conference with a number of experimental philosophers, so I thought I would ask the experts to see if they could point me to a qualitative study. Interestingly, I found it nearly impossible to get an answer from anyone and one particularly vocal advocate of experimental philosophy simply replied by saying, “Are you serious? Do we *really* want to ask Grandma what she thinks?”

Setting aside for the moment the fact that some of the most accomplished and brilliant philosophers I know happen to be grandmothers (or that my own maternal

¹² While this particular case is one used in an earlier piece by Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich (see footnote 5, above), I do think it demonstrates that Gettier cases *can* be manipulated back into cases that appear closer to instances of actual knowledge than they are designed and taken to be within the context of analytic epistemology.

grandmother, though not a professional academic, was as they say “smart as a whip”), I was a bit taken aback because this response was not at all what I would have expected from someone who has vociferously championed the claim that “what non-philosophers actually think” should matter to philosophers. Said differently, I found it very curious indeed that what seemed intuitively obvious to one philosopher, me, was not at all intuitively obvious to another philosopher, my interlocutor. Rather than a “different voices” hypothesis, my interlocutor’s response implicitly advanced a “voices worth hearing/voices not worth hearing” hypothesis.

II. Situating Experimental Philosophy and Its Need for (a Certain Kind of) Difference

Perhaps I ought not to have been so surprised. Had I known more about experimental philosophy at the time I would have understood how and why differences in philosophical intuitions matter to experimental philosophers.

For those unfamiliar with experimental philosophy I will now provide a few more details to this approach before analyzing the problems I see with its interest in and understanding of differences in intuition. As previously stated, experimental philosophers are concerned with what philosophers take to be obvious and the role of claims taken to be obvious in philosophical argument. Specifically, they are concerned with the evidentiary status of such claims. So, for example, in a Gettier case where a philosopher would say “it is obvious that we would not call this knowledge” or “normally we would not call such a case knowledge,” the experimental philosopher says “but how do you *know* that’s not what people would normally call knowledge?” and then conducts surveys to test what people find obvious or “normally” say about the example.

What is of interest to the experimental philosopher is not so much to establish the truth of the claim the philosopher finds obvious, but rather to call it into question by *finding* divergences and fluctuations in what people take to be obvious, thereby calling into question the kind of philosophical thinking that does not rely upon empirical methods. This distrust of (and in some cases disdain for) claims taken to be so obvious as to need no further justification is aptly represented by the emblem of experimental philosophy, the burning armchair signifying that “armchair thinking” ought to be cast to the flames.

Typically experimental philosophers are divided into two camps. In the first are those who hold a negative thesis that differences and fluctuation in intuitions indicate that intuitions are an unreliable source of truth. Moreover, they contend that “reflection...and dialogue are *not* reliable sources of evidence for (philosophically relevant) claims about our [everyday] concepts” (Kauppinen 2014, 5). Instead, the negative approach urges philosophers to abandon any and all claims that are not empirically verified and to investigate the world through the use of the

sciences. The second camp, typically referred to as the positive approach, is less hostile to philosophical intuitions. While similarly advocating that philosophers remain skeptical concerning what appears intuitively obvious, this camp thinks that in some cases we may indeed find universal agreement regarding some intuitions, and that important things may be learned from investigating the causes of divergence in intuitions.¹³

In both versions, however, finding differences in intuitions *matters* a great deal. Without them there is nothing with which to garner support for the experimental philosopher's claim that philosophers ought to "burn the armchair," abandoning the kind of thinking that does not use verification through scientific experiment.

And yet, there is something curious about this fervent desire to cast aside all claims taken to be obvious as well as the notion that the proper response to divergences in philosophical intuitions is to reject (or to suspend judgment concerning) claims that appear intuitively obvious. To analyze some of the problems I find here, I now turn to Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich's "Normativity and Epistemic Intuition." After analyzing some of the assumptions and attitudes toward differences in intuitions that I find problematic in that piece, I will turn to Buckwalter and Stich's "Gender and Philosophical Intuition" to examine precisely how differences are deployed in this piece in a manner quite distinct from the feminist deployments of differences with which Antony aligns it. My aim in examining these pieces is to highlight *how* and *why* data are used in them, independently of whether the data are in fact accurate, since it is here that I think feminists and those interested in philosophy's demographics ought to pay close attention.¹⁴

III. Different Ways of Responding to Differences in Intuitions

While the name "experimental philosophy" leads one to think of thought experiments, the specific target of the experimental philosopher is what is variously called a conceptual, philosophical, or epistemic intuition. For Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich, who are primarily concerned with epistemic intuitions, "an epistemic intuition

¹³ For a more thorough discussion of the similarities and differences between the negative and positive programs of experimental philosophy see Kauppinen (2014) and Alexander & Weinberg (2007).

¹⁴ By this I do not mean to say that we ought not to pay attention to how the data are collected and/or whether they are in fact accurate. This too is important and Louise Antony already does a fine job of demonstrating why we ought to consider Buckwalter and Stich's data to be inaccurate (Antony 2012). Nonetheless, in addition to accuracy I have questions about why the data are sought and how this influences the way data are interpreted.

is a spontaneous judgment about the epistemic properties of some specific case” (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2008, 19). Anniti Kauppinen, characterizing experimental philosophy more broadly, offers the following: “conceptual intuitions—or Socratic intuitions as they are sometimes called (Margolis and Lawrence 2003)—are roughly speaking, pre-theoretical dispositions to apply concepts to some particular cases or scenarios and refuse to apply them to others” (Kauppinen 2014, 4; internal citation in the original). What is in question is whether such judgments ought to play a role in philosophy at all, given their status as justified due solely to their “obviousness” to the philosopher.

In an attempt to call into question the use of epistemic intuitions, Weinberg, et al., aim to show that philosophical intuitions are in fact highly variable and so not as obvious as philosophers typically claim them to be. By calling into question whether epistemic intuitions are universally shared, Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich hope (as they put it) to undermine “a sizable group of epistemological projects” from Plato, Descartes, and Mill to “much of what has been done in epistemology in the analytic tradition” (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2008, 17).

Because the paper aims at such a large swath of philosophical projects, “the exact details of how they work will play no role in our argument” (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2008, 21). Instead the authors seek to discredit the use of epistemic intuitions altogether by characterizing the kind of philosophical thinking that is their target (from Plato to most of 20th century analytic epistemology) as a process that “takes intuitions (and perhaps other data) as input and produces implicitly or explicitly normative claims as output” (21).

If, the argument goes, normative philosophical claims (the output of philosophical cognitive processes) are generated from input that can vary from population to population (as their experiments aim to show), then the whole procedure should be scrapped. Nowhere do the authors justify the use of this picture to adequately describe philosophical cognition—instead it is assumed as a sort of shared “obvious” intuition concerning what “we” do when we do philosophy. However, appeals to the meanings of our words and attempts to spell out particular implications of everyday concepts can be done for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, not all of which are very aptly described in the way that Weinberg, et al., paint them.

Both thought experiments and appeals to word use appear within the contexts of larger arguments within which authors can direct attention to the phenomenon or difficulty they would like readers to consider. Moreover, considering the use of a word or what it makes sense to say may be asked of a reader for a number of reasons, including but not only: to get clear on one’s commitments, to identify instances where implicit commitments are at odds with stated commitments, to examine the way certain lines of thought obscure and/or distort our understanding

of particular phenomenon, to direct the reader to a very specific aspect of a concept that is of concern to the writer, to create new working concepts for calling attention to things that matter to the writer, and/or even to live well. Insofar as *some* philosophers become so fixated by particular aspects of our lives with words that they cannot see anything else, falling prey to what David Owen and Cressida Heyes call “aspectival captivity”¹⁵ I can understand a frustration with what is being tagged “epistemic intuition.” But does any philosopher really expect that a simple, but proper input, will lead to another philosopher automatically agreeing with them? And when someone finds obvious what another does not, is the only option really simply to throw one’s hands in the air? In what world is this picture of what philosophers do useful? Or, perhaps more pointedly, for *which* philosophers are “hand waving” and “quizzical stares” viable responses to people who do not see what they take to be obvious? For *which* philosophers are such responses not viable?

The homogeneity of the “we” who make judgments deemed to be “obvious” in philosophy and elsewhere has been of great concern to feminist philosophers. Moreover, those who are non-dominantly situated are no strangers to the experience of finding obvious what others do not. However, variability in what appears obvious does not necessarily mean that one ought to abandon the claim taken to be obvious, nor does it necessarily mean that one ought to suspend judgment until one can produce scientific proof, for example, that racism exists or that date rape is indeed rape.

Certainly collecting data can help demonstrate the truth of one’s claim, but it is not the only (and often not the most effective) way of helping one person to perceive what another finds obvious. Sometimes one needs to help another attend to the world in a particular way, much like the scientist might guide the novice to see what is clearly there underneath the microscope. One might even need to help the fellow expert to attend to the world in a novel way in order for something that is obvious as day to one expert to clearly emerge to another. This kind of work, of helping others to attend to the world in particular ways, is important work; it helps to widen our attention to the world and to open new avenues of investigation that until now were perhaps not quite so obvious.

For the purpose of this paper then, I will distinguish between two types of knowledge work. The first is the work of helping others to attend to what one would like to investigate, of getting knowers on the same page, as it were. Following the

¹⁵ Aspectival captivity is the inability (or refusal) to shift one’s attention to other aspects of a given situation, concept, or object of thought, such that epistemic attention is captivated by just one aspect or set of aspects at the expense of others (Owen 2003, 87-91) and (Heyes 2007, 17-20).

philosopher Sara Ahmed, I will call this first kind of work “orientating work.”¹⁶ The second kind of work is what knowers do when we are already on the same page and need to fill in acknowledged gaps in our knowing. This kind of work I will call “procedural work,” in order to encompass the variety of procedures we have for justifying possible candidates for knowledge. It will perhaps not go unnoticed by those familiar with feminist work in philosophy of science that orientating work pertains to the context of discovery (one where we may indeed see a great deal of variation), whereas procedural work pertains to the context of justification.

For many feminist philosophers that “we” find certain things “obvious” may indeed be owing to the *particular* set of persons encompassed by the “we.” However, this is not reason to stop philosophizing from and about particular aspects of the world that are obvious or salient to specific communities. Instead, it is reason to investigate whose interests are being served by some things appearing more obvious than others, to diversify the “we” of philosophers so as to expand philosophical attention to the world, and to engage in orientating knowledge work, finding ways of making what is obvious (*particularly* to those non-dominantly situated in the world) more obvious to others (*particularly* those dominantly situated in the world).¹⁷

Returning to experimental philosophy, we might consider whether in all cases thought experiments and appeals to the obvious are doing procedural work or orientating work.¹⁸ For example, a Gettier case can be taken to be evidence that cases of justified true belief are not knowledge, end of story (doing procedural knowledge work). In contrast, a Gettier case can be taken to be doing orientating work, calling attention to something interesting and curious about the nature of justification that philosophers have not noticed until the example makes this under-theorized area “obvious.” If the latter, one would expect our philosophical attention

¹⁶ In *Queer Phenomenology* Sara Ahmed uses the term “orientating” to describe and analyze various ways in which attention is directed within the world (Ahmed 2006, esp. the introduction and chapter one).

¹⁷ I place emphasis on attending to what is obvious to those non-dominantly situated, because as standpoint epistemologists, among others, have argued, part of what it means to be dominantly situated is precisely to have the epistemic attention of those around you already directed at what you find obvious and to have no (or little) practical need to (re)direct your own attention to what is obvious to subordinated others.

¹⁸ I grant that it may be the case that not all thought experiments and appeals to the obvious are engaged in orientating work, but it seems clear that some cases at least are, and we would be foolish to eliminate this kind of work from our philosophical toolbox.

to expand and new areas of investigation to be followed, such as new debates about and new models for understanding the nature of justification to emerge.

If some of the cases considered by experimental philosophers are indeed engaged in orientating and not procedural knowledge work, then the fact that there might be fluctuation in how these cases are understood is not only unproblematic, but perhaps even to be expected; it can be quite difficult to get another to see a very specific aspect of a concept, which would be made even more difficult by excising the example from the context within which it is offered to a reader.

Still, there is something further to be noticed here that should be of concern to feminist philosophers, and that is the desire to eliminate claims taken (by some, but perhaps not yet others) as obvious. Attempting to eliminate what one takes to be obvious or salient from one's thinking is akin to attempting to eliminate the context of discovery from one's investigations of the world. Moreover, it is akin to attempting to eliminate the very knower from the activity of knowing, a favorite pastime of analytic philosophy, but nonetheless a self-defeating and epistemically harmful project.¹⁹

In this regard, Weinberg, et al., are not really engaged in anything new. Instead of actually eliminating the knower and/or the context of discovery within which certain aspects of the world are more salient than others, eliminating any and all discussion of what one takes to be obvious simply removes these matters from philosophical scrutiny. What we need here is not *less* self-reflexivity, but *more*. In other words, philosophers ought to scrutinize ourselves and the epistemic communities that sustain our knowing to discern whose interests are being served and whose are not by the particular orientations we inhabit that make some things obvious to us while making others less so. For example, one could argue that the fixation on propositional knowing in academic philosophy has left other important types of knowing such as knowing persons seriously under-theorized (Code 1993). One might, furthermore, wonder what aspects of our lives might become more obvious if philosophical attention to the activity of knowing persons were as fine grained as attention toward propositional knowing and the nature of justification. Whose interests might be more adequately served? Whose interests might not?

IV. Attending to Philosophy's "Demographic Challenges"

This approach, however, is not the one recommended by Wesley Buckwalter and Stephen Stich in their essay "Gender and Philosophical Intuition." As stated

¹⁹ Self-defeating insofar as knowing requires a knower, harmful insofar as more often than not the "invisible" knower standing in for "knowing in general" is the knower who is dominantly situated in the world, rendering those non-dominantly situated as less than ideal knowers.

above, the negative version of experimental philosophy depends upon differences and fluctuations in intuitions precisely in order to argue that such intuitions should be excised from philosophy. In “Gender and Philosophical Intuition,” Buckwalter and Stich set out to *find* differences in intuitions along lines of gender and then imagine for their readers “the predicament of a young woman in a philosophy class” (Buckwalter and Stich 2014, 332) who does not share the same intuitions as her male classmates and professor. Following their own intuitions on this imagined predicament, Buckwalter and Stich write that “it is plausible [obvious?] to suppose that some women facing this predicament will be puzzled or confused or uncomfortable or angry or just plain bored...[and some] may become convinced that they aren’t any good at philosophy” (333).

Buckwalter and Stich do not indicate that they consulted any female undergraduates to support their intuitions in constructing this imagined scenario, although they do take care to say that they do not mean to present it in any scientific way (331). Still, one wonders why Buckwalter and Stich saw fit to include such speculation in their paper without testing to see how female undergraduates actually experience their first philosophy class and why two white male professors would feel entitled to imagine what the experiences of female undergraduates must (or even could) be like without actually asking any female undergraduates this question.²⁰ Nonetheless, it is on this basis that they suggest that philosophical education should not rely so heavily on philosophical intuitions and thought experiments (338), thereby forwarding the agenda of the negative approach to experimental philosophy to turn to strictly empirical methods for investigating philosophical questions.

Of course, this is not the only response one can have to finding apparent differences in philosophical intuitions. Instead, one might conclude that it is absolutely imperative to diversify philosophical communities so as to widen the scope of what philosophers find obvious thereby broadening philosophical attention to our shared world. It is here that we can most clearly discern two ways of responding to (apparent) differences in intuitions, one of which is rightly akin to Carol Gilligan’s (1982) concern for different voices, while the other is not.

²⁰ In contrast, Eva Cadavid and W. David Hall have been conducting their own experiments to determine undergraduate perceptions of their philosophy classes, to see whether perceptions confirm Buckwalter and Stich’s speculations or are more consistent with the thesis that stereotypes about philosophy result in a schema clash for women, as speculated by Haslanger (2008), Calhoun (2009), and Antony (2012). Preliminary results indicate that student perceptions are in line with the latter, but not the former (Cadavid et al. 2014).

Recall that Gilligan's study on moral development was *not* a study seeking to establish that women made judgments different from men's judgments. Rather, Gilligan's study was an attempt to make sense of data *already gathered* using Lawrence Kohlberg's scale that suggested there *was* a statistically significant difference in moral judgments between women and men. In other words, Kohlberg's scale appeared to show a difference and Gilligan wanted to know *why*. Moreover, she wanted to know how women made sense of their judgments, not what caused them to make one judgment rather than another.

Here, we might say Gilligan was concerned with women not as objects moved by psychological processes, but as moral *agents*, capable of making sense of their own judgments. Consequently, she conducted qualitative experiments to see whether the instrument being used to chart differences might contain an unhelpful bias resulting in misleading data. By examining the larger narratives within which the women she interviewed made sense of their judgments, Gilligan argued that Kohlberg's scale was indeed biased and that we could make sense of differences in moral judgments with recourse, *not* to gender, but rather to different sets of concerns guiding the different judgments.

Paying attention to and seriously grappling with these different sets of concerns, Carol Gilligan and subsequent theorists from a variety of disciplines explicitly articulated a way of thinking about moral situations that can be employed (or rejected) by anyone, regardless of gender. This kind of work significantly expanded philosophical attention to our moral lives in important ways.

Here, then, is where Antony is wrong to align Buckwalter and Stich not only with Gilligan, but also with philosophers such as Lorraine Code, Linda Alcoff, Iris Young, and Alison Jaggar. These philosophers do not advocate eliminating from philosophy all claims found to be obvious to some but not others, nor do they claim that women have *innate* intuitions that make them different from men. On the contrary, they argue that differences in social location might make some things appear more obvious to women, but that these things can be made more obvious to men, and they *ought to be* made more obvious to *all* philosophers. Moreover, they engage in the difficult task of developing concepts for making what is not yet obvious to some more so, and they demonstrate how philosophical thinking that begins from a different set of concerns can bring into focus whole aspects of the world previously unnoticed or disregarded by philosophers. This kind of work can be seen as enriching our epistemic, moral, and political lives generally speaking, by expanding philosophical attention to more aspects of the world.

However, this is not at all how the negative version of experimental philosophy is oriented. The real analogy to negative-version experimental philosophy's use of apparent differences would be if Kohlberg and Gilligan had noticed differences in moral judgments and concluded that we ought not to discuss

morality or think about morality in any sustained way, since the data showed that there is not universal agreement in moral judgments, or that we ought to conduct more experiments to see what might cause people to respond one way and not another.

However, locating causes does not tell us how one *ought* to respond to the world (unless of course one is relying on an unstated intuition assumed to be shared with one's audience and "obvious" to the writer). Nor does it engage with knowers as epistemic *agents* capable of noticing things about the world and expanding others' attention to the world in ways that might make what is salient, of interest, and obvious to one person more obvious to another. Using differences and fluctuations in what is found to be obvious to argue that we ought not to consider what some *do* take to be obvious is not "listening" to different voices, but rather wielding them in ways that preclude the difficult work of understanding intuitions that are not (or not yet) shared and the work of developing epistemic resources that answer to a wider range of the experienced world.

V. What's Obvious and What is not Within Positive Experimental Approaches

While the negative version of experimental philosophy ironically relies upon the unsupported intuition that differences in intuitions mean we ought to excise intuitions from philosophy altogether, the positive version seems more promising. For example, Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols go to great lengths in the introduction to their first volume of *Experimental Philosophy* to assure readers that "we are not going to give up all other forms of thought" (Knobe and Nichols 2008, 10), that no one "is suggesting that . . . we do away with any of the methods . . . traditionally . . . used" (10), and that "experimental philosophers are calling for a more pluralistic approach" (12). While I am somewhat more sympathetic to the positive projects, I have worries about them, too, which I will discuss briefly in terms of what is "obvious," what is not, and what something's being obvious (or not) might indicate about the epistemic communities that sustain such projects.

Knobe and Nichols categorize experimental philosophy as being engaged, generally speaking, with three types of projects. The first set they describe are projects that inquire into the causes of belief, something they note that was of great interest to philosophers of the past such as Marx, Nietzsche, and Feurbach,

but then something strange happened. Although arguments of this basic type [about things like the impact of religion, tradition, and ideology on our epistemic lives] had traditionally been regarded as extremely important, they came to occupy a far less significant role in the distinctive form of philosophy that rose in the 20th century . . . leading to a diminished interest in questions about, for example, the fundamental sources of religious faith

and a heightened interest in more technical questions. (Knobe and Nichols 2008)

This shift strikes Knobe and Nichols as “a somewhat peculiar one” (7). However, this shift is only peculiar if one ignores the larger socio-historical context and institutions within which this shift took place, something to which a Marxist or Nietzschean genealogical approach would certainly attend.

So what strikes me as more peculiar is that Knobe and Nichols seem unaware of, or at the very least do not see fit to mention, the possibility that pursuing projects even remotely linked to Marx might have been a difficult, even dangerous, endeavor for one who wished to keep an academic job in the United States in the 1950s. Also strikingly peculiar is that Knobe and Nichols seem unaware of (or again simply fail to mention) a rich critical tradition of investigating the sources of belief that flourished within philosophy during the 20th century, not only in the work of such figures as Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Michel Foucault, but also among U.S.-born thinkers within feminist and critical race philosophical traditions, such as Angela Davis, Alain Locke, and Grace Lee Boggs.

Why experimental philosophers, to my knowledge, have not seriously engaged with philosophical work written within the intellectual traditions of non-white, non-male philosophers concerning questions about what “we” do and do not know, what does and does not circulate as “common knowledge,” remains an open question. However, to proceed as if this work does not exist by characterizing a concern with questions about the sources of belief as something absent from philosophy “since the 19th century” contributes to a picture of philosophy that perpetuates a kind of epistemic injustice. At the very least, the illusion of “newness” hinges on disregarding, or remaining ignorant of, whole traditions of thought while granting epistemic authority to define the discipline of philosophy to persons who, for the most part, happen to be white and male.

This leads to the second set of projects Knobe and Nichols outline: projects interested in doxastic diversity. Here the authors note that “at the turn of the century anthropologists provided a catalog of . . . striking cultural diversity . . . Such diversity . . . was an important catalyst to philosophical reflection” (11). What they fail to note, however, is that doxastic and practical diversity was also a catalyst for European philosophers’ arguments that non-Europeans were not human or lacked history or true moral understanding. This kind of thinking, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, was not limited to “armchair” thinking, but infiltrated scientific pursuits as well.²¹ The problem here was neither the presence of armchairs nor the absence of lab coats, but rather with how people were, and continue to be,

²¹ See for example Gould (1981).

organized in relation to them. In our current context, if “we” take the view that the only way the meaning of concepts can be engaged is to collect data about how people respond to “yes or no” questions, then women and people of color can be relegated to data sets for white men to discuss, preventing epistemic engagement with aspects of the lived world that might unsettle dominant interests.

In other words, those in the discipline of philosophy stand to learn a great deal by *following* the intuitions of philosophers from traditionally under-represented groups, *particularly* when those intuitions are not at first shared.

This is, of course, easier said than done. One of Sara Ahmed’s interests in calling attention to the ways in which attention to the world is orientated is to identify and examine how it can be coercively orientated, making it difficult to call attention to that which unsettles historically and institutionally dominant interests. In such cases, reorienting oneself might require some knowers to “unlearn” habits of epistemic hubris that make it seem as though we could dispense with the friction provided by other knowers in order to know the world well.²² I suspect a concern with precisely this kind of hubris might drive the impulse (in some at least) to “burn the armchair.”

But to replace the armchair with a lab coat does not rid us of the hubris that resided in the thinker to begin with. Instead, knowing well (and without hubris) might hinge upon an ability to become disoriented and reoriented in the world by a wide range of lives. Such reorientation would require not data sets, since data sets do not instruct us on how to understand or be oriented toward them, but rather the creation, use, and maintenance of concepts honed on and developed by a wide range of bodies, not all socially located in the same position. And this would require, among other things, more diversity in philosophy departments and more serious, wide-spread engagement with work *by* (and not just “about”) members of groups previously excluded from the discipline—*especially* work that is disorienting to and reorients those dominantly situated.

Notice, however, that maintaining that one can excise all intuitions so as to approach the world, not from a perspective, but from an everywhere (or nowhere), removes from consideration and scrutiny the question of how one’s approach *is* directed to some parts of the world and not others. Moreover, approaching the world by proceeding down a particular path as though it were the only path available can be a way of coercively requiring others to be on a page shaped by particular interests to the exclusion of others.

²² Here I follow José Medina (2013) in advocating the importance of productive *resistance* from other knowers, differently situated in the world, for knowing the world well.

Ahmed calls these kinds of maneuvers “straightening devices” (Ahmed 2006, 92). I worry that experimental philosophy may, perhaps inadvertently, be a straightening device, still engaged in organizing the world according to concepts that were and continue to be honed, for the most part, on the bodies of white men. Furthermore, I am concerned that relegating non-white, non-male people to comparative sets of statistical data may be just one more way of deflecting attention away from the world as it actually matters and materializes in the interaction between non-dominantly situated subjects and their/our lived worlds.

This issue is one that can be seen operating in the third set of projects catalogued by Knobe and Nichols, which they characterize as being concerned with “the mind and its workings.” Using my distinction between two types of knowledge work (orientating and procedural) there are at least two ways in which one can understand the question, “What is a mind and how do minds work?” One is to understand the question as concerning an uncharted section of a path we are already on, the other is to understand the question as concerning where the path is. Knobe and Nichols appear to be doing the former, where minds are identified as discrete objects somehow lodged inside the heads of individuals whose causal properties can be discerned by observing behavioral responses to surveys.

But thinking that this is the *only* way to consider what minds are is to preclude consideration of what we ought to be regarding when we ask the question “what is a mind?” The likelihood that one will neglect this distinction seems high for persons who think they are not engaging intuitions in their knowledge pursuits. Coupled with social power and a sense that one’s own experienced world is all the world there is might lead to “quizzical stares” as opposed to a sense of wonderment concerning those aspects of the experienced world that cannot be understood without actually listening to and being epistemically moved by others.

VI. Listening to Others

Returning to the question as to whether philosophy’s demographics ought to be framed in terms of Antony’s perfect storm, Buckwalter and Stich’s different voices, or my own sense that we ought to be asking and listening to Grandma about what she thinks, philosophers stand to learn a great deal not just by considering the *causes* of our demographics, but also the *effects* of them on our ability to know the world well.

Many of the omissions and problems I point out with Knobe and Nichols’ characterization of the projects of experimental philosophy, for example, might have been more noticeable to them if they were engaged more fully with feminist philosophers and other non-dominantly situated philosophers who are attempting to reorient philosophical attention so that it is shaped by a wider range of human experience. This kind of reorientation requires philosophers to engage with

philosophers from under-represented groups as epistemic *agents*, not as objects of study. Among the reasons why Antony's concern with such things as implicit bias, gender scripts, and stereotype threat is important is that these mechanisms are ways of suppressing the epistemic *agency* of members of traditionally underrepresented groups. When one is dealing with an unwarranted credibility deficit it is that much more difficult to call epistemic attention to whole areas of human experiencing that are systematically ignored and/or "not obvious" to some but perfectly obvious to others who are similarly subjected to unwarranted deficits in credibility attributions.

While I agree with Antony that the "different voices" approach advocated by Buckwalter and Stich may indeed exacerbate the situation, making it seem as though there are unbreachable and "natural" epistemic chasms in how men and women intuit the world, I do not share the intuition that theirs is the only way to understand or to approach possible differences in intuitions. Moreover, I do not think Antony is correct to align Buckwalter and Stich's treatment of apparent "differences" with feminist work that takes differences in social positioning seriously. Instead, a good deal of feminist work that takes differences seriously does so with the understanding that while one's situatedness in the world can indeed make some things appear more obvious, part of the work that epistemic agents can do is to *call* others' attention to different aspects of the world, making them *more* obvious to others.

This is no easy task, particularly when philosophers posit the matter of something's being obvious as either simply "how things are" or, if not this, then something we ought to disregard altogether or investigate solely in terms of causal mechanisms acting on discrete individuals. Instead, the obvious may very well be something that it takes work to notice,²³ and it is work that can only be done by engaging with other epistemic agents who find these aspects of the world to be so. To take seriously and attempt to engage the world in ways that are informed by what others find obvious is to engage with those others as epistemic *agents* capable of orientating one's epistemic attention to the world. This kind of engagement does require philosophers to deal with the perfect storms that suppress women's epistemic agency, but it also requires engaging with philosophers from under-represented groups *as* epistemic agents, *particularly* with regard to what they/we find obvious and others do not, reorienting philosophical attention so that new things may appear more obvious than they did before.

²³ For an analysis of one way in which it might require a good deal of work to notice the obvious as well as one particular way of systematically avoiding what is obvious to non-dominantly situated subjects, see Pohlhaus (2012).

Attending to the world well and in ways that are epistemically *informed* by others is complex business. This much I hope to have made at least a little more obvious to some. Moreover, seriously expanding philosophical attention to our lived world requires philosophers to look for and to pursue equitable philosophical engagement at places where there are differences in what appears obvious and what does not. Given social relations of dominance and subordination, this type of work is and will continue to be difficult. Nonetheless, it is work that many non-dominantly situated thinkers have been pursuing for quite some time, since it is work we must do in order to live. Grandmothers may very well be worth asking and listening to, precisely because they may bring different epistemic resources to the conversation, and in so doing enrich the field of knowing.

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