Experimental Philosophy and
the Epistemic Status of Intuitions

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Experimental Philosophy and the Epistemic Status of Intuitions

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Introduction

One of the central questions in epistemology asks for the sources of knowledge. Next to experience, testimony, and memory, intuition has been traditionally discussed as a possible source of knowledge. The role of intuition is special in that it typically serves as a fundamental source in the following sense. All justification, so the famous trilemma, must either go in circles, issue into an infinite regress, or rest on some fundamental, axiomatic assumptions. Intuition has often been taken to provide such a regress-stopping fundament. The question whether intuition is a trustworthy source of justification has recently received a lot of renewed attention due to the new movement of experimental philosophy.

The guiding question of this thesis is whether philosophical intuitions are a trustworthy source of evidence. The answers I will present and discuss (both positive and negative) are limited to the ones that have figured in the recent debate surrounding experimental philosophy. I will first lay out the frameworks of the debate in giving an overview over experimental philosophy and presenting different views on the nature of philosophical intuitions. I will then offer a crude reconstruction of the experimentalists’ challenge to philosophical intuitions. The two most central defenses of intuitions (Conceptual Difference Defense and Expertise Defense) will be discussed, before I finally turn to a critical examination of the most sophisticated version of the experimentalist

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1 See especially Descartes, who took intuition to be an indubitable and infallible source. (However, not everything that goes under the name of intuition today qualifies as intuition in Descartes’ sense. See Hintikka 1999 for an historical synopsis of the different notions of intuition.)

challenge, Jonathan Weinberg's argument from Hopelessness. Throughout the thesis I will try to
defend the view of Intuition Pluralism which runs orthogonally to the whole debate: Intuition
Pluralism says that philosophical intuitions differ in their trustworthiness and that this fact is
underappreciated both by defenders and critics of intuition.

What is Experimental Philosophy?

Experimental philosophy is the young movement that, very roughly, challenges by empirical means
traditional philosophy’s armchair reliance on philosophical intuitions. In fact, there are many rather
different and even mutually incompatible projects being pursued under the name of experimental
philosophy. The most general distinction is between the positive and the negative program of
experimental philosophy (cf. Alexander, Mallon & Weinberg 2009). Very roughly, the positive
program only criticizes the armchair-aspect of traditional appeals to intuition. According to the
positive program, the traditional method should be scientifically supplemented, i.e. intuitions
should not simply be appealed to from the armchair, but should be supported by an empirical basis.
The negative program on the other hand, uses the empirical backing not to support armchair
intuitions, but to discredit them. The negative program asks philosophers to abandon the practice
of appealing to intuitions; hence this view also goes under the name ‘restrictionism’. The two sides
of experimental philosophy can also be described as pursuing different questions: The positive
program explores which intuitions the folk actually have and how they work; the negative program
asks whether these intuitions are trustworthy. Even though this thesis will only be about the
challenge to intuition from the negative program, the positive program shall be briefly portrayed.

There are, again, two different projects which fall under the umbrella term ‘positive
experimental philosophy’: Experimental Analysis and Experimental Descriptivism (cf. Nadelhoffer
& Nahmias 2007, 126-8). Experimental Analysis aims to empirically establish (typically via
questionnaire surveys) what the intuitions of the folk actually are. The presupposition of this

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3 This correlates roughly with the distinction between the proper foundation view and restrictionism in
Alexander & Weinberg 2007, 60f.

4 As the name suggests, it is also definitive of the negative program to answer the question in the negative.

5 Different names have been suggested for this version of experimental philosophy, among others: ‘proper
foundation view’ (Alexander & Weinberg 2007, 61f.) and ‘Check with the Folk Experimental Philosophy’
(Pust ms., sect. F(i), p. 37).
program is that when philosophers appeal to intuitions they generally mean to appeal to **shared** intuitions, i.e. folk intuitions. On this view, appeals such as “we would say that …” seem to come out as empirically testable claims. The finding that a certain intuition is widely shared among the folk then speaks in its favor, the finding that it is not widely shared will have to be taken as a potential defeater of that intuition. Yet, this does not mean that philosophical questions are to be decided by putting them to the vote.

A prime example for Experimental Analysis is Joshua Knobe’s work on the dependence of intentionality-ascriptions on the moral quality of a particular action. (The relation has come to be known as the Knobe-effect; cf. Knobe 2003a, 2003b, 2006.) In Knobe’s studies subjects are presented with one of two very similar scenarios: A CEO makes a decision for a change in policy in order to increase profits while knowing about but ignoring the helpful/harmful side-effects this change in policy has on the environment. Subjects are then asked to judge whether the CEO **intentionally** helped/harmed the environment. It turns out that the vast majority of the subjects will describe only his harming as intentional, not his helping. Another prominent example in Experimental Analysis is a series of studies conducted by Eddy Nahmias and different collaborators on the folk’s intuitions regarding free will. The authors of these studies believe to have shown that, contrary to what philosophers allegedly assume, incompatibilism is not intuitive (cf. Nahmias et al. 2005, 2006; Nahmias, Coates & Kvaran 2007).

The other project within positive experimental philosophy, Experimental Descriptivism, aims to find out how philosophical intuitions are generated (cf. Nadelhoffer & Nahmias 2007, 127f.).[^6] That is, Experimental Descriptivism empirically examines the psychological, cognitive and biological bases of intuitions. For instance, Joshua Greene, the most prominent figure in this project, did brain scans (fMRI) of subjects considering moral thought experiments such as the trolley cases (cf. Greene 2002, 2003; Greene and Haidt 2002; Greene et al. 2004). The finding of Greene’s studies is that in the consideration of thought experiments with more or less affective contents, different regions of the brain are activated. Unsurprisingly, when scenarios with high affective content are considered, regions of the brain are active which are linked to emotional activity; when scenarios with low affective content are considered, regions of the brain are active which are linked to rational deliberation. However, the arguments by which Greene wishes to derive normative conclusions from these empirical findings are highly controversial (see e.g. Berker 2009).

[^6]: Pust calls this variant ‘Sources and Justification Experimental Philosophy’ (ms., sect. F(i), p. 37).
In the remainder of this paper I will be concerned only with the negative program of experimental philosophy. Roughly, the negative program uses empirical findings to challenge intuition as a source of evidence. According to the negative program, what is problematic about traditional practice is that philosophical intuitions vary with factors that are irrelevant to the truth of the intuition in question. Let me briefly name some of the most prominent studies: Weinberg, Nichols & Stich (2001) claim to show that the Gettier intuition varies with cultural background between Westerners and East Asians; Machery et al. (2004) aim to show that the anti-descriptivist intuition in Kripke’s Gödel-Schmidt case varies along the same cultural lines; Buckwalter & Stich (ms.) claim to have found a gender-variance of intuitions, they find that certain mainstream philosophical intuitions are less likely to be shared by females than by males; Swain, Alexander & Weinberg (2008) aim to show that the order of presentation of different scenarios affects how likely subjects are to ascribe knowledge in the Truetemp case or in the barn-façade case. With all these cases of variance along irrelevant factors, so the restrictionist argument, intuitions can no longer be appealed to from the armchair. I will later offer a more precise reconstruction of the restrictionist argument against intuition.

A case study: Cultural Divergence in the Gettier Intuition

It will prove helpful to present one paradigmatic study in more detail now so that it can be referred to later. In a seminal paper, three of the founding fathers and leading proponents of experimental philosophy, Jonathan Weinberg, Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich (WNS), present evidence for the claim that East Asians are less likely to share the Gettier intuition (see Gettier 1963) than Westerners. This study is remarkable in challenging a particularly well established intuition – the Gettier intuition.

Here’s the intuition probe that was used:

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8 This is the first explicit experimental philosophy study. There are some forerunners to experimental philosophy such as Haidt, Koller & Dias (1993), who show e.g. that certain moral intuitions vary with socioeconomic background. The main difference between these earlier studies and what has come to be known as experimental philosophy is that these earlier studies were not undertaken in the experimentalists’ revisionary spirit of arguing against the use of intuition in philosophy – even though they could be put to that use.
Bob has a friend, Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American car. Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it? (WNS 2001, 443)

Subjects were given the forced choice answers ‘really knows’ and ‘only believes’. The survey was administered to undergraduate students at Rutgers University. The survey’s surprising results are, firstly, that the judgments vary with the cultural background of the subjects. Americans with European ancestral background (Westerners) were less likely to attribute knowledge to Bob (25%) than East Asians (or subjects with an East Asian ancestral background) (57%). Secondly, the majority of East Asians and a still significant 25% of Westerners attributed knowledge to Bob. That is to say, they did not share the Gettier intuition.

The high percentage of subjects who do not share the Gettier intuition is particularly surprising since the Gettier cases are taken to be paradigm examples of armchair philosophy. Timothy Williamson claims that “[Gettier’s] thought experiments are paradigmatic, in the sense that if any thought experiments can succeed in philosophy, his do.” (2007, 179f.) Until 2001 western analytic philosophy assumed that a justified true belief (jtb) in a Gettier scenario is not an instance of knowledge. It was further presumed that this intuition was universally shared. Now, it seems, we have been shown by WNS that it is not. What are we to say about this? How are we to go on reasoning about knowledge? And who’s to say whether Gettier is right or not?

Before I proceed, let me briefly mention, just to put aside, some very basic and formal methodological objections. To name but a few: the sample size of the study is too small, the probe is suggestive, possibly the cultural variation is not causally relevant for the results, but just correlates with some other factor, etc. Further, it has been urged that the case is underdescribed in a flawed way: East Asians may have interpreted Bob’s belief that Jill drives an American car as based on the assumption that Jill is the type of person who drives American cars (inferred from the statement that she “has driven a Buick for many years”) rather than based on the belief that Jill actually drives a Buick. On that interpretation, we are not actually dealing with a Gettier case and thus have an explanation for the deviant judgments (cf. Sosa 2005). Cullen (2010) forcefully argues that philosophical intuitions cannot simply be read off of survey responses. The mere responses are heavily influenced by different pragmatic cues and conversational norms which have not been

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9 Cullen (2010) has actually repeated the study and found that the phrasing of the answers strongly affects the results (he used WNS's ‘really knows’ or ‘only believes’ vs. ‘knows’ or ‘doesn't know’).
sufficiently controlled for in experimental philosophy surveys. Similarly, Lam (2010) argues that divergence in responses to Kripke’s Gödel-Schmidt case may not be due to diverging semantic intuitions, but due to differences in linguistic competence between native and non-native speakers. Even more radically, Kauppinen (2007) argues that claims about folk concepts (i.e. claims of the type ‘we would say that …’) cannot, in principle, be tested empirically by means of survey studies.

While these methodological points are important and justified I will not be concerned with them here. WNS themselves acknowledge some of these points and caution that their results presented in (2001) are only preliminary. My question here is rather: what if the results prove to be robust? The philosophically interesting question could itself have been presented in the form of a thought experiment: What would we say if the folk disagreed on certain intuitions that are uncontroversial among philosophers, such as the Gettier intuition?

**Philosophical Intuitions**

Before we proceed to the challenge to philosophical intuitions, we should take a closer look at our subject matter: what are these intuitions that experimental philosophy is challenging? I will take up three issues in turn. First, I will distinguish philosophical intuitions from other types of intuitions. Second, I will discuss the dialectics of intuitions, that is, the question whether intuitions are used as evidence and whether they can themselves be justified. Finally, I want to propose a view I call Intuition Pluralism, which claims that different intuitions probably differ in their epistemic status. Trivial as this may sound, this claim has overlooked implications for the debate.

Before I begin the discussion two caveats are in order. First, experimental philosophy does not mean to challenge any intuition used in philosophy, but only certain types of intuitions. Roughly speaking, the experimental philosophers’ main concern is with intuitions about “esoteric, unusual, far-fetched, or generally outlandish” scenarios (Weinberg 2007, 321). The following cases are frequently mentioned as plausible targets of the critique or have actually been empirically tested: Gettier cases, Lehrer’s Truetemp, The New Evil Demon Problem, Thomson’s Violinist, Searle’s Chinese Room, Block’s Chinese Nation, Kripke’s Gödel-Schmidt case and Putnam’s Twin Earth. Thus, when I now and later speak of the challenge of experimental philosophy to philosophical intuition, the term ‘philosophical intuition’ must be understood to refer only to a certain subclass of intuition within philosophical practice. Second, the term ‘intuition’ is ambiguous between the
process of intuiting and the intuition which is the result of this process. Whenever the context fails to make sufficiently clear what is meant, I will use the terms ‘intuiting’ to refer to the process and ‘intuited’ to refer to the resulting intuition (first introduced by Lycan 1986, 88; see also Pust ms.).

First, we can broadly distinguish philosophical intuitions from causal intuitions. The distinction can most easily be explained by reference to the questions to which the respective kinds of intuitions are answers. Causal intuitions are answers to questions about what would happen in such-and-such a case. For example, I might judge that this vase will brake if I drop it from one meter’s height to the floor. Philosophical intuitions, on the other side, are answers to questions of the type ‘How would we describe such-and-such a case?’, ‘What would we say in such-and-such a case?’ or ‘How should we judge such-and-such a case?’. For example, the Gettier intuition answers to the question whether a Gettier scenario would count as a case of knowledge, or in other words, whether this scenario should be described as the subject knowing the proposition in question. One main difference between the two is that the correct physical description of the scenario is not in question when it comes to philosophical intuitions, while it is in question regarding causal intuitions.

This highlights one peculiarity of philosophical intuitions, the fact that they cannot be empirically tested. As Williamson points out, a thought experiment’s being hypothetical makes no difference to the method. If we were to encounter a real life Gettier scenario we would make the same judgment based on the same faculties as in the hypothetical case (cf. Williamson ms.; cf. also Nimtz 2010, 199). Similarly, Cohnitz (2008) humorously tells the sci-fi story of how the realization of Jackson’s Mary case fails to settle the dispute over physicalism among philosophers.

Second, I want to distinguish the notion of philosophical intuition from some everyday notions of intuition. There is a special danger of confusion since many philosophical intuitions actually share some of the intrinsic properties that are definitive of everyday intuition. One sense of ‘intuition’ in everyday language is that of being an immediate response (such as a gut feeling or a hunch). Philosophical intuitions need not be immediate in this sense; rather they are carefully

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10 I’m trying to stay neutral here on the question whether this result is a belief, inclination to belief, judgment, inclination to judge, or seeming.


12 See also Peijnenburg & Atkinson (2003) who argue that philosophical thought experiments are worse off than scientific ones since only the latter can be corrected by empirical research.
reflected, considered judgments. However, philosophical intuitions probably are immediate in another sense, to wit: they are non-inferential. Another everyday sense of ‘intuitive’ (but not of ‘intuition’) is of something’s being commonsensical or easy to grasp (cf. Jenkins ms., 9). This highlights that ‘intuitive’ may have different implications than ‘intuition’. For an extended discussion of the difference between ‘intuition’ and ‘intuitive’ see also Vaidya (2010, 407-409). Again, even though philosophical intuitions may be commonsensical or easy to grasp, this is not a feature common to every philosophical intuition.

Some authors have argued that intuitions are beliefs or judgments. Against this view, one particular counterexample is regularly put forward. Opponents claim to have the intuition that the comprehension axiom of naïve set theory is true, even after learning of Russell’s proof that it is not. An analogy can be made to visual perceptions of known optical illusions: Even if we have the intuition or inclination to believe that the two lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are of different lengths, once we know that they are not, we no longer believe or judge them to be of different lengths. The analogy to intuition is that, even after we discover that the proposition which seemed most plausible is false, the proposition does not lose its appeal of seeming true to us, that is, we do not lose the intuition.\footnote{Jumping ahead a little: Even though examples such as this show that intuitions are fallible they do not by themselves provide a reason to generally distrust intuitions. Otherwise, the fallibility of visual perception in the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion would equally give us reason to generally distrust visual perception.}

Intuitions as Evidence

In this section I will discuss the descriptive question whether intuitions are in fact appealed to as evidence in philosophical practice to begin with. Certainly philosophers do appeal to intuitions, this fact is not contested. However, it has been argued that understanding this appeal as an appeal to evidence misconstrues actual philosophical practice. What other role could intuition play, if not an evidential one?

As I mentioned in the beginning, intuitions are typically elicited by thought experiments. It is therefore worthwhile noting that thought experiments can play different dialectical roles. Sometimes thought experiments figure straightforwardly as evidence, most typically in the form of being a counterexample to a proposed theory. But in other cases thought experiments are rather used for purposes of persuasion or illustration (cf. Gendler 2007 and Cohnitz 2006, chapt. 3). In
these latter cases intuitions may not actually play an evidential role; I will not concern myself with these kinds or uses of intuitions.\textsuperscript{14}

Let me present some views which all have in common that they make claims about the dialectical role of intuitions in philosophy. David Lewis says that intuitions are beliefs that we appeal to in philosophical inquiry when there is no further way of settling a disagreement. Consider the following quote.

[W]hen all is said and done, and all the tricky arguments and distinctions and counterexamples have been discovered, presumably we will still face the question […] which theories are on balance credible, which are the unacceptably counterintuitive consequences and which are the acceptably counterintuitive ones. On this question we may still differ. And if all is indeed said and done, there will be no hope of discovering further arguments to settle our differences.

(Lewis 1983, X)

If I understand Lewis correctly, these final questions can only be decided intuitively. On this view then, it is impossible to find definitive answers to (some) philosophical questions. It is a well known phenomenon that in philosophy one can consistently hold basically any strange view, if one is willing to accept the counterintuitive consequences that come along with it. The way intuitions figure in this picture of philosophy is that they help us weigh different theories or sets of theories against one another when argumentation has hit rock bottom. Are they used as evidence then? In some sense they are: they are reasons that make us believe one set of propositions over another. In another sense they are not: they cannot be used to decisively settle a question or persuade our opponents.

Another suggestion (Ichikawa ms. b) defines philosophical intuitions solely via their dialectical role. The idea is that any belief can be appealed to as an intuition in the proper argumentative context. For instance, the Moorean belief that there is a hand will be an empirically justified belief in most contexts. But in the context of contesting external world skepticism, one may appeal to the claim as being intuitive. Citing an intuition or labeling a claim as intuitive, on this view, is a method to avoid begging the question against the opponent.

Being intuitive, according to this view, does not mark a specific epistemic status, but rather a specific dialectical occurrence. On Ichikawa’s view intuitions are beliefs. More precisely: Every intuition that \( p \) is a belief that \( p \), but not every belief that \( p \) need be an intuition that \( p \), at least not in

\textsuperscript{14} For a different argument to the claim that intuitions are not used as evidence in philosophy, see Earlenbaugh & Molyneux (2009a) and (2009b).
every possible context. However, for (almost) any belief that \( p \) a context can be imagined in which it makes sense to call the belief intuitive (cf. Ichikawa, ms. b).

Two objections can be pressed against Ichikawa’s view. First, Ichikawa does not distinguish between a proposition’s being intuitive and someone’s having an intuition. His claim is plausible for the locution ‘it is intuitive that…’ but less plausible for locutions such as ‘I have an intuition that…’.

Secondly, even though Ichikawa plausibly shows that sometimes ‘intuitive’ merely marks a certain dialectical property of a claim, this does not show that sometimes it cannot also mark a certain epistemic quality of a claim. Intuitions, on this view, are merely beliefs in a certain dialectical context, with the context being such that citing an intuition does not so much amount to presenting evidence than rather stating one’s opinion. As Ichikawa himself puts it:

> Claims about intuitions are not attempts to argue for the desired conclusion; they’re attempts to find common ground, even once we’ve admitted it’s no use continuing to try to bring our interlocutor to the light. (ms. b, 11)

This upshot of the theory I am not willing to swallow. Sometimes, so I wish to maintain, intuitions are cited as evidence in philosophical discourse and we do (at least try to) argue for certain philosophical conclusions by appeal to intuitions. This is especially salient whenever we devise a counterexample to a certain theory. The general working of counterexamples is such that a case is described in which a certain theory delivers a result that does not fit with our intuitive judgment of the scenario. The best counter-examples are those which are not disputed by the defender of the criticized theory. Consider again the Gettier-intuition as a paradigm case. Few people tried to defend the JTB-analyses against the Gettier intuition. Rather, people started looking for ways the theory could be amended (JTB + X) so as to guard against this type of counterexample. The fact that the former defenders of the JTB theory accept the Gettier intuition as a counterexample shows that there is no question begging involved when the intuition is appealed to as evidence. The strength of the counterexample against the theory depends on its intuitive force. Some intuitions are less strong and we are willing to give them up more easily than others. This I take to be evidence for the claim that intuitions (at least sometimes) do carry evidential weight and are used with an argumentative purpose.

I want to propose the following view, which borrows from Ichikawa (ms. b) and Jenkins (forthcoming) the idea that intuitions may be defined via their dialectical role: philosophical intuitions are usually judgments which are explanatorily fundamental. This is supposed to mean the following. They are fundamental in that they usually either do not allow for further justification or do not require further justification. There may be cases or situations in which philosophical
Intuitions do allow for or require further justification. For instance, the Gettier intuition can in some sense be justified in pointing to the features of a Gettier situation that usually will prevent us from ascribing knowledge (e.g. the unreliability of the source). A different kind of justification could be given for instance for the Twin Earth intuition in pointing to the fact that treating ‘water’ as a natural kind term fits well into our scientific world view which is overall well established and justified. In these cases the type of justification is inductive; for example an inference to the best explanation (as in the Twin Earth case) or a form of generalization (as in: usually true beliefs derived from unreliable sources do not amount to knowledge, therefore in the Gettier case the true belief is not a case of knowledge). Note that another alleged feature of intuition, that of being pre-theoretical, turns out rather questionable according to my view. If it is right that intuitions can in some weak sense be justified for instance by fitting into a certain world-view, then this intuition might not be so independent from that world view after all. However, the kind of justification is weak in the following sense: It is always open to the opponent to reject the conclusion even while accepting the premises. For example, a Gettier-skeptic may admit that, usually, true beliefs derived from unreliable sources do not amount to knowledge, while simultaneously holding that in a Gettier case things are different and the true belief does amount to knowledge after all. Similarly, a defender of descriptivism can accept a materialist world-view and still hold that ‘water’ is not a natural kind term, just as ‘liquid’ is not.16

I will proceed in what follows on the assumption that intuitions are (at least sometimes) used as evidence in philosophy. Obviously, so does experimental philosophy. For, the critique that intuition is not a trustworthy source of evidence would be of no interest if intuitions were not appealed to as evidence to begin with.

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15 See Balcerak-Jackson (ms.) for more discussion. Balcerak-Jackson points to possible explanations of intuitions to reject the orthodox view that philosophical intuitions are non-inferential.

16 It has turned out that glass at room temperature shares the relevant physical structure of liquid substances. The fact that our everyday term ‘liquid’ does not apply to glass is evidence for its not being a natural kind term but a descriptive term.

17 For further argument for this claim see Pust 2000, chapter 1.
Intuition Pluralism

Before I present the challenge from experimental philosophy, I will take a brief detour to present a point that runs orthogonal to the debate. I want to criticize both sides of the debate for discussing the question on a too general level. I will argue for a position that I call Intuition Pluralism. The view is based on the idea that what we call intuitions in contemporary analytic philosophy is a heterogeneous class differing in various respects: psychologically, cognitively, dialectically, and of course in content. The claim of Intuition Pluralism then is that different intuitions may, and probably do, differ in their epistemic status. The relevance of this claim for the experimental philosophy debate should be obvious: Arguments both supporting and attacking the trustworthiness of intuitions should not be cast at a general level but restricted to particular intuitions (or to particular types of intuition).

One motivation for Intuition Pluralism is this: in principle it should be possible to hold the view that intuitions with one type of content, say moral intuitions, are trustworthy, whereas intuitions with a different type of content, say modal intuitions, are not. Such a view, however, is not viable as long as we fail to distinguish between different (types of) intuitions and just discuss the trustworthiness of intuition in general. To make room for such a view we need to discuss the epistemic status of intuitions on a more fine grained level.

In the remainder of the paper, I will return to this view now and then in urging that the debate surrounding experimental philosophy suffers from being cast at a too general level. Frequently, the trustworthiness of philosophical intuitions as such is debated, when it would be better to discuss the trustworthiness of particular (types of) intuitions.

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18 I here remain neutral on the question whether and, if so, how far and in which way claims about intuitions may be generalized. Some may argue for the trustworthiness of intuitions regarding a particular subject matter, say moral intuitions, others may argue for the trustworthiness of intuitions with respect to particular types of thought experiments, say mundane ones. My point rather is that these questions of generalization need to be addressed and that the experimental philosophy debate has so far failed to do so.
The Challenge from Experimental Philosophy

I finally come to what surprisingly proves to be a hard task: spelling out the challenge from experimental philosophy to philosophical intuitions. It is hard because experimental philosophers have not spelled out their critique precisely (one very notable exception is Weinberg 2007, which will be discussed later). Two questions are of special importance: First, what is the scope of the critique? In other words, which intuitions are meant to be challenged? I have not found any plausible answer to this first question. Largely, the discussion proceeds on appeals to paradigm cases. For example, while the Twin Earth intuition is paradigmatically dubitable, mathematical and logical intuitions are paradigmatically trustworthy.

Let us then focus on the second question: what exactly is wrong with philosophical intuitions? Mere fallibility cannot be the problem, everyone agrees to that. I will now discuss two similar ways to phrase the challenge: The Argument from Divergence merely states that the fact that people’s intuitions diverge on certain questions is a bad sign, while the Argument from Irrelevant Factors points to the fact that intuitions supposedly vary with irrelevant factors. Later I will discuss a much more sophisticated challenge by Jonathan Weinberg (2007) which criticizes philosophers’ appeals to intuitions for their lack of error detection and correction.

The Argument from Divergence

The argument from divergence takes the mere fact that people disagree on certain intuitions to be a sign of their lack of trustworthiness. The argument could be constructed like this in its crudest form:

19 Other challenges of intuitions cannot be discussed in what follows. Cummins (1998) argues that intuitions are not trustworthy because they cannot be calibrated against other sources of evidence. Williamson (2004) and (2007) proposes a deflationary or eliminativist approach to intuitions in arguing that intuitions should not be appealed to as evidence on pain of ‘psychologizing the evidence’. Finally, the explanationist objection argues roughly that, since the truth-makers of intuiteds do not play a role in the causal explanation of the intuitings, intuitings do not provide any epistemic support for the intuiteds (cf. Grundmann 2007, 76; for extended discussion see also Pust 2000, chapters 3-5).
(1) People have diverging intuitions in case X.  
(2) If a method delivers diverging results then that method is not trustworthy.  
(3) Therefore: Intuitions are not trustworthy in case X.

So far, this argument can be used to assess one particular case, say, the particular judgment from the WNS (2001) study regarding the question whether Bob knows that Jill drives an American car. I will shortly present a way to generalize the claim. The two objections that have been made most forcefully so far are the Expertise Defense and the Conceptual Difference Defense. I will discuss both in more detail below. Both objections concern premise (1). The Expertise Defense roughly says that only the folk’s intuitions have been assessed in the studies and that philosophers’ intuitions may very well be qualitatively superior. More precisely, it is claimed that even if the folk have diverging intuitions regarding case X, philosophers do not (or, more cautiously, it has not been shown that philosophers do). The Conceptual Difference Defense says, roughly, that the discovered divergence may, after all we know, be no more than a conceptual divergence, e.g. a misunderstanding based on ambiguity, context sensitivity or other pragmatic factors.

A different objection, which has not been made explicitly as far as I know, can be raised against premise (2). Does the mere divergence in intuitions suffice to render intuitions untrustworthy? In the current debate about the epistemology of disagreement there is an ongoing controversy between Conciliationism and Steadfastness. Conciliationism is the view that upon disagreement with epistemic peers one ought to correct one’s initial confidence in a given belief towards one’s peer’s confidence in that belief. Steadfastness holds that one need not change one’s credence in one’s own belief (cf. Christensen 2007 and 2009). Even though the debate on the epistemology of disagreement mainly asks what it is reasonable to believe (given disagreement with an epistemic peer) the question of trustworthiness is not entirely unrelated. Conciliationism, for instance, can be motivated by the following line of reasoning.

\[ \text{Reliable methods of inquiry must tend to produce agreement. Thus the persistence of the degree of disagreement on important issues we see in fields like philosophy indicates that, in general, practitioners in the field do not form beliefs reliably. (Christensen 2009, 2)} \]

The argument implies a premise of the form “If a method delivers diverging results then that method is not reliable” which is identical to premise (2) except for being stated in terms of reliability instead of trustworthiness. Proponents of Steadfastness-views have not been swayed by

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20 This, of course, is meant to imply ‘intuition in case X regarding a certain feature of X’ - the feature being, for instance, the question whether Bob really knows that Jill drives an American car in the case described above. Also, the people have to be understood to be epistemic peers, for it does not speak against a chess master’s intuitive moves that a chess novice will make different moves intuitively.
this line of reasoning due to the broad degree of skepticism which would be entailed by such an approach. Even though Steadfastness is a strong position in the disagreement-debate, nobody to my knowledge has tried to avail herself of this approach in the experimental philosophy debate. Perhaps rejecting (2) on pain of skepticism would amount to a petitio in the experimental philosophy debate.

Before I discuss how the challenge against intuitions can be generalized from particular cases to philosophical intuitions in general, I will present another way to construe the challenge.

The Argument from Irrelevant Factors

A very similar argument can be stated in terms of intuitions varying with irrelevant factors. The factors that have been uncovered so far have been named above and include cultural background, socio-economic status, gender as well as the order of presentation, the degree of affective content and the level of abstraction in the description of a scenario. That these factors are irrelevant means that the truth of the intuition in question does not depend on these factors (cf. Horvath 2010, 449f.). For example, the truth of the judgment that Bob knows that Jill drives an American car does not depend on whether the judgment is made by an East Asian or Western subject.

(4) Intuitions vary with irrelevant factors in case X.
(5) Sources the outputs of which vary pervasively with irrelevant factors are not trustworthy.
(6) Therefore: Intuitions are not trustworthy in case X.

Ernest Sosa has put forward an argument which at least bears some motivational resemblance to the argument for Steadfastness: Sosa argues that on pain of “check[ing] out of life” or “hold[ing] ourselves generally aloof” we simply have no choice but to follow our philosophical intuitions in making life-guiding decisions. (forthcoming) This is similar to the Steadfast’s holding on to his beliefs on pain of skepticism. Sosa raises another worry: If disagreement by itself casts doubt on a method, not only are philosophical intuitions put into doubt but the whole of philosophical methodology: philosophers have been unable to agree on certain philosophical questions for about as long as there has been philosophy (just think of all the issues that have already been discussed by Plato and still are far from being settled: free will, the mind-body problem, moral questions, social justice, the value of knowledge over true belief, the nature of numbers, etc.). If the fact that these questions have not been decisively answered speaks against intuitions then it also speaks against the rest of philosophical method as a whole, including extended discussion, reflection, formalization etc. In other words, the principle of disagreement is likely to issue into general philosophical skepticism.

Cf. Horvath (2010, 448), who calls the generalized version of this argument the “master argument against intuition-based philosophy”.
Apart from the Steadfastness inspired objection the same objections can be made as against the Argument from Divergence. It can be argued that there is no such variation among the experts (Expertise Defense) and it can be argued that the variation is a mere upshot of miscommunication (Conceptual Difference Defense). And again, the same generalization is needed if the critique is meant to have a broader impact.

The Argument for Generalization

So far, the conclusions of both arguments have been leveled only at those particular intuitions (or cases) that have been empirically studied. For the experimental philosopher’s critique to unfold some broader impact we need to generalize to philosophical intuitions in general.

(7) In many cases intuitions are not trustworthy.
(8) We do not know from the armchair whether a particular intuition is trustworthy or not.
(9) We should only appeal to sources of evidence that we know to be trustworthy.
(10) Therefore, we should not appeal to intuition from the armchair.

Of course, (7) and (8) depend on the conclusions’ of the Argument from Divergence or the Argument from Irrelevant Factors being correct for several cases. The main objection to the generalization arises from the question of scope: what are the relevantly similar intuitions that are put into doubt by the conclusion? It has further been objected that the disagreement is overemphasized. Even if some cases of divergence have been uncovered, there is overall agreement on most intuitions. Therefore, it would be unwarranted to put into doubt all intuitions solely on the basis of a few faulty ones (cf. Horvath 2010, 458). Premise (8) seems to be supported by some studies. No one would have been surprised that people have different intuitions regarding, say, compatibilism regarding free will. However, the Gettier intuition was taken to be rather uncontroversial, so that the finding of divergence may really call into question our ability to estimate the degree to which our intuitions are generally shared. However, other studies confirm that our felt certainty in an intuition corresponds well with how widely our intuitions are shared (cf. Wright 2010). In line with this finding is the following point: it has frequently been said about the so called Knobe effect that the claim (about the dependence of intentionality ascriptions on the moral quality of an action) could have been made equally well from the armchair and become known as the Knobe intuition.

The two step structure of my reconstruction offers the advantage of clearly separating the two problems. First the experimentalists need to show why disagreement or variation along irrelevant factors in a particular case is problematic. Second, they must show how this problem is supposed to generalize to other (or all) philosophical intuitions. This two step structure is present also in the
The conclusion of one of the more central experimental philosophy papers, Swain, Alexander and Weinberg (SAW) (2008). SAW present studies which purportedly show that the Truetemp intuition is affected by order of presentation. They clearly offer two conclusions. First, straightforwardly, one should no longer appeal to the Truetemp intuition: “Such variability [by order of presentation] calls into question the legitimacy of using the intuitions generated by the Truetemp Case as evidence against reliabilism.” (153) Second, their findings along with all the other findings of experimental philosophy suggest a general worry about appeals to philosophical intuitions:

[I]t is unclear what about this case makes it susceptible to these effects, which raises questions about the reliance on intuitions about thought-experiments more generally, especially given that this is not the only case called into question by empirical research. (153)

Note that their suggestion is not to discredit philosophical intuitions once and for all, but rather to cast a general doubt on armchair intuitions. They suggest that philosophers should empirically test their intuitions. If the intuitions turn out to be generally shared, so SAW, it is fine to appeal to them.

We propose that philosophers who wish to continue relying on intuitions as evidence begin empirically investigating intuitions about their favorite thought-experiments to determine whether, and which, intuitions may be taken as evidence. Perhaps they will find that, contra the worries we have raised here for the likes of Truetemp, there is nothing amiss with their own preferred intuitions. (154)

This last point is rather important to correctly understanding the challenge. The way it is put here, intuitions are taken to be trustworthy if and only if they are generally shared. The central problem of traditional philosophy is, according to this view, that from the armchair we cannot tell whether a particular intuition is generally shared or not.

Before we move on, let me briefly state why it is worthwhile to distinguish the two arguments. First, the arguments allow for different objections. For instance, the Argument from Divergence can be objected to with the Steadfastness argument. Secondly, they are in need of different empirical evidence. The Argument from Divergence perhaps wouldn’t even need any empirical surveys but could proceed simply on the basis of the claim that philosophers haven’t been able to settle any important philosophical questions in the last 2600 years (cf. Christensen 2009, 1). In any case, mere findings of divergence will do, while the Argument form Irrelevant Factors additionally needs to empirically identify the factors which are responsible for the divergence.

In the next two sections I want to present the two central responses that have been given in defense of intuition, the Conceptual Difference Defense and the Expertise Defense. I will not only
discuss their plausibility but will also try to show how their plausibility depends on the case under consideration.

**Conceptual Difference Defense**

The basic idea of the Conceptual Difference Defense (CDD) is this: For all we know, the divergence discovered in the studies may be due to a merely verbal or conceptual divergence and not due to real disagreement. I will illustrate the Defense using the Gettier case from WNS (2001). CDD says that the disagreement between the dissenters and assenters to the Gettier-case may be a merely verbal one. Those who assent to (B) “Bob really knows that Jill drives an American car” may be attaching a different concept to the word “know” than those who deny (B). Thus, those who assent to (B) and those who dissent to (B) disagree with one another merely verbally; they do not really, substantially disagree. The assenters take the sentence (B) to express a proposition different from the one that the dissenters take it to express. In other words, the affirmation of (B) in the mouth of the assenters is compatible with the negation of (B) in the mouth of the dissenters. What seems to be a divergence of epistemic judgments regarding the Gettier-case can be explained away as a divergence in concepts.

Let me make more precise what CDD does and does not claim on its most reasonable reading. Strictly speaking, CDD does not claim that conceptual divergence is what actually happened in the surveys and what correctly explains the surveys’ results. Rather, CDD urges that conceptual divergence is a possible explanation of the results. In addition, the proponent of CDD must either claim that the burden of proof is on the experimentalists to show that conceptual divergence is not the correct explanation of the results, or the proponent of CDD must claim that conceptual divergence is the most plausible explanation of the results. In what follows I will only discuss the later approach.

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23 I am greatly indebted to Romy Jaster for helping me resolve many confusions and achieving a clearer presentation of my ideas in this section.

24 CDD has been mainly developed and held by Sosa (2009, 2007, 2010). For a perspicacious discussion see also Horváth (2010, 454-7).

25 Nothing hangs on the talk of concepts and propositions. CDD can be stated in terms of words being used with different senses, or sentences expressing different thoughts.
In the following discussion I will distinguish two different kinds of conceptual divergence. On the one hand, there is what we may call **merely verbal disagreement**. It is mostly just a failure of communication or a misunderstanding due to obstacles such as ambiguity, vagueness, or context-sensitivity. Merely verbal disagreement can be overcome by discourse. For example, “[i]f today I say ‘Mary went to the bank yesterday’ and tomorrow you say ‘Mary did not go to the bank yesterday’ we need not disagree, given ambiguity and contextual variation.” (Sosa 2007, 102) The divergence in Gettier-intuitions, so the idea, is a merely verbal disagreement if we assume that the assenters express the concept **SUBJECTIVE CERTAINTY** while the dissenters express the concept **JTB**.

On the other hand, there may be what I will term **(robust) conceptual disagreement**. It is systematic rather than accidental, perhaps even theoretically motivated, and cannot be overcome by discourse. A disagreement based on robust divergence will persist even after the disagreeing parties have acknowledged that they attach a different concept to some term central to the dispute. Typically, the parties will then argue about the question which one is the right concept to attach to the term in question. Let me illustrate the idea using a toy example originally due to William James, paraphrased by Chalmers.

A man walks rapidly around a tree, while a squirrel moves on the tree trunk. Both face the tree at all times, but the tree trunk stays between them. A group of people are arguing over the question: Does the man go round the squirrel or not? (Chalmers, ms., 1)

Parties disagreeing on this question are having a robust conceptual disagreement. The disagreement certainly is not empirical since even under a complete physical description of the scenario the parties would still disagree. It is also not merely verbal, as pointing out that the opponents express different notions of going around may not put an end to the dispute either. If the divergence in the Gettier case is a robust conceptual divergence, the assenters express the concept **JTB** with ‘knowledge’ while the dissenters express the concept **JTB** (jtb which is not Gettierized)\(^{26}\). \(^{27}\)

Different philosophical debates have been accused of being based on a robust conceptual divergence. For example, the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists is sometimes taken to rest on the two sides’ attaching different concepts to the term ‘free will’ and the debate between

\(^{26}\) Alternatively, the dissenters could be taken to express the concept **JTB+X**, where X is another criterion such as the belief’s being formed in a reliable way, its being formed safely, etc.

\(^{27}\) For a similar distinction see Cohnitz (ms.). For more discussion on the notion of talking past one another, see also Chalmers (ms.).
internalists and externalists has been explained as the two sides’ attaching different concepts to the term ‘justification’. I will now discuss two objections to CDD in turn.

Is CDD prima facie Implausible?

Horvath (2010) argues that CDD is prima facie implausible:

[All of the subjects who took part in the studies were fluent speakers of English, and most of them had a fairly high level of formal education as well, that is, they were at least undergraduate college students. So, prima facie it seems more plausible that such people accept the same propositional content when they assent to an English sentence that is neither unusual, nor overly complicated, nor in any obvious sense ambiguous or context-sensitive. (2010, 455, Horvath’s italics)]

The claim is this: In absence of further evidence, it is more plausible that the results reflect a substantial disagreement than a conceptual divergence. Before discussing this claim a methodological point is in order. Any serious attempt at causally explaining the survey-results in terms of conceptual divergence would need more data. To understand why one fourth of the Ws attribute knowledge to Bob, we would have to ask them more questions. Assessing the plausibility of CDD in the light of the rather scarce empirical information runs risk of turning into mere speculation. However, since there is no option of asking the subjects now, I will take this as an armchair exercise and consider what explanations are possible. Without assuming that I am getting things right, various how-possible explanations may suggest that conceptual divergence is a plausible explanation of the results.

First, I want to discuss the possibility that the divergence is a product of a shallow, merely verbal disagreement. Horvath claims that (B) is in no “obvious sense ambiguous or context-sensitive”. As for ambiguity: “knowledge” may express either of the concepts subjective certainty (such as in “Darn, I just knew this was going to happen!”) and JTB / JTB*. To make sure that the subjects had the right concept in mind, WNS tested the subjects with a coin-flip story before presenting the Gettier-case. The story is this: Dave has a “special feeling” that the coin will land heads, and it really does. Almost all subjects judged that Dave didn’t really know this, but that Dave only believed so (cf. WNS 2001, 450). WNS argue that this rules out the possibility subjects could have had the subjective-certainty sense of “knowledge” in mind. But consider the following hypothesis: The coin-flip story really had a priming effect on some subjects. These subjects (perhaps subconsciously) interpreted the survey to test their capability of distinguishing the two senses of “knowledge” in the following way: Choose “really knows” when the sentence “X knows
that \( p \) is true in the jtb-sense of “know”, choose “only believes” when the sentence “\( X \) knows that \( p \)” is true only in the subjective-certainty-sense of “know”. This hypothesis may explain why some subjects chose “really knows” in the Gettier-case.\(^{28}\) The above speculations suggest that a merely verbal disagreement could be partly responsible for the results. The fact that the Gettier-intuition is virtually undisputed in professional philosophy also speaks in favor of explaining the findings of WNS as a merely verbal disagreement. Philosophers do not disagree about the Gettier-case since they are able to settle on the relevant meaning of ‘knowledge’.\(^{29}\)

Secondly, I want to discuss the idea that the divergence may be explained as a robust conceptual divergence. One idea that suggests itself very naturally as an explanation of the cultural divergence is that there just might not be a perfectly synonymous translation of the English term ‘knowledge’ into the native languages of the East Asian subjects. On this assumption, it seems quite plausible to assume that the East Asians attach a slightly different concept to ‘knowledge’ than the native English speakers, viz. whatever concept is generally expressed by the term of their native language which is near synonymous to the English term ‘knowledge’.

I have to admit that I have no idea whether there is a true or only a near synonym to ‘knowledge’ in, e.g., Cantonese or Japanese. But let me cite a different study which purports to show a significant variation in the application of ‘knowledge’ along linguistic lines. Vaesen & Peterson (ms.) have conducted studies on philosophers to test the expertise defense: they found

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\(^{28}\) In fact, a later survey shows that presenting a clear case of knowledge or of non-knowledge has a priming effect on the judgment of the Truemp case. Cf. Swain, Alexander & Weinberg (2008).

\(^{29}\) Of course, this fact could also be explained by assuming that academic philosophy systematically excludes or discourages from its pursuit anyone who does not share the relevant intuition (cf. e.g. Weinberg 2007, 337). But why should academic philosophy be so restrictive with this particular intuition? After all, disagreement about all sorts of intuitions is pervasive in philosophy, even about such basic issues as logic. (See also Grundmann 2010, 497f., and Williamson (ms., sect. 5) for replies to the social selection thesis.)

A similar worry is that philosophers are a homogenous group in certain respects and that philosophers’ intuitions may differ from other groups’ intuitions. For example, it has been proposed that philosophers of an analytic provenance are typically white, Western, male, rich, highly educated people (cf. Nichols, Stich & Weinberg 2003, sect. 5). Psychologists recently raised the worry that the “WEIRD” people (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) are not representative of humankind in many important respects (cf. Heinrich, Heine & Norenzayan 2010). For instance, some culturally remote groups differ from Westerners in surprising respects such as following different strategies in decision theoretic games, not being susceptible to the Müller-Lyer illusion (or being significantly less susceptible) etc. The worry is not entirely novel. E.g., the fact that not all humans are susceptible to the Müller-Lyer illusion has been discovered in the 1960s.
that subjects’ intuitions whether a case is a case of knowledge or not vary along linguistic lines. The
survey was administered in English to fluent speakers, yet non-native speakers significantly diverged
in their judgments from native speakers. More precisely, the non-native speakers were less likely to
describe beliefs in trivial, non-informative propositions (such as the belief that water is water) as
cases of knowledge. Vaesen & Peterson suggest the following explanation:

In Dutch, for instance, […] “kennis” […] is used just to refer to what one might call
Knowledge—knowledge’s social, impersonal or scientific version. Hence, in Dutch […] it is
counter-intuitive to attribute knowledge to someone that knows a proposition as
uninformative as “water is water”. (ms., 10, Vaesen & Peterson’s emphases)

‘Kennis’, of course, is the correct translation of ‘knowledge’ even though it is only a near synonym.
The supposition is that Dutch speakers might attach the concept KENNIS to the English term
‘knowledge’, where KENNIS slightly differs from KNOWLEDGE. Something similar may hold true
for the German ‘Erkenntnis’.30 Even though the most natural translation of ‘knowledge’ is ‘Wissen’,
in epistemological contexts sometimes ‘Erkenntnis’ may be the better translation. In any case, many
traditional debates in epistemology are conducted in terms of ‘Erkenntnis’ rather than in terms of
‘Wissen’.31 And just like KENNIS, the concept ERKENNTNIS seems to differ from the concept
KNOWLEDGE in certain respects. For instance, classifying something as ERKENNTNIS has the clear
implication of there being a discovery or insight. As far as epistemic intuitions are rooted in the
concepts KENNIS or ERKENNTNIS it is no wonder that these intuitions vary with native language.
I will later get back to the question what the upshot of this explanation would be for armchair
philosophy. For now note that subtle differences between the concept KNOWLEDGE and its close
relatives (such as KENNIS, ERKENNTNIS, and whatever may be the concept expressed by the
Cantonese translation of ‘knowledge’) may be the cause of divergent judgments in experimental
philosophy studies.

Finally, I want to argue that whether disagreement about a particular sentence is plausibly
interpreted to reveal a difference in concepts or not heavily depends on the type of sentence that is
disagreed upon. Consider the following cases. How would we react if experimental philosophers
were to uncover that competent speakers disagree on the truth-value of (A) “Pope Benedict XVI is
not a bachelor.” Would this show that these speakers disagree on empirical matters, say on the

30 Vaesen & Peterson (ms., 10) translate ‘knowledge’ with the German ‘Kenntnis’ which again has
connotations different from both ‘Wissen’ and ‘Erkenntnis’ – however, Krist Vaesen (in correspondence)
hinted that this passage will probably be edited.

31 The post Gettier debate about the analysis of the concept WISSEN is a notable exception.
marital status of Benedict XVI? Most probably not. Rather we would say that one or another type of conceptual problem has occurred. Either, some subjects did not correctly understand the question. This assumption roughly means to explain the results as a merely verbal disagreement. Or, different subjects attach slightly different concepts to the word ‘bachelor’—the assenters’ concept applying only to marriageable men, the dissenters’ concept applying perhaps to all unmarried men. On the contrary, if we found disagreement with respect to the sentence (C) “Benedict XVI was born in 1927” this disagreement is most plausibly interpreted as an empirical disagreement. The point of this comparison is that, intuitively, disagreement about (B) is much more like disagreement about (A) than disagreement about (C). That is to say, disagreement about the Gettier case is intuitively much more like conceptual disagreement than like empirical disagreement.

A Theory of Concepts

Before we move on to the second objection we take a little detour through the theory of concepts that seems to be needed to make sense of robust conceptual divergence. I cannot go into the details of any theory of concept individuation here, but just want to point out that certain assumptions which are rather frequently made in philosophy allow for the conceptual divergence move. The first innocuous assumption is this.

(analysis) We can tell by way of thought experiments and intuitions whether a certain concept applies to a case or not (see e.g. Nimtz 2010).

Thought experiments, so this view, can be part of conceptual analysis. A second rather trivial assumption is this.

(divergence) If a concept C applies to a set of cases Δ: {d₁, d₂, … dₙ} and a concept D does not apply to these cases, then C is not identical to D.³²

For now, I will add one more, perhaps not so trivial assumption.

(Size) The size of Δ can be as small as one.

Given these three assumptions, it follows that whenever I judge a case to be a case of ‘C’ and you judge that case not to be a case of ‘C’, we are expressing different concepts with ‘C’.³³

³² The converse, famously, does not hold.
Frank Jackson, for example, says just that about the Gettier intuition:

I have occasionally run across people who resolutely resist the Gettier cases. [...] What we then [if they are not confused] learn from the stand-off is simply that they use the word ‘knowledge’ to cover different cases from most of us. In these cases it is, it seems to me, misguided to accuse them of error (unless they go on to say that their concept of knowledge is ours). (Jackson 1998, 32)

So, according to Jackson, someone who resolutely and unconfusedly applies the term ‘knowledge’ to a Gettier case simply expresses a different concept of knowledge. Note that we need not accept all of Jackson’s theory of conceptual analysis. All we need are the two innocuous assumptions above, plus the assumption that two speakers’ use of a term ‘C’ diverges in a large enough or systematic enough way.

Here’s another version of the same idea, this time put in terms of a term’s truth-conditions. Nimtz (2009, 145ff.) defends the notion of conceptual truth against Williamson in the following way. Williamson (2007, 85ff.) argues against the following notion of conceptual truth. If \( p \) is conceptually true, whoever understands \( p \) assents to it. As a candidate for a conceptual truth he considers the sentence (V) “Every vixen is a vixen”. He then introduces the following counter-example. Peter does not assent to (V) due to, first, his (paranoid) belief that there are no vixens and, second, his peculiar theory of logic according to which “Every \( F \) is \( G \)” implies that there exists at least one \( F \). Peter, Williamson argues, is someone who understands (V) very well and who still does not assent to it. Nimtz objects that Peter does not in fact understand (V) the way we do. The very fact that Peter uses “Every \( F \) is \( G \)” in a robustly and systematically deviant way means that he does not share our concept of this expression. In this sense, then, he does not grasp the sentence’s meaning that it has in our mouths. Nimtz argues: “the truth-conditions of [Peter’s ‘Every \( F \) is \( G \)’] differ from the truth-conditions of our ‘Every \( F \) is \( G \)’ and everyone agrees that a difference in truth-conditions makes for a difference in thought expressed.” (2009, 148f.)

Obviously the principle, that a difference in truth conditions implies a difference in thought, can be applied straightforwardly to the Gettier-case. The sentence “Bob knows that Jill drives an American car” has different truth-conditions in the mouths of the assenters than in the mouths of the dissenters. Thus, the assenters attach a different thought to the sentence, which can plausibly be traced back to a difference in concepts attached to the word “know”.

33 Of course I am presupposing that we are being sincere, sufficiently rational, interpreting the case identically, etc.
In fact, there is a real-life analogy to Williamson’s Peter for the Gettier-case. Brian Weatherson (2003) has argued for the claim that a jtb in a Gettier-case is a case of knowledge in spite of our intuition that it is not. So, just as Peter’s dissent to (V) is motivated by a particular theory of logic, Weatherson’s assent to (B) is motivated by his peculiar epistemic theory. We need not get into the details of Weatherson’s argument here. On the assumption that Weatherson actually uses the word ‘know’ in accord with his theory (although in discord with his intuition), it seems quite plausible to say that Weatherson, when uttering (B), expresses a different concept of knowledge than we (the dissenters) do.

Yet another argument in the same spirit has been presented by Boghossian (2006). He argues that the Azande, who presumably use “if … then” in a systematically deviant way, do not disagree with us, but simply attach a different meaning to the terms: “What conditions must someone satisfy if he is to mean if by … the English word ‘if? … [The condition is] being prepared to use ‘if’ according to certain rules and not others.” (106f.)

Another lesson from these examples is that robust and systematic divergence is important. We do not need to appeal to the controversial principle (size) if we can show that \( \Delta \) represents a robust and systematic divergence.

Does CDD Render Substantial Dissent Impossible?

The second objection to the Conceptual Difference Defense is that any such theory of concepts will render substantial dissent impossible. Horvath writes:

[An interpretation of the findings of experimental philosophy in terms of conceptual differences, rather than as real intuitive disagreements, would result in an implausible proliferation of concepts […] In addition to that, all of these disagreements would be turned into merely verbal disagreements. (2010, 456)

First, note that Horvath here does not distinguish between shallow verbal and robust conceptual disagreement. On the merely verbal version of CDD, Horvath’s worry that CDD “threatens the substantiality as well as the universality of many central philosophical debates” by turning them into merely verbal disputes is unwarranted (2010, 456). Sosa has convincingly argued that it is quite implausible that disagreements between philosophers rest on shallow merely verbal disagreement (cf. 2010). Thus, insofar as the experimentalists’ results are interpreted as shallow verbal disagreements, no such implication to philosophical debates is warranted.
However, insofar as the proponent of CDD aims to explain the survey results as robust conceptual disagreements and subscribes to some version of the theory of concepts outlined above, he runs into a dilemma. Either, opponents in a robust conceptual disagreement still have a philosophically interesting disagreement, or not. If they do, the survey results of experimental philosophers do show that the subjects disagree in a philosophically interesting sense after all. The intuitions thus are not saved by the claim that they are ‘merely’ due to a conceptual divergence. If, on the other hand, a robust conceptual disagreement is not philosophically interesting, then many if not all debates in philosophy will turn into a philosophically irrelevant talking past one another. Remember, on the theory of concepts sketched above, the systematic disagreement in some cases suffices for two opponents to count as expressing different concepts. Since disagreement about the correct evaluation of scenarios is pervasive in many philosophical disputes, all these disputes would be insubstantial (cf. Horvath 2010, 456).

Let me press the problem again in a slightly different way. What does it mean for a disagreement to be substantial? For now let it suffice to present a sufficient condition. If a disagreement can take the form of one party uttering ‘p’ and the other party uttering ‘not p’ and if in these utterings both parties express the same proposition with ‘p’, then the two parties are having a substantial disagreement about the truth of p. However, on the view sketched above, substantial disagreement about hypothetical cases seems to be impossible then. If I respond to the Gettier case by uttering ‘Bob knows’ and you do by uttering ‘It is not the case that Bob knows’ then, ipso facto, we express different propositions by ‘Bob knows’ and do not substantially disagree. This upshot I take to be untenable and thus conclude that CDD is a viable defense of intuitions only in its ‘merely verbal’ variant, but not in its ‘robust conceptual’ variant.

This conclusion has ramifications for Intuition Pluralism, for it renders CDD applicable only to certain cases and not to others (only to those cases that can plausibly create a merely verbal disagreement). While ‘knowledge’ clearly can be ambiguous in the merely verbal sense, ‘moral responsibility’ for instance cannot. This means that CDD cannot be used to explain divergence in moral intuitions.

The Expertise Defense

The second, and probably most prominent reply to the experimentalists’ challenge is the Expertise Defense. According to the Expertise Defense Philosophers possess some kind of expertise in making judgments about hypothetical cases such that the surveys on the folk’s intuitions do not impugn the philosophers’ intuitions. Depending on how the challenge is construed, this would
either mean that there is no divergence within philosophers’ intuitions (rejecting (the relevance of) premise (1) of the Argument from Divergence) or it would mean that philosophers are not susceptible to irrelevant factors (rejecting (the relevance of) premise (4) of the Argument from Irrelevant Factors).

At least two different versions of the Expertise Defense can be found in the literature. The conceptual variant expressed by Ludwig (2007) argues that philosophers are experts at analyzing concepts. The underlying assumption of this variant is that philosophical intuitions can be understood to be in a wide sense conceptual intuitions and that thought experiments are essentially part of conceptual analysis. In what follows I will only be concerned with the methodological variant of the Expertise Defense. According to this version, philosophers possess expertise in interpreting and understanding thought experiments, paying attention to the relevant details, separating semantic from pragmatic issues, etc. (This argument has been professed e.g. by Williamson (forthcoming), Grundmann 2010, and Horvath 2010).

There has been intense discussion over the question whether philosophers actually are experts in the claimed sense. Weinberg et al. (2010) claim to extract from the general literature on expertise that philosophers are not involved in the kind of activity that confers expertise. For example, unlike experienced firefighters who possess expertise in intuitively judging whether a building is likely to collapse soon, philosophers lack a direct feedback about the correctness of the intuited judgment. In reply to Weinberg et al. (2010), Timothy Williamson (forthcoming) has dedicated a whole paper solely to the purpose of shifting the burden of proof back to the experimentalists. Grundmann (2010) very sensibly reminds us that this is an empirical question and that we simply need to conduct surveys on philosophers rather than the folk.

34 For an explicit expression of this view on intuitions and thought experiments see Nimtz 2010.

35 Roy Sorenson, long before the advent of experimental philosophy, foresaw both the idea of polling intuitions as well as the expertise defense. The following passage is from a discussion how to guard intuition against theory contamination: “[T]heorists have developed various ways of monitoring and controlling [pet theory bias]. First, others are asked for their reaction to the thought experiment. […] Occasionally, this type of questioning can be developed into a full-blown survey. When the thought experiment is complicated or esoteric, you cannot use the opinion of ordinary people, because they are too prone to confusion and lack the background knowledge needed to understand the thought experiment.” (1992, 263)

36 See also Horvath 2010, 464-472 for a defense of the expertise claim and an extensive discussion of Weinberg et al. 2010.
The hardest in principle problem for administering surveys to professional philosophers is that the thought experiments have got to be both novel and philosophically interesting. But conceiving of a novel philosophically interesting thought experiment isn’t that easy. This, I believe, is where the Vaesen & Peterson survey mentioned above, the only experimental philosophy survey on philosophers so far, failed. Vaesen & Peterson aim to test the expertise claim in the following way. They devised cases which “suppose that a person knows something, and thereafter asked whether that something qualified as knowledge” (ms., 6). The idea that it is even possible that \( S \) can know \( p \), without this qualifying as knowledge, draws on a subtle distinction between ‘knowing \( p \)’ and ‘having knowledge that \( p \)’. The results, very roughly, are that certain non-native speakers are less likely to classify ‘knowings’ of trivial or analytic propositions (such as ‘water is water’) as knowledge. Many objections can be raised against the study. E.g., in the first part of the study the cases were massively underdescribed, in the second part of the study the significance of the variation can be questioned. I believe that more studies will have to be conducted to assess the expertise claim.

For illustration I will now apply the Expertise Defense to my case of reference, the Gettier case used by WNS (2001). Is it plausible to say that philosophers are better than the folk in judging whether Bob really knows that Jill drives an American car? According to the Expertise Defense, those subjects who answered affirmatively (“Bob really knows”) must have made some kind of (broadly methodological) mistake. They misunderstood the scenario, filled in the details in some non-intended way, or just didn’t pay attention to the fact that Bob’s true belief essentially derived from a false belief. The study’s data do not tell us anything as to why the subjects answered the way they did and thus they cannot tell us what went wrong. However, anecdotal evidence may confirm that non-philosophers may be initially confused by Gettier cases: Try presenting a Gettier case to a philosophically untrained person and see if they get the idea.

However, my primary aim is not in assessing the expertise claim, but in seeing how Intuition Pluralism bears on it. For that purpose, consider how the expertise claim would fare in other cases. We need not go very far to see that the expertise claim will gain in plausibility as soon as we consider more complicated cases. For example, in a famous variety of a Gettier case the relevant

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37 There is statistically significant variation in how likely the different linguistic groups are to classify some of the cases as cases of knowledge. But, there is no significant difference in the overall rankings. That is to say, both groups agree in the question which of the ten relevant cases is most certainly a case of knowledge, which case is most certainly not a case of knowledge, and on all the variation in between (with one exception being that the case ranked 3rd by native speakers, ranks 4th in the non-native group, and vice versa).

38 Thanks to Tim Williamson and Daniele Sgaravatti for pressing this point.
justified true belief is a disjunction with one true and one false disjunct, where the Gettierized subject is justified in believing the disjunction by way of being justified in believing the disjunct that is actually false. In this case it seems (even) more plausible than in WNS’s case to say that philosophers are better than the folk at judging it. If you are not convinced by this, start thinking about not only complicated but also far out cases: present to a philosophically untrained person a Twin Earth scenario, Swampman, the Chinese Nation, or the Predictor’s Paradox, and see how long it takes you to get them to understand what you are talking about and to correctly interpret the scenario. If this proves to be less than trivial, you can imagine that things can easily go wrong when lay subjects in experimental philosophy surveys give their one shot answers to the little stories they are presented with.

My concluding point is this: If philosophers do enjoy expertise in assessing thought experiments, this expertise will be the more relevant the more complicated (and possibly far out) the scenarios get. This in turn means that the Expertise Defense’s plausibility is a matter of degree and depends on the thought experiment and study under consideration. For example, Swain, Alexander & Weinberg (2008) purport to show that the Truetemp intuition varies depending on whether a clear case of knowledge or a clear case of non-knowledge is presented right before it. Here, the Expertise Defense is quite convincing for two reasons: First, the Truetemp thought experiment actually might confuse lay subjects in the sense that they do not understand what the case is supposed to show. Second, influence of the order of presentation seems like a bias that philosophers may actually be less susceptible to – less, that is, than for example to gender bias or cultural bias. Therefore, in the study on the simple Gettier case, the Expertise Defense has much less intuitive appeal.

**Weinberg’s Challenge from Hopelessness**

I will now turn to what I take to be the strongest version of the experimental philosophers’ challenge to intuitions. Jonathan Weinberg (2007) argues that reliance on philosophical intuition is

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39 For instance: Al has the justified belief that Beth drives a Buick. He therefore (justifiably) believes that Beth either drives a Buick or is in Barcelona. Al has no particular beliefs about Beth’s whereabouts. In fact Beth does not drive a Buick, but she happens to be in Barcelona. Al therefore has the justified true belief that that Beth either drives a Buick or is in Barcelona, but, intuitively, Al does not know this.

40 I am greatly indebted to Lars Dänzer for pointing out many mistakes and helping me present my view much more precisely in this section.
problematic because it provides no means for detecting and correcting faulty intuitions. Weinberg introduces the technical term **hopefulness** for the property (of methods) of allowing for the detection and correction of errors. A method is hopeful if it meets all or most of the following desiderata to some sufficient degree: external corroboration, internal coherence, detectability of margins, and theoretical illumination (the desiderata will be explained in detail later). A method is hopeless when it clearly fails to meet any of the desiderata to any significant degree. According to Weinberg, this is the case for the Philosophers’ practice of Appealing to Intuitions (PAI). In conclusion, he demands that the practice be abandoned or revised.

Weinberg’s argument deserves an in-depth treatment for at least two reasons. First, the epistemic criterion of hopefulness is interesting for its own sake, that is, independent from the debate of experimental philosophy. Second, Weinberg’s critique raises the experimental philosophy debate to a new level of precision and sophistication. We will encounter several thoughts that have been present in the previous arguments but are now laid out in much greater precision and clarity. One idea that is new to this version of the challenge is that it attacks PAI as a practice (or method) and attacks only indirectly the subjects of this method, i.e. intuitions.

I will begin by presenting Weinberg’s argument and will then discuss several objections. On the one hand, I will take a closer look at the claim that PAI does not fulfill Weinberg’s demand of hopefulness. Further, I will discuss the question how much hopefulness a method must possess to count as trustworthy. I will argue that PAI does better in both respects than Weinberg will have. On the other hand I will raise doubts about the validity of Weinberg’s demand: should we really demand of intuitions that they be hopeful in Weinberg’s sense? I will claim that Weinberg places the wrong kind of epistemic demand on PAI in comparing it to the appeal to evidence in the sciences.

**Is PAI Hopeless?**

Before I begin the discussion, let me briefly rehearse the framework of the argument. First, note that Weinberg does not mean to attack all of intuitionkind – not even all intuitions used in philosophy. Rather, he means to attack a certain type of philosophical intuition, especially those elicited by far-out scenarios. This description is far less clear than one would like it to be, but we can use a sample of paradigmatically far-fetched cases. Among the PAI-type intuitions are intuitions such as those elicited by the Truetemp case, the Gödel-Schmidt case, and, presumably, the Gettier case (since this is the subject of criticism in WNS 2001). Other intuitions are explicitly exempt from PAI, let us call these the undisputed intuitions: mathematical and logical intuitions, “ordinary
application of concepts to particulars” (Weinberg 2007, 320), and, I suppose, linguistic and grammaticality intuitions.

Secondly, it is crucial to understand the dialectic. Weinberg argues for the principle of hopefulness “(H): Any putative source of evidence that is hopeless ought not be trusted.” (2007, 327; emphasis omitted) He accepts that the demand for hopefulness must be construed so as to abide by two constraints:

(self-undermining constraint) The argument for (H) must not be self-undermining, i.e. it must be possible to argue for (H) without relying on premises which are rendered untrustworthy by (H); and

(skepticism constraint) (H) must be strong enough to render PAI untrustworthy, but not too strong, so as to put into doubt a large set of our basic and scientific evidential sources as well as the undisputed intuitions, and thus issue into general skepticism.

In other words, Weinberg has to define hopefulness in a way that renders philosophical intuitions hopeless, but renders scientific practice, the undisputed intuitions, and the premises of the argument for (H) hopeful.

I will now present the four sources of hopefulness in turn and discuss how they fare with respect to the two constraints of the argument. Note that no single criterion is necessary for a method to be hopeful and that a method’s deficiency in one criterion could be made up by excellence in other criteria.

**Theoretical Understanding**

Methods enjoy theoretical understanding when we understand “how they work when they do” and “why they fail to work when they don’t.” (Weinberg 2007, 330) I think it is fair to say that this is the least important of the four criteria in the sense that the lack of theoretical understanding does not detract much of a method’s hopefulness. Theoretical understanding is probably of greater importance regarding scientific methods which rely on technical devices. Here, understanding of
the technology is crucial. But the quotidian sources of evidence, such as sense perception or memory, have been hopeful long before we had any theoretical understanding of their workings.  

Weinberg claims that PAI lacks theoretical understanding since we do not know much about its underlying psychology and cognition (neither introspectively nor scientifically) (cf. 2007, 336f.). On the one hand, I agree with Weinberg that we do not know much about the psychology of intuitions. Yet, we seem to know equally little about the psychology of the undisputed intuitions, such as mathematical, logical, or grammaticality intuitions. On the other hand, I wonder why theoretical understanding has to consist in understanding the underlying psychology or cognition. For, a psychological explanation is just one kind of possible explanation. If other types of explanation are admitted, then it is not at all obvious that we do not have any understanding of the workings of intuitions.

For instance, a different way to explain how we gain knowledge about the world via intuition is what I will call Conceptualism. Let us call Conceptualism the view which holds, very roughly, that concepts are individuated via their application conditions and that intuitions determine the application conditions. This way we can explain how our Gettier intuition gives us access to the fact that the subject lacks knowledge: It is because we have the intuition that the case is not a case of knowledge. Obviously, I have outlined the view very crudely and lot more would need to be said on the questions whether this turns intuitions infallible, how it is that we can have shared concepts even though we may intuitively disagree in their application to particular cases, etc. However, it gives us a rough idea of what it could mean to provide for a theoretical understanding of intuitions.

I conclude that, on a wide notion of understanding, Weinberg has not shown that we have no understanding of the workings of intuitions, and on a narrow notion (asking only for psychological or cognitive explanations), PAI does not seem to fare any worse than the undisputed intuitions.

41 I will return to this question below in the section “The Boundaries of Hopefulness”.

42 For more discussion see the following. Ludwig (2007 and 2010) professes a strong version of Conceptualism which actually renders intuitions infallible. The idea that intuitions in thought experiments guide our application of concepts is developed in Nimtz (2010). Jenkins (2008) argues that our concepts are sensitive to our experience and are thus grounded in experience, so that we can learn something about the world via conceptual analysis (see also Jenkins ms., 12). For a critique of Conceptualism see Hofmann (2010).
Detectability of Margins

A source has detectable margins of error when the outputs of the source carry within themselves information about the outputs’ quality. Weinberg’s example illustrates the idea very nicely: “a poorly done [electron microscopy] scan will more likely look like nothing at all than it is to look like something clear but wrong” (2007, 330).

How does philosophical intuition fare with respect to detectable margins? Weinberg makes three claims to show that PAI does not enjoy detectable margins. First, he suggests that intuition is “basically a 1-bit signal” (2007, 335), for example a yes/no judgment, that does not allow for much gradation. I take this claim to be false for two reasons. On the one hand I know by first hand experience that intuitions provide a much richer signal than Weinberg will have. I sometimes have intuitions that clearly say ‘yes’, other times I have intuitions that clearly say ‘no’, and then I have a range of intuitions that say ‘maybe’. I assume that most readers will share this experience. On the other hand, it has been empirically established that people are not only very precise and reliable at reporting the felt certainty of an intuition, but that the felt certainty correlates with how widely the intuition is shared. That is to say, the more certain we are of an intuition the more likely it is to be generally shared (cf. Wright 2010).

This last point leads to the second of Weinberg’s claims, the claim that our senses of certainty are not reliable since they are afflicted by cognitive biases such as the confirmation bias (cf. 2007, 335f.). Even though intuitions sometimes may be biased, there are many cases which speak against a general worry of simple theory contamination. To name two: Gettier’s intuition against the JTB analysis of “knowledge” was universally shared even though it went against the then dominant theory (cf. Grundmann 2010, 497f.); Lehrer’s Truetemp intuition is generally accepted both by externalists as well as internalists, which we would not expect if the intuition were theory contaminated. I think it is safe to conclude that intuitions often do carry trustworthy information about their reliability. 43

However, this is of no help if Weinberg’s third claim is right, the claim that the method of PAI does not exploit this information. Detectable margins only confer hopefulness on a method if that

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43 Sorensen discusses the charge of theory contamination even before it had been raised by experimental philosophers in his 1992, 263f. He proposes the following guards against theory contamination: checking for the intuitions of theoretical adversaries, using variations of thought experiments, checking with intuitions about older or other thought experiments unrelated to the theory in question, and finding confirmation in empirical sources and literature.
method avails itself of the information about the outputs’ quality. Obviously, Weinberg is right that “we currently possess no standard reporting procedures for registering any degrees of tentativeness or certainty with intuitions” if by “standard reporting procedure” he means a scale of confidence or the like (2007, 335). However, this does not mean that philosophers do not exchange views about their confidence in an intuition. And it especially does not mean that there is “no method in our practice for taking such information [about subjective certainty] into account.” (2007, 335) Quite to the contrary, the ubiquitous method of reflective equilibrium is based on the very idea that we can weigh competing intuitions against one another.44 Weighing intuitions simply could not be done if we didn’t possess some (even if implicit) method of taking into account the confidence we place in the competing intuitions.

I conclude that PAI actually does enjoy detectable margins and that PAI makes use of this information, even if not explicitly so.

Internal Coherence

The criterion of internal coherence is ambiguous between two readings. On the weak reading, a method satisfies the criterion simply by allowing for the comparison between different deliverances of that method. I will call this property the internal comparability of a source or method. On the strong reading, a method satisfies the criterion if the deliverances of that method are in overall agreement. I will call this property the overall agreement within a source or method. While comparability only allows for the detection of error, overall agreement presupposes comparability and further allows for the correction of error. Weinberg clearly has overall agreement in mind when speaking of internal coherence. There is one passage which suggests the comparability reading when he characterizes internal coherence as the possibility of “comparing different deliverances of the device” (331). However, there are so many clear cases of the other reading that I take the above

44 Could reflective equilibrium proceed on a purely syntactical basis, that is, without weighing intuitions? I don’t think this would work very well. E.g., we do not give up the Gettier intuition simply on the ground that it is a single outlier to an otherwise well confirmed theory (Weatherson 2003 proposes to do so). The reason we don’t, I suppose, is that the Gettier intuition has too much force to be given up just in favor of a more simple theory.
quote to merely be a slip of the pen. In what follows I will intend “internal coherence” to be understood in the strong reading unless otherwise noted.45

Weinberg argues that philosophical intuitions are not internally coherent. To bolster this claim he relies mainly on the results of experimental philosophy and adds some bits of speculation inspired by findings in the cognitive sciences. Let us follow Weinberg in distinguishing two types of disagreement among intuitions: interpersonal and intrapersonal. With regards to interpersonal disagreement, experimental surveys have supposedly shown that intuitions vary with factors such as cultural background, socio-economic status, and gender. With regard to intrapersonal disagreement, experimental surveys have supposedly shown that intuitions vary with factors such as order of presentation, degree of affective content and level of abstraction in the description of a scenario, and the environment in which the judgment is made. All parties to the debate agree that the above cited factors are irrelevant to the truth of the judgment in question. Whether the studies actually do establish the supposed variance is a highly controversial matter which is best discussed for each study on its own and which I cannot go into here.

The claim that PAI is not internally coherent faces again the question of generalization. Even though the literature is growing, only a rather limited amount of intuitions have been empirically tested. The defender of intuitions may object that the variance uncovered in relatively few cases cannot be taken as representative of the whole method of PAI, which comprises a lot of overlooked agreement as well. The main objections to the claim that intuitions are incoherent have already been discussed above. The Expertise Defense claims that there is no incoherence among philosophers’ intuitions, and the Conceptual Difference Defense objects that the incoherence uncovered in the studies is merely a type of miscommunication.

I will now come back to the weak reading of internal coherence. Above I have laid out my interpretation of Weinberg’s argument. I take him to claim, that PAI does not enjoy much internal coherence in the strong reading. That is to say, PAI delivers neither inter- nor intrasubjective agreement. This means that PAI cannot correct errors by appeal to overall agreement. However, Weinberg’s argument leaves open the possibility that PAI allows for detection (and avoidance) of errors; if there is interpersonal disagreement, we can withhold judgment and thus avoid relying on a

45 Note that Ichikawa (ms. a) attributes the weaker reading to Weinberg. He accuses Weinberg of having “lost the thread of his own argument” in mistakenly taking the claim “that PAI judgments do not converge internally” to “bear against the suggestion that internal coherence can be a source of hope for PAI.” (ms. a, 13) But this is a mistake only on the weak reading of ‘internal coherence’. On the strong reading, divergence does show that there is no internal coherence.
possibly false intuition. Interpersonal divergences in intuitions are detected in the various forms of
discussion (in seminars, lectures, hallway discussions, print publications, blogs, etc.) which are a
definitive part of traditional philosophy. Metaphorically speaking: Philosophers’ appeals to intuition
are not made from isolated armchairs, but from armchairs in philosophy departments, allowing for
comparisons between one intuiter and another. If there is interpersonal divergence regarding some
intuition – even if we may not be able to settle on an agreed upon answer – it will not go
unnoticed.46

However, Weinberg makes some remarks which suggest an argument against the claim that
intuitions allow for intra-personal comparability. In the section on intrasubjective disagreement
Weinberg repeatedly mentions different kinds of biases which may keep a philosopher from
detecting a possible intrapersonal divergence. That is, Weinberg explains away the apparent
intrapersonal convergence which a philosopher presumably experiences as an effect of different
biases and cognitive limitations. If Weinberg is right that “the uniformity of philosophers’
judgments about personally important cases is an artifact of their theoretical commitments” and
that philosophers as being “thoughtful people tend to lock in their initial judgments, and their very
thoughtfulness allows them to rationalize away those considerations that might have led to future
revisions”, then a stronger argument can be made (2007, 338, Weinberg’s emphasis). For we can
now say that PAI does not even allow for intrapersonal internal coherence in the weak sense, that
is, it does not allow for intrapersonal comparison of intuitions and thus does not even allow for
error detection by way of intrapersonal comparison. This means that PAI fares even worse with
respect to internal coherence than it initially seemed. Not only does it lack overall agreement (i.e.
errors cannot be corrected by appeal to agreement) but also does it allow only for diminished
comparability (errors can be detected by interpersonal comparison, but not by intrapersonal
comparison).

However, I am not convinced by this argument. As I have pointed out above, the conjecture
that philosophers are susceptible to certain biases is betrayed by many cases such as the Gettier
intuition. I still think it is worth noting what the claim actually amounts to, viz. that certain types of
error are not even intrapersonally detectable.

I conclude that intuitions do allow for error detection by way of inter- and intrapersonal
comparison. Whether intuitions further allow for internal error correction depends on whether the
divergence of intuitions allegedly discovered in the studies proves genuine or not. The success of

46 Of course, this is an argument against which Weinberg raises the worry of social selection (see footnote 29
above.)
the Expertise Defense and the Conceptual Difference Defense is a matter that largely depends on the case under consideration, as I have argued above. Whether error detection itself may be sufficient for trustworthiness will be discussed below.

External Corroboration

The criterion of external corroboration is, again, ambiguous between two readings. On the weak reading, a method fulfils this criterion if and only if its deliverances can be compared to the deliverances of other sources or methods (henceforth: external comparability). On the strong reading, a method fulfils this criterion if and only if its deliverances can be confirmed by the deliverances of other sources or methods (henceforth: external confirmation). Again, external confirmation presupposes external comparability. External corroboration in both senses allows for error detection. Whether it also allows for error correction seems to depend on the case at hand: If among many equally reliable sources a single one disagrees with the others, then the outlier is most plausibly in error. On the other hand, if there are but two equally reliable sources that disagree with one another, it cannot from that fact alone be said which source is correct.

PAI, so the critique, does not even fulfill the weak reading of external corroboration, i.e. the outputs of PAI cannot be compared to other sources’ outputs and thus do not allow for external error detection. The following passage summarizes Weinberg’s concern:

As for external corroboration, I take it to be clear that philosophical intuition has not had very much of this. By and large, we have not found much other access to the particular propositions in question than the intuitions themselves. For many of the domains in question (e.g., the metaphysics of modality) there simply may be no area outside of philosophy that really can speak to it, and for many of these domains we simply have not found any other way of investigating them other than intuition-mongering. (2007, 338f.)

On the face of it, the argument is very compelling. Philosophical intuitions are exclusive sources of evidence and thus cannot be externally corroborated – not even in the weak sense. What source, other than intuition, could speak to the question whether, for instance, a subject in a Gettier scenario has knowledge? Certainly, the realization of a Gettier scenario won’t be of any help. However, there are at least two ways in which the conclusion that PAI does not allow for external corroboration can be resisted.

The first objection, raised by Ichikawa (ms. a, § 5.1), pivots on the individuation of PAI. The general thrust of the objection is that Weinberg is equivocating on ‘intuition’ in the argument. Remember that PAI only encompasses a certain type of intuition and not all of intuition within
philosophy. The equivocation occurs in the claim that intuition is the only source of evidence we have for certain philosophical domains. If ‘intuition’ here refers to PAI-intuitions only, then the claim is false. For example, ordinary concept applications to particulars such as “that belief is justified” are proto-philosophical claims from which a general philosophical claim can be inferred. That means, non-PAI intuitions can be a source of evidence for philosophical claims. If ‘intuition’, on the other hand, refers to both PAI- and non-PAI-intuitions, then the claim does not say that PAI is the only source of evidence to philosophical domains after all. This in turn means that PAI-intuitions can be externally corroborated by non-PAI intuitions.

A second objection can be raised by pointing to the fact that Weinberg’s notion of corroboration is ambiguous between a narrow and a broad reading in yet another way. The disambiguation faces a dilemma which proves fatal to his argument. On the narrow reading, external corroboration is understood solely as the direct corroboration of results, i.e. corroboration by evidence from other sources showing directly that a certain result is correct. On the broad reading, external corroboration is understood to encompass not just direct but also indirect forms of corroboration such as successful application of a method’s results in other fields. On the narrow reading, Weinberg’s critique will equally apply to other types of intuition (breaching both the self-undermining as well as the skepticism constraint) and it will lead to general philosophical skepticism. On the broad reading, Weinberg simply has not shown that PAI does not enjoy external corroboration. Let me elaborate.

The first horn of the dilemma is based on the narrow reading. By ‘direct corroboration’ I mean for example the following. My visual perception that there is a glass of wine before me can be directly confirmed by tactile, olfactory and acoustic perceptions as well as by my memory and general understanding of the situation I am in. The attribution of the narrow reading is made plausible by most of Weinberg’s discussion. For example, Weinberg explains the criterion of external corroboration with examples where results from vision or electron microscopy are directly corroborated by the results from other sources. Further, he argues for PAI’s lack of external corroboration by claiming that “we have not found much other access to the particular propositions in question” and that “there simply may be no area outside of philosophy that really can speak to” these propositions (2007, 338 and 339 respectively). His taking this claim to be sufficient for establishing the lack of external corroboration of PAI implies the narrow reading. However, the narrow reading allows for two objections.

First, the narrow reading allows for a reductio that issues into philosophical skepticism. According to Weinberg, PAI cannot be externally corroborated because it is an exclusive source with respect to the domains about which it speaks. However, if PAI is the only available source of
evidence with respect to the domains to which it speaks, and PAI is not trustworthy, then there are no trustworthy sources with respect to the domains about which PAI speaks. Assuming that PAI speaks pretty much to all philosophical domains (Weinberg’s critique is not directed at just one particular domain), Weinberg’s critique issues into a general skepticism regarding philosophical questions: There are no trustworthy sources of evidence for philosophical claims. This is not the intended conclusion of Weinberg’s critique – after all, he is making philosophical claims himself.

To be fair, there is a way out for Weinberg. He can alter the argument from saying that in principle there are no other sources for the domains that PAI speaks to, to saying that so far we have not found or used any sources external to PAI to corroborate its results. The *reductio* is thus defused—but it is defused by weakening the attack: Weinberg can no longer claim that in principle there is no other source that can corroborate philosophical intuitions. He can only maintain that, so far, we have either not found or not used other sources to corroborate philosophical intuitions.

The second and more serious problem with the narrow reading is that it renders the mathematical and logical intuitions equally uncorroborated. What source, other than intuition, could speak to logical axioms such as ‘(p → q) → (¬q → ¬p)’? Doubting logical intuitions will lead to general skepticism and will render Weinberg’s critique self-undermining. Something similar holds for grammaticality intuitions. On a very naïve view: we take grammaticality intuitions to be good evidence for the grammatical correctness or incorrectness of a sentence without demanding for any external corroboration.47

The second horn of the dilemma is based on the broad reading of ‘external corroboration’, which admits both direct and indirect types of corroboration. The only example of indirect external corroboration given by Weinberg is this.

> Logic and mathematics are excellent examples of domains with hopeful intuitions. […] We have the kind of checking that comes from the successful integration of mathematics and logic into other ongoing scientific concerns; indeed, into almost all ongoing scientific concerns. (2007, 339)

I take it to be uncontentious that mathematics and logics do enjoy this indirect type of corroboration. The problem with the broad reading of ‘corroboration’ is that Weinberg has not even tried to show that PAI does not also enjoy this kind of indirect corroboration. Even though it is not quite clear what would count as indirect corroboration, I will try to cite some examples of how results of PAI are successfully applied in fields outside philosophy. Unfortunately, this task

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47 See Kipper (2010) for an analogy between PAI and grammarians’ appeals to intuitions. See also my (2010).
proves to be harder than one would think. Which far-fetched cases help guide our inquiry in domains other than philosophy?

First of all, moral intuitions come to mind. Does the fact that moral intuitions successfully guide our moral and legal practices provide indirect external corroboration? It seems that the type of success that is conferred by these intuitions may differ from the success of scientific inquiry in a relevant way. So this is not a clear case of successful application of PAI in another field. Secondly and more convincingly, PAI-type intuitions, or conceptual distinctions based on them, are frequently and successfully used in the sciences. To name but one example: Elliot Sober’s distinction between ‘selection for’ and ‘selection of’ (1984, 97ff.) helped generate a better understanding of evolutionary theory and has explanatory relevance for many initially puzzling phenomena (e.g. those generated by pleiotropy or gene linkage). This distinction is based on the intuitive evaluation of a thought experiment, so, in a relevant sense, it is a result of PAI.\(^{48}\) Since I cannot think of any more convincing cases I propose this as a challenge to armchair philosophers.

I conclude the discussion of external corroboration by stating that the two challenges above have not been met by Weinberg. Ichikawa showed that PAI intuitions can be externally corroborated, e.g. by mundane application intuitions and innocuous generalizations from particular cases to general claims. Secondly, the criterion of direct corroboration is too strong while the criterion of indirect corroboration can probably be met by PAI (at any rate, Weinberg has not given us any reason to think the opposite).

The critical examination of the four criteria of hopefulness has yielded that PAI is a lot more hopeful than Weinberg would have. Perhaps more decisively, PAI seems to be (almost) on a par with the undisputed intuitions, which, just like PAI intuitions, are less hopeful than scientific and everyday sources in several respects, to wit: theoretical understanding, detectability of margins and external corroboration. The only criterion with respect to which the undisputed intuitions seem to trump PAI is internal agreement. However, PAI’s standing on this issue, i.e. the question whether

\(^{48}\) Sober imagines the following scenario: “Two organisms \(A\) and \(B\) may have the same overall [fitness], even though they have different vulnerabilities to specific possible [causes of death]. […] Let’s imagine a large population of organisms each of which is a clone either of \(A\) or of \(B\). The organisms in this population would be identical in overall fitness. Does it follow that no selection process can occur here, since the requisite variation in fitness is absent? In a sense that I will try to clarify, the answer to this question is no. […] It’s true that there is no overall selective difference between the two types, because there is no overall difference in fitness. Nevertheless, there’s a good deal of selecting going on.” (Sober 1984, 97) This thought experiment is meant to help explicate the notion of selection and eventually leads up to Sober’s distinction between ‘selection of’ and ‘selection for’.
there is genuine and pervasive divergence among philosophers’ intuitions, is still a matter of debate and investigation.

The Boundaries of Hopefulness

We now see that things may not be as bad for PAI as Weinberg takes them to be. Yet, it seems equally clear that the demand for hopefulness does present a challenge to PAI, as intuitions clearly seem to be less hopeful than scientific or everyday methods of inquiry. In this section I want to discuss the question whether the argument from hopefulness can be met by the claim that PAI is hopeful after all. Answering the question whether PAI is hopeful would first require defining the boundaries of hopefulness, that is, defining how many of the four criteria of hopefulness have to be satisfied to what extent in order for a method to count as hopeful. Weinberg avoids the question by arguing that PAI meets none of the four criteria and thereby is clearly hopeless. However, he claims that error detection by itself will not make for a significant degree of hopefulness, only error detection and correction together will make for a hopeful source: “If, and only if, our methods possess a significant degree of hope, that possibility [of correcting errors] might be secured. Otherwise [i.e. if there is only error detection], at best, we can know that someone is wrong without being able to uncover who is wrong and why.” (2007, 328) In other words the question is this: with only limited potential for error detection and correction should intuition count as hopeful? Grundmann has offered an argument which claims that fulfilling the criterion of internal coherence is sufficient for hopefulness (cf. 2010, 504, Fn. 6). If this argument is correct, the Argument from Hopelessness could be rejected by showing that PAI is internally coherent. Let me discuss Grundmann’s argument.

Grundmann claims that “for most basic sources internal coherence is the only available procedure of error-correction.” (loc. cit.) Thus, if Weinberg were to ask for more than the fulfillment of one criterion the criterion of hopefulness would label most basic sources as not trustworthy and thus issue into general skepticism. To establish the claim that most of our basic sources do not possess more than internal coherence Grundmann cites color vision, introspecting qualia, and preservative memory as examples. I will go through the other three criteria of hopefulness in turn.

49 More precisely, Grundmann speaks of “introspective awareness of special features of mental content” such as a pain’s sharpness vs. a pain’s nagging. (2010, 504, Fn. 6)
Regarding external corroboration Grundmann writes that

[for most basic sources we do not have any resource of external corroboration since basic sources are often exclusive sources with respect to their domain. How should we be able to corroborate colour vision, introspective awareness of special features of mental content (e.g., is this pain sharp or nagging?), or preservative memory by any external procedure? (loc. cit.)

Is it true that color vision, introspection of qualia, and preservative memory are exclusive sources? Regarding preservative memory counterexamples abound: My memory that I left my keys on the table can be corroborated by my visual perception of them lying there; my memory that I made a certain assertion during an interview can be corroborated by listening to the recording of that interview; etc.\textsuperscript{50} As for color vision, the notion of color vision is ambiguous between phenomenal color vision, which is just another case of introspection of qualia, and functional color vision, which is not an exclusive source (we can corroborate functional color vision for instance by using a spectrometer).\textsuperscript{51} Qualia in fact do seem to have a special stand in that they cannot be accessed except via introspection. However, this one example hardly allows for the generalization pushed by Grundmann that “most basic sources” lack external corroboration. A skeptical attitude towards qualia actually would fit Weinberg’s scientific approach.

Regarding theoretical understanding Grundmann argues that

[s]ince many basic sources are exclusive with respect to their domain, their proper functioning within their typical environment can only be explained by using these sources themselves. But then, the theoretical understanding itself could never be justified. The reason is that any justification by a source would already presuppose theoretical understanding of that very source. (loc. cit.)

The idea is that there can be no non-circular explanation of a basic source. However, Weinberg explicitly admits circular explanations to be part of theoretical understanding. He writes that „the epistemically deleterious characteristic cannot be […] the lack of a non-circular defense” and that “the opponent had better not think it is a problem that part of that justification [of perception] comes from perception itself.” (Weinberg 2007, 323 and 324 respectively) Thus, the claim that basic

\textsuperscript{50} I hope that I did not misinterpret Grundmann’s claim, for these counterexamples just seem too obvious to have slipped his attention.

\textsuperscript{51} By “phenomenal color vision” I mean the experience of color qualia upon visual perception of colored objects. By “functional color vision” I mean that sort of color vision which phenomenal zombies presumably can have and which allows for capacities such as classifying objects by color etc.
exclusive sources cannot be explained non-circularly does not imply that they do not allow for theoretical understanding in the relevant sense.

Finally, regarding the detectability of margins Grundmann claims that “many basic sources simply do not represent the epistemic quality of their performances (e.g., introspection in cases where it is not practically infallible, or preservative memory).” (Grundmann 2010, 504, Fn. 6.) First, I want to object to the claim that preservative memory does not carry information about its reliability. I take it we are all familiar with cases in which we are not sure whether we correctly remember, say, the name of a person or the departure time of our train. This uncertainty need not be due to a defeater, but can arise simply as a felt uncertainty that accompanies a deliverance of our memory. Regarding the other extreme, in many cases we are so sure about the deliverances of our memory that doubting them doesn’t even cross our mind. Of course we sometimes trust a false memory, but in most cases our sense of certainty does not fail us, as should be clear from the overwhelming amount of things we remember correctly in our everyday lives, such as the name of one’s spouse or one’s way to the office and back home. As for color vision the ambiguity mentioned in the last paragraph is relevant again. Functional color vision clearly carries information about its reliability. We can point to clear instances of red, to clear instances of orange, and we can also point to borderline cases where the object in question is neither clearly red nor clearly orange. Phenomenal color vision, again, is just another instance of introspecting qualia. Regarding qualia introspection, the debate is notoriously complicated by the fact that everyone has access only to their own qualia. So, I for my part do experience clear cases of feeling hungry, clear cases of feeling sick, and cases in which I am not quite sure if I am being hungry or feeling sick.

Summing up, I believe that the premises of Grundmann’s argument are false. That is to say, apart from perhaps introspection of qualia, which is a notorious exception in many respects, most other basic sources (the ones discussed above as well as other apparently basic sources such as the different sense modalities and testimony) do allow for hopefulness by more than one means. Of course, this does not show that we do in fact need more than internal coherence for a source to be hopeful. What can be said, then, about the hopefulness of PAI? First, to repeat the last section’s conclusion, PAI is more hopeful than Weinberg believes. Nothing in Weinberg’s argument speaks against the idea that a medium hopeful source could be trustworthy, so in this sense, my overall objections can be deemed successful. Second, comparison to the undisputed intuitions shows that these are just a little bit more hopeful. If hope comes in degrees and the undisputed intuitions are above the trustworthiness threshold, it is plausible to assume that PAI is as well.
Rejecting the Demand for Hopefulness

In the final section I want to explore yet another way to react to Weinberg’s challenge, viz. rejecting the demand for hopefulness of PAI. I will first present an argument from Grundmann (2010) and then some of my own considerations.

Grundmann accepts that hopefulness is an epistemic virtue, but maintains that it is not a necessary condition for trustworthiness. His argument is based on the distinction between the weak and the strong reading of internal coherence (internal comparability vs. internal agreement). He admits that intuitions may not be fully hopeful (which would require error correction), but holds that they are at least ‘hopeful-Minus’ (which only requires increasing reliability and error detection). Being hopeful-Minus, according to Grundmann, is sufficient for a source to be trustworthy. That is to say, error correction is not necessary for a source to be trustworthy. The argument, roughly, goes thus. First, Grundmann cogently shows that Weinberg’s positive argument for the claim that error correction is a necessary condition for trustworthiness is not conclusive (cf. 488-90, I will not go into the details here). Then, he offers a positive argument himself for the claim that error correction is not a necessary condition of trustworthiness (cf. 490f.). He appeals to two hypothetical examples in which a generally corrigible source has a particular output which is itself not corrigible. Such outputs, Grundmann maintains, can be trustworthy in spite of their lack of corrigeability. But of course Grundmann will have to generalize from this claim about incorrigible but trustworthy outputs to the claim that there can be generally incorrigible but trustworthy sources. To do so, he asks us to imagine a reliable, exclusive source, the outputs of which concern completely unrelated phenomena. Its exclusiveness means that its errors cannot be externally corrected or even detected, its being about unrelated phenomena means that its errors cannot be internally corrected or even detected. This reliable source, according to Grundmann, is “a genuine source of evidence that is hopeless.” (491)

Let us grant to Grundmann here that, in some objective sense, this mysterious source is a genuine source of evidence. Still, it could be objected, it is not trustworthy, that is, we should not appeal to it as a source of evidence. This is because we cannot know about its reliability. With the outputs’ being neither internally nor externally comparable, we have no idea whether the source gives us the correct results or not. Thus, even if this source were infallible, we would have no justification in trusting this source, and in this sense, the source is not trustworthy. Here is a rejoinder: we can have a justification to trust the source independently from its deliverances, say, via testimony. Fair enough, perhaps such a source can be trustworthy after all. Yet, this implies a slight modification to the conclusion reached by Grundmann. All that has been established by this
example is that a hopeless source can be trustworthy, if the source can be known to be reliable. This weakened conclusion will still support Grundmann’s argument, which goes on to reconstruct the challenge to intuitions in terms of reliability. This means that the question of the trustworthiness of intuitions can now be put in terms of the reliability of intuitions, which I cannot pursue any further.

Finally, I want to wrap up the discussion with an argument for the claim that the demand for hopefulness on PAI is misplaced. Weinberg’s critique of PAI is inspired by treating evidence in philosophy analogously to evidence in the natural sciences. This, to me, is a mistake. Measurements in the sciences are about empirical facts. Weinberg treats intuition as comparable to such evidential sources. My conjecture, on the contrary, is that philosophical intuitions simply are not like scientific evidence in that, for instance, they are not empirically testable. Of course, we still want to be able to detect and – if possible – correct errors in PAI. However, detecting errors in philosophical intuitions may require other criteria than detecting errors in the sciences. Philosophical claims, so the idea, are settled by a different (not a weaker) kind of evidence than scientific claims.

How does this idea pan out into an argument against the demand for hopefulness? The mere fact that philosophical claims differ from scientific claims does not license the conclusion that they must not fulfill the same criteria. Rather, the disanalogy can be used to rebut Weinberg’s positive claim that PAI needs to be hopeful.

First, Weinberg presents a ‘practical case’ for the demand for error correction. Weinberg sees a “risk in granting any status to the hopeless” namely that “[d]isagreements between rival researchers with hopeless sources of evidence may be impossible to adjudicate.” (2007, 328) But are intuitions to blame or is it perhaps just in the nature of philosophical questions that they sometimes do not allow for definite answers? Consider what it means to make progress in philosophy. Progress is not necessarily achieved by answering questions, but often by achieving a better understanding of a question or by dissolving a question as well as by improvements in the philosophical toolbox (e.g. the distinction between use and mention, the notion of a category mistake, or formal methods in decision theory to name just a few). Weinberg’s premise that a source must allow researchers to conclusively settle a disagreement simply may be misguided in philosophy.

52 The above considerations provide an answer to another question Grundmann raises: “what is epistemically desirable about an evidence to be delivered by a source that is in general corrigible, if the particular evidence is completely isolated from the practice of error-correction”? (491) An answer could be: the general corrigibility, say, of vision, gives us justification to trust vision as a reliable source, and even trust some particular perceptions which are isolated from error-correction.

53 See also Grundmann (2010, 492) and my (2010, 241).
Second, Weinberg presents the argument that error correction has already proved to be a good criterion in the sciences: “we can also see (H) already and in practice fruitfully at work in science.” (2007, 328) Against this argument, the disanalogy applies itself very naturally: Even if (H) has proven to be a fruitful norm in science, it may not be fruitful in philosophy due to philosophy relying on a different kind of evidence.

Even though these considerations may not be decisive, they provide some hesitation to grant to Weinberg the demand that PAI need to be hopeful in the specified sense. Together with Grundmann’s argument, we can conclude that error correction is not necessary for a source to be trustworthy.

**Conclusion**

Are intuitions a reliable guide to philosophical truths? I have presented different versions of challenge from experimental philosophy and discussed the defenses that are available to the armchair philosopher. My main focus was on Weinberg’s Argument from Hopelessness which represents the strongest challenge to intuition. I argued that the challenge can be resisted, even though certain issues, such as the expertise claim, need to await further inquiry. What can be said about the initial question whether intuitions are a trustworthy source of evidence? I have argued for the view of Intuition Pluralism which says that the question cannot be answered on that level of generality. I neither join the experimentalists in claiming that intuition is not trustworthy, nor do I join the armchair defenders of intuition in claiming that intuition is trustworthy. Rather, I take to the view that the answer depends on the particular intuition and case in question.

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