

# Philosophical Intuitions

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What exactly is a philosophical intuition? And what makes such an intuition reliable, when it is reliable? This paper provides a terminological framework that is able answer to the first question, and then puts the framework to work developing an answer to the second question. More specifically, the paper argues that we can distinguish between two different “evidential roles” which intuitions can occupy: under certain conditions they can provide information about the representational structure of an intuitor’s concept, and under different conditions, they can provide information about whether or not a property is instantiated. The paper describes two principles intended to capture the difference between the two sets of conditions—that is, the paper offers a principle that explains when an intuition will be a reliable source of evidence about the representation structure of an intuitor’s concept, and another principle that explains when an intuition will be a reliable source of evidence about whether or not a property is instantiated. The paper concludes by briefly arguing that, insofar as philosophers are interested using intuitions to determine whether or not some philosophically interesting property is instantiated by some scenario (for instance, whether knowledge is instantiated in a Gettier-case), the reliability of the intuition in question does not depend on whether or not the intuition is widely shared.

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## 1. Introduction

Many philosophers use intuitions as a source of evidence. But recently, interest in the epistemology and psychology of intuitions themselves has increased dramatically, and some philosophers—most of whom are proponents of a research programme called “experimental philosophy”—have argued that we now have evidence that shows that we should be sceptical of philosophical intuitions. These philosophers contend that we should no

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longer use just the intuitions of philosophers as evidence in philosophical theorizing (if we need to use intuitions at all), because it can be shown on the basis of experimental data that non-philosophers typically have intuitions that do not agree with the intuitions of philosophers, and that the intuitions of non-philosophers vary according to factors that are seemingly philosophically irrelevant, like the intuitor's socio-economic status.

The present paper enters into the debate initiated by the arguments of the experimental philosophers. The paper's main goal is to clarify the notion of an intuition as it is used in contemporary philosophy and also in the burgeoning experimental literature treating the psychology of intuitions, and in so doing, to show one way in which this notion is sophisticated enough to resist the sceptical worries of some experimental philosophers.<sup>1,2</sup> In so doing, the paper is most concerned with offering a coherent and explanatorily useful account of intuitions that tries to collect together many of the features of intuitions that philosophers have remarked on. The aim, in short, is to provide a report on what might be called the "standard view" of intuitions.<sup>3</sup> And so, in service of this goal, I will provide an analysis of the structure of intuitions, offer an assessment of the conditions under which intuitions will be reliable sources of evidence, and explain why one of the central lines of experimental philosophy's critique of the use of intuitions in philosophy fails. My hope is that the results of this paper will be helpful to both traditional philosophers and those researchers (including experimental philosophers) who are studying intuitions experimentally.

The paper is organized in the following way. I start with a discussion of the structure of intuitions in section 2, in the course of which I establish a terminological framework that allows us to talk with an appropriate degree of precision about the properties of intuitions. Sections 3 and 4 offer some

<sup>1</sup> This is, roughly, the use of 'intuition' that is found in the works of Chomsky, Gettier, and Kripke. I believe that this is a logically distinct notion of intuition, compared to the notion of intuitions most closely associated with Ethical Intuitionism; i.e. the notion of intuition familiar in the works of Moore and Ross. However, Audi (2004) and Huemer (2005) both offer views that link the contemporary notion of an intuition with the older notion of an intuition.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that not all experimental philosophers are party to the sceptical argument. I am focusing on the argument produced by proponents of what is sometimes called the "Rutgers Plan".

<sup>3</sup> It is unsurprising that, given their ubiquity in philosophical practice, nearly every philosopher has at some point in their career offered some insightful remarks concerning the properties of intuitions. Clearly, it isn't possible to catalogue here all these remarks. But for a different attempt to capture the consensus view in philosophy, one which places more emphasis on demonstrating how philosophical intuitions can be a source of a priori knowledge than the present account, see (Bealer and Strawson 1992), (Bealer 1996) and (Bealer 1998).

further terminological refinements to this framework. I then turn to the epistemology of intuitions in section 5, where I identify some of the conditions that intuitions must meet in order for them to be properly treated as a source of evidence. Section 6 then uses the results of the preceding sections to show that, for technical concepts, this paper's view of the epistemology of intuitions implies that we should defer to the intuitions of experts. Section 7 shows that a similar conclusion holds for many of the concepts that interest contemporary philosophers, and then draws from this some implications for the sceptical argument from experimental philosophy concerning the use of intuitions as evidence in philosophical theorizing. Brief concluding comments are offered in section 8.

## 2. Paradigm Examples

We begin with an often recited platitude about the function of intuitions within philosophy. It is often claimed that intuitions involve or somehow reveal what our concepts are. Hilary Kornblith, for example, writes that “appeals to intuition are designed to illuminate the contours of our concepts” (Kornblith 2006, 11). One way of cashing out this platitude might be to understand intuitions as a kind of judgment about the meaning of a concept. But this cannot be right. For, as we will see in following sections, intuitions are not literally *about* our concepts or their meanings, despite the fact that there are conditions under which intuitions can be a good source of evidence about the meanings of our concepts.

In fact, in order to capture some of the more subtle aspects of intuitions, I believe that we need a better understanding of the structure of intuitions. So, here is, to a good first approximation, what I take the structure of an intuition to be. Intuitions are *about*—in the sense of, “is a response to”—the *salient feature(s)* of a *case*. The *salient features* of a *case* are the *objects* of an intuition. The *propositional content* of an intuition follows from the *implicated concept*. Thus, the basic idea is that an intuition is about the salient features of a case, it has propositional content, and the propositional content of an intuition is obtained in some way from the implicated concept.

The argument for this terminology is straightforward. I will take four examples of paradigmatic appeals to intuition and show that the distinctions just mentioned can be used to make sense of each example.<sup>4</sup> My examples

<sup>4</sup> A point of clarification: I am not offering an analysis of thought experiments. Of course, some of the most famous thought-experiments in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century analytic philosophy consist of, basically, a single appeal to an intuition about a hypothetical case. But it nevertheless seems to me that thought-experiments both within and outside of philosophy usually consist of more than just an appeal to an intuition. So perhaps in order to understand many thought-experiments we need to first understand intuitions, but I do

will be the first of Edmund Gettier's two appeals to intuition, Judith Jarvis-Thompson's famous violinist case, an example from Gilbert Harman, and about half of Hilary Putnam's twin earth scenario.

For example, Gettier asked us to consider the following familiar case in his famous 1963 article:

Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition:

(d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones' pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (d) entails:

(e) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true.

But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Proposition (e) is then true, though proposition (d), from which Smith inferred (e) is false. In our example, then, all of the following are true: (i) (e) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (e) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (e) is true. But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (e) is true; for (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (e) on a count of the coins in Jones' pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job. (Gettier 1963, 122)

First, a small interpretative claim. When Gettier claims that "it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (e) is true", he is reporting an intuition. I believe that this is the standard interpretation of this passage.

Now, it makes sense to ask what the intuition is about. Following the platitude mentioned above, a natural answer is this: the intuition is *about*

not think that a single explanation will be able to account for both appeals to intuitions and thought-experiments. (For more on thought experiments, see (Sorensen 1992) and (Häggqvist 1996).)

our concept of knowledge. But this is not exactly right. For on further examination, it looks as though the intuition is really about the imaginary scenario described by Gettier - i.e., the *case*. In fact, it is more precise to say that the intuition is about—again, meaning, roughly, “is responding to”—some of the properties of the case, namely the fact that Smith’s belief is true and that it has been derived from things that Smith already knows, but that Smith’s reasoning relied on (unbeknownst to him) false lemmas. We can say that these properties constitute Smith’s doxastic state, and that these properties are the *salient features* of the *case*, and they are therefore the *object* of the intuition.

It is obvious that intuitions have *propositional content*. This is what we “get” when we have an intuition. And in this example, it is clear that the propositional content of the intuition is what is expressed when Gettier reports his intuition: that Smith doesn’t know that (e) is true.

Now, it should seem that the concept of knowledge is in some way or another *implicated* in the intuition. In the next section I’ll clarify this claim further, but for now it will do to simply establish our terminology. The idea, in rough, is that the *propositional content* of an intuition is obtained by the intuitor applying her concept of knowledge to the case, and we say that her concept of knowledge is the *implicated concept*.

Putting the terminology together now, we have the following. The *object* of this particular intuition is the *salient feature* of the *case*, namely Smith’s doxastic state. The concept of knowledge is *implicated* in this intuition. And what the intuitor of the intuition “gets” when she has the intuition is the *propositional content* of the intuition, which, if you share Gettier’s intuition, is: Smith does not know that (e) is true.

If by now you think that this account of the structure of an intuition is basically correct, or at least close enough to work with for the remainder of this paper, please feel free to skip ahead to the next section. Otherwise, let’s move through the next three examples a little more quickly.

So, once again, we can see that the same distinctions can be used to make sense of Thompson’s famous violinist case. Here is the relevant passage:

You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with an unconscious violinist. A famous unconscious violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist’s circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own. The director of the hospital now tells you, “Look we’re sorry the Society of Music Lovers did this to you—we would never have permitted it if we had known. But still,

they did it, and the violinist now is plugged into you. To unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind, its only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you.” Is it morally incumbent on you to accede to this situation? ... do you *have* to accede to it? (Thompson 1971, 48–49)

The intuition that people usually report is that there is no moral obligation to agree to remain plugged into the famous violinist. Whether or not this case is appropriately analogous to the situation of an unwanted pregnancy is not our concern here.

Now, at first it may seem plausible that this intuition is about what morality requires of us, or what our moral duty would be in such circumstances. But for the same reason as above, this is not exactly right. For we can see that, literally, the intuition is about the imaginary choice to remain hooked up to the famous violinist or not. The conditions of this choice are the *salient features* of the *case*, and so we say that these features are the *object* of the intuition. Additionally, it looks as though our concept of moral duty is *implied* in this intuition, while the *propositional content* of the intuition is, as we have just observed, that one need not agree to remain plugged into the famous violinist.

Let us turn to our two final examples. First, from Harman, and then from Putnam.

You are a doctor in a hospital’s emergency room when six accident victims are brought in. All six are in danger of dying but one is much worse off than the others. You can just barely save that person if you devote all of your resources to him and let the others die. Alternatively, you can save the other five if you are willing to ignore the most seriously injured person.

It would seem that in this case you, the doctor, would be right to save the five and let the other person die. (Harman 1977, 3)<sup>5</sup>

Once more we can see that this appeal to an intuition has the suggested structure. For it is clear that the object of this intuition is a salient feature of a case—that is, the intuition is about the imaginary choice concerning which patient to save as presented in the hypothetical E.R. scenario. The

<sup>5</sup> Harman here thinks that philosophers are “reporting our feelings about an imagined example” (Harman 1977, 4), and so it may be that Harman once held an emotivist view of the psychology of moral intuitions. Recently, however, he has written in support of the idea that moral intuitions are derived from a developmentally-endogenous moral grammar. Put roughly, the idea is that moral intuitions are caused by a cognitive faculty that encodes moral knowledge in something like the structure of a generative grammar. C.f. (Harman 2008).

implicated concept appears once again to be the concept of moral duty, and the propositional content of the intuition is that it would be right to save the five and let the other person die.

Our final example will consist of only a part of Putnam's famous twin-earth argument, since I assume that readers are familiar with the details of the case and therefore nothing of importance is lost by omitting Putnam's full description. Here is the relevant passage.

Suppose that somewhere in the galaxy there is a planet we shall call Twin Earth. Twin Earth is very much like Earth (...) One of the peculiarities of Twin Earth is that the liquid called "water" is not H<sub>2</sub>O but a different liquid whose chemical formula is very long and complicated. I shall abbreviate this chemical formula simply as XYZ. (...)

If a spaceship from Earth ever visits Twin-Earth, then the supposition at first will be that "water" has the same meaning on Earth and on Twin Earth. This supposition will be corrected when it is discovered that "water" on Twin Earth is XYZ, and the Earthian spaceship will report somewhat as follows: "On Twin Earth the word 'water' means XYZ." (Putnam 1975, 223)

The case here is the scenario involving the various uses of 'water' plus the details of the nature of Twin Earth, and the salient features of it are the "peculiarities" of Twin Earth including their use of 'water'. The intuition is about these salient features, and its propositional content is, of course, what the Earthian spaceship reports: that on Twin Earth the word 'water' means XYZ. In this example, it is the concept of meaning that is implicated in the intuition.

So, we have now examined four examples of appeals to intuitions, and we've seen that each case the intuition can be sensibly interpreted using the following structure: the *object* of an intuition is the *salient features* of a *case*, that a particular concept is *implicated* in the occurrence of an intuition, that intuitions also have *propositional content*, and that there is a sense in which the *propositional content* of an intuition is obtained from the *implicated concept*.

### 3. The Relationship between Concepts and Propositional Content in Intuitions

If the preceding proposal concerning the structure of an intuition is right, then it will be hard to say anything more about what makes some intuition or another reliable without saying something, first, about concepts, and second, about the relationship between a concept and the propositional content of an intuition. Sorting out these two issues is the purpose of this section.

So let me begin with concepts. The consensus amongst philosophers and psychologists is that concepts are mental representations and that they are referring entities. It is also uncontroversial, I believe, that some concepts are more accurate than other concepts,<sup>6</sup> which is to say, some concepts correspond better to the things that fall under them than other concepts, while some concepts correspond to nothing at all. Examples are easy to find. For instance, consider the concept of gravity as understood by Newtonian physicists compared with the concept of gravity as understood by physicists after the introduction of the theory of general relativity, and either concept of gravity compared to the concept of a unicorn or the concept of a square circle. In fact, I think that these three assumptions about the nature of concepts are all that is required to get a plausible epistemology of intuitions off the ground. My case for this contention is found in the remainder of the paper.

But that said, I should mention one important caveat and introduce an important distinction. The caveat first. Beyond the assumptions just mentioned, I am not initially proposing to take on board any further commitments about the psychology or semantics of concepts.<sup>7</sup> That is, I want to remain neutral on the issue of the details of the underlying psychology that allows an individual to deploy a concept, and likewise I want to remain neutral on the issue of how to properly specify the meaning or intensional content of a concept—i.e., whether the meaning of a concept is given by a stereotype, an inferential role, an analytic definition, beliefs that encode a representation of a cluster of properties, or whatever else it may be. I do want to register my doubt that being competent with some particular concept always or necessarily involves knowing something like an analytic definition for the concept,<sup>8</sup> but most of the following arguments do not depend on any particular position on these various issues being correct.

So, with these points in mind, in the following I will talk about the salient features of a case “satisfying” the intensional content of the implicated concept, and what I mean by this, of course, is that the salient features correspond to a sufficient number of the properties encoded in the representational structure that constitutes the intensional content of the intuitor’s concept, whatever that structure may be, however knowledge of that structure is realized psychologically in the mind, and whatever number suffices as a sufficient number. The idea here is that, when applying a concept to a case,

<sup>6</sup> That is, unless an atomistic conception of concepts is correct; see (Fodor 2008). And see also Machery (2009), who, to put it very roughly, argues that the notion of a concept is too heterogeneous to have any explanatory use.

<sup>7</sup> Nor, for that matter, am I taking on any deep commitments about the correct analysis of propositional content.

<sup>8</sup> C.f. (Block and Stalnaker 1999).



if the salient features satisfy the intuitor's concept, this will ordinarily cause an intuitor to affirm that the salient features fall under her concept; and if the salient features do not satisfy the intuitor's concept, this will ordinarily cause her to withhold affirming that her concept is satisfied by the salient features of the case.

As for the promised distinction, in the following sections I will reserve 'concept' for a particular individual's mental representation of the property that is picked out by her concept. Using 'concept' in this way allows us to make explicit the distinction between someone's concept of knowledge, for instance, and the prevailing conception of knowledge, and/or the correct concept of knowledge. For it is of course clear that someone's concept of knowledge can fail to coincide with, e.g., the prevailing conception of knowledge, if the intensional content of the individual's concept of knowledge does not map onto the intensional content of the prevailing conception, and where the prevailing conception is (if there is one) the statistically normal way of representing properties that fall under the associated concept(s). An example of this is, arguably, the concept of knowledge possessed by many reliabilists. Although this is a claim that could be confirmed by experimental test (see section 5 below), plausibly the prevailing conception of knowledge amongst non-philosophers comports best with internalist analyses of knowledge. But a reliabilist's concept of knowledge will usually not comport with such analyses. So, since someone's concept may disagree with an associated prevailing conception, someone may find that certain properties satisfy her concept, but it may be that these same properties do not fall under the associated prevailing conception. Since this fact will have consequences for the epistemology of intuitions, it makes sense to set up our terminology for talking about intuitions and concepts in a way that does not suppress this distinction, or the similar distinction between an intuitor's concept and the correct concept. For it is of course important to keep in mind that satisfying the intuitor's concept of, e.g., a plant is not the same as satisfying the correct concept of a plant. Consider for example intuitions about fungi or coral reefs.

Turning now to the relationship between a concept and the propositional content of an intuition, I want to begin examining this issue with the following observation. We can see that the salient features of any sufficiently detailed case will satisfy more than one concept, and that the salient features of any one case will typically either satisfy or fail to satisfy an even larger number of concepts. Since intuitions involve both cases in which the implicated concept is satisfied and cases in which the implicated concept is not satisfied by the salient features of the case, this means that the overall details of the case will typically be insufficient to determine the identity of the implicated

concept. Thus, it looks as though *which* of the intuitor's concepts gets to be the implicated concept must ultimately be a pragmatic matter, determined by the way in which a particular intuition is being used in argumentation, for example.

Let me illustrate this point with two examples. First, with apologies to Gettier, consider the following case:

Smith and Jones have applied for the same job. As both wait to be interviewed outside the office of the president of the company's office, neither Smith nor Jones has any evidence that he will be the one to get the job, and not the other man. Still, on the basis of nothing more than a guess, Smith forms the following belief: he will be the one to get the job. But as a matter of fact, Smith and Jones are the only two candidates being considered for the job and Jones is patently unqualified, so Smith's belief is true.

Clearly a number of concepts are satisfied by this case (guessing, believing, truth, etc.), and even more are not. Some of the philosophically interesting concepts that are not satisfied, though, are the concepts of justified belief and knowledge. Indeed, this case might well be used to elicit either of the following intuitions:

Smith does not know that he will get the job.  
Smith's belief is not justified.

But whether or not either of these intuitions are elicited will surely depend on how the case is framed by the argument in which the appeal to intuition is embedded. We can imagine that the first intuition would be elicited if the case were to occur as the crucial part of a paper mounting a refutation of some philosopher's theory that guessing to the truth provides knowledge, for instance.

Here is the second example.

Smith has applied for a job and, after he is interviewed by the president of the company, the president tells Smith that he has the job. She then asks Smith to immediately sign a job contract, which he does. Smith is then told to report for work early next week.

Once again, depending on how the case is being used within an argument, it could be used to elicit this intuition,

Smith knows that he has the job.

But were the case being used in service of a different argument—suppose it occurs as part of a paper discussing the legality of asking someone to sign a contract before they have had the opportunity to consider the contract at length—a different intuition may be elicited—say, that the president did something improper. The concept implicated in this intuition has shifted; it seems to be the concept of legal propriety now.

We can see that in both of these examples it is the use to which the intuition is being put in argument that determines which of the intuitor's concepts "counts" as the implicated concept. So, more generally, the implicated concept will usually be determined by the pragmatic context in which an appeal to an intuition occurs.

But these examples also show that we need to introduce some more terminology into our discussion of the structure of intuitions. We must consider the *operative presuppositions* that are made about the case, for as we will soon see, these partially determine what the *salient features* of the case will be.

Here's the idea. Consider the case used in our very last example. If an intuitor knows that the case occurs as part of an epistemological argument, she may presume that the purpose of the case is to elicit an intuition that reveals something about knowledge. Because of this, she might further presume that when Smith signs the job contract, he comes to believe that he has a job. However, if instead the intuitor knows that the case occurs as part of an argument in legal theory, she may instead presume that the purpose of the case is to elicit an intuition that reveals something about legal propriety. In this scenario, she might never think of whether or not Smith forms the belief that he has a job. Indeed, because the salient features of the case need not always consist in explicitly mentioned properties of the case, being fixed instead by the intuitor's operative presuppositions about the case combined with the explicitly mentioned properties of the case, it is important for the person constructing the case to pay attention to what sorts of presumptions about the case will be made by potential intuitors. Usually, this will require the person constructing the case to adopt some presuppositions of her own about the presuppositions that will be made about the case by the intuitor. So, the point here is that both the person presenting the case to an intuitor and the intuitor herself will typically have beliefs that "fill in" further details of the case, beyond what properties are explicitly described. These beliefs are what I have been calling *operative presuppositions*; and, importantly, which properties of the case are taken by some intuitor to be the *salient features* of the case can be partly determined by the operative presuppositions that the intuitor makes about the case.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The operative presuppositions that are involved in developing an intuition seem to be a spe-

We are now in a position to be able to say more precisely what the relationship is between the implicated concept and the propositional content of an intuition. For by now it should seem clear that to have an intuition is nothing more than for the intuitor to apply one of her concepts, namely the implicated concept, to the salient features of a case—where which of the intuitor's concepts counts as the implicated concept is determined by the pragmatic context in which the appeal to the intuitor's intuition occurs, and where the salient features of the case are determined by the explicitly mentioned properties of the case plus the operative presuppositions that the intuitor is making about the case, and where the propositional content of the intuition is determined by whether or not the salient features satisfy the intensional content of the implicated concept. So, the basic idea is that the intuitor of the intuition that Smith does not know that he will get the job gets that intuition because the salient features of the case do not satisfy her concept of knowledge, given the intuitor's operative presuppositions about the case; the intuitor of the intuition that the patient does not have a moral duty to remain hooked up to the famous violinist gets that intuition because the salient features of the case do not satisfy her concept of moral duty, given the intuitor's operative presuppositions about the case; and the intuitor of the other intuition that Smith does know that he will get the job gets that intuition because the salient features of the case do satisfy the intuitor's concept of knowledge, given the intuitor's operative presuppositions about the case.

At this point, I want to address the following issue. I have claimed that an intuition amounts to an intuitor applying one of her concepts to a case, and that specifically, the intuitive judgment is produced by whether or not the salient features satisfy the intensional content of the implicated concept. But the satisfaction or not of the intensional content of some concept is not the only way that someone can apply a particular concept. For example, someone might use her implicit beliefs about the extension of a concept in order to mediate the application of that concept, where these beliefs do not constitute the intensional content of the implicated concept.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, some concepts made be applied more or less automatically—as the result of, say,

cial case of the phenomena of conversational implicature. And, just as for more ordinary examples of this phenomenon, it may be very hard to explicitly list all of the presuppositions that are, well, operative in the manifestation of any particular intuition.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, one reviewer has suggested that intuitions are not derived from the intension of a concept, but the intuitor's beliefs about the extension of the concept. I think, however, there is a problem with this view. For, some intuitions can be surprising (c.f. Bealer and Strawson 1992), and so long as we are reasonably charitable about the rationality of an intuitor, this phenomena is hard to square with the proposal that intuitions are guided by an intuitor's beliefs about the extension of a concept. People typically aren't surprised by their own beliefs.

a course of classical conditioning. So, why don't these other kinds of conceptual application count as intuitive judgments? The answer, quite simply, is that not every application of a concept—even when the application is mediated by implicit psychological processes—counts as the manifestation of an intuition in the relevant *philosophical* sense of 'intuition'.<sup>11</sup> At the risk of stipulating too much, what I am trying to do is (as I said in the introduction) to come up with a terminological framework that captures fairly accurately the standard philosophical notion of an intuition. And of course, the standard philosophical notion of an intuition is derived from the practice of conceptual analysis, which plainly consists of philosophers appealing their intuitions in an attempt to explicitly characterize or describe the intensional content (or the meaning, or the sense) of some concept or another. Thus, in the relevant philosophical sense, it is the application of a concept mediated by the (dis)satisfaction of its intensional content that properly counts as an intuition.<sup>12</sup>

So, it therefore looks as though something like the following picture must approximate (at a very abstract level) the psychology of an intuition, where '+' and '→' stand in for whatever the real underlying cognitive processes are that operate on the mental representations to produce the propositional content of the intuition.

Intuitor's apprehension of the salient features of the case, conditioned by the intuitor's operative presuppositions + Intuitor's representation of the implicated concept → Propositional content of the intuition

Now, I believe that this picture captures most of the judgments that are standardly called intuitions by philosophers. Thus, this is not intended to be a picture that captures all of the phenomena that are called intuitions by contemporary researchers; for example, since it is implausible that grammatical competence is represented conceptually, it is unlikely that this picture applies to linguistic intuitions.

#### 4. Meaning-Directed and World-Directed uses of Intuitions

In this section, I want to draw attention to a distinction that has important methodological consequences for research that involves intuitions. This distinction is easiest to grasp if we first introduce one last piece of terminology into our examination of the structure of intuitions. So, let us say that a *presentation* of an intuition is composed of the following three things: the case

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, see (Hogarth 2001) for an interesting exploration of a notion of intuition that understands the notion in a much broader sense than philosophers usually do.

<sup>12</sup> See (Nadelhoffer and Nahmias 2007, 132–133) for further discussion of this issue.

that is used to elicit an intuition, the implicated concept, and the intuition that has been elicited by the case. To illustrate this, we can say that the case from our last example above (which described Smith receiving a job offer from the president of a company), plus the intuition that Smith knows he has a job, plus the intuitor's concept of knowledge together compose a *presentation* of an intuition.

What I want to suggest is that, if the preceding account of intuitions is right, then presentations of intuitions can be used as two logically distinct kinds of evidence. The idea here is that—for any presentation that implicates the intuitor's concept of knowledge—the presentation may only tell us something about the intuitor's concept of knowledge, and not knowledge itself, if we have reason to believe that the intuitor's concept of knowledge does not correspond sufficiently well to knowledge. Of course, the propositional content of the intuition in a presentation may be identical to the propositional content of an intuition in another presentation whether or not either presentation involves a concept of knowledge that corresponds closely enough to knowledge. Even people with fairly unreliable concepts of knowledge may have intuitions about Gettier cases where the propositional content of each intuition is, for instance, that Smith does not know that he has a job. But one of the reasons why it is important to recognize these two different “evidential uses” of presentations of intuitions is that this distinction helps make it clear that two presentations that have the same propositional content can (and perhaps often do) differ in their reliability.

Let me try to make the distinction that I have in mind more salient by using a less philosophically tendentious example. Suppose we are interested in the intuitions of mine that implicate my concept of a hadron. Myself, I know very little about high energy physics. About all I know about hadrons is that they are made up of quarks bound together by the strong force. So, if someone presented me with a series of cases designed to elicit intuitions that implicate my hadron concept, it may very well be that I get intuitions that have propositional content specified by these sentences: ‘That electron is not a hadron’, ‘That neutron is a hadron’, ‘That baryon is not a hadron’. But there's no reason to suspect that any of my intuitions are true; and if any of them are, then that is only an accident. The point here is that intuitions of mine that implicate my hadron concept are best interpreted as revealing only something about the representational structure of my hadron concept, and not the nature of hadrons.

However, if we find ourselves examining intuitions that implicate the hadron concept of someone trained in high energy physics, then a completely different interpretation of these intuitions seems plausible. Because of the way that she acquired her concept (i.e. through her training), this per-

son's hadron concept should correspond accurately with hadrons. So, instead of seeing these intuitions as only revealing something about the intuitor's concept of hadrons, it is more natural to interpret these intuitions as revealing something further—they can be treated as evidence about what sorts of things have the property of being a hadron.

Examples like these suggest that, as I say, there are two logically distinct uses of presentations of intuitions as evidence. A presentation of an intuition can be used as a *meaning-directed probe* or it can be used as a *world-directed probe*. To use a presentation as a world-directed probe is to treat the intuition manifest in the presentation as something like a recognition. That is, to use a presentation as a world-directed probe amounts to interpreting the intuition manifest in the presentation that  $x$  is  $F$  as providing good evidence that it is true that  $x$  is  $F$ . However, when using a presentation as a meaning-directed probe, we are not required to consider the truth-value of the propositional content of the intuition manifest in the presentation. So, to return to the example we just used, the trained physicist's intuitions about hadrons could reasonably be used as both meaning-directed and world-directed probes. Even though we probably only care about the later use, presentations of her intuitions that implicate her hadron concept can legitimately be used as either meaning-directed probe (thereby telling us something about the representational structure of her hadron concept) or world-directed probes (thereby telling us something about what things have the property of being a hadron). However, it is only rational to treat presentations of my intuitions that implicate my hadron concept as meaning-directed probes.

When discussing intuitions deployed in philosophical contexts, philosophers quite often make something like the following claim (this from Alvin Goldman), “[i]ntuitions are evidence for the content of an intuitor's concept, or conception, of the term in question” (Goldman 2001, 477). We can also recall Kornblith's comment, that “appeals to intuition are designed to illuminate the contours of our concepts” (Kornblith 2006, 11). I suggest that assertions like these be interpreted as assertions about what sort of knowledge you can gain by using presentations of intuitions as meaning-directed probes. But that said, it is also plausible that most philosophers who use presentations as evidence are interested in using these presentations as world-directed probes.

Moreover, I think that it is important to make it clear that, while it is true that using presentations of intuitions as world-directed probes is one way of trying to limn the boundaries of philosophically-interesting categories, it is also evident that presentations of intuitions are neither the only nor the most reliable kind of evidence that can be used in service of this kind of inquiry. There are, for instance, obviously better methods to use when trying to figure

out what sorts of things might be hadrons; methods that involve much more than just eliciting the hadron-concept-implicating intuitions of high energy physicists. Arguably, the same point holds for the methods appropriate for the study of some philosophically interesting subjects (like knowledge) as well.<sup>13</sup> A similar lesson applies to the methods appropriate for the study of the representational structure of people's concepts. While it is true that presentations of intuitions used as meaning-directed probes are a source of evidence about the intensional content of people's concepts, it is not obvious that using intuitions as meaning-directed probes is either the best or the only way to try to characterize the intensional content of someone's (or some groups of people's) concepts. Depending on what the correct psychology of concept possession is, there may be other methods that are more appropriate.

## 5. Reliable Intuitions

Enough has been said about the structure of intuitions to allow us to turn to an examination of the epistemology of intuitions—the outlines of which, I am sure readers will have noticed, have already been suggested in the previous sections.

We have now observed that presentations of intuitions can be used as two logically-distinct kinds of evidence: they can be used as either world-directed probes or meaning-directed probes. Our task here is to identify some of the conditions under which it is rational to use a presentation as either a meaning-directed probe or a world-directed probe. So, here are the conditions that I believe should govern the use of presentations as meaning-direct probes.

*It is rational to use a presentation of an intuition as a meaning-directed probe if there is reason to believe that the intuitor is able to make ordinary operative presuppositions about the case, and the intuition manifest in the presentation occurs in favourable circumstances.*

By 'ordinary operative presuppositions' I just mean the presuppositions that the intuitor makes when deploying the concept implicated in her intuition in everyday discourse. And for technical concepts that are not deployed in everyday discourse, then the ordinary presuppositions would be just those presuppositions that are typically made when deploying the concept in the discourse in which the concept is usually used.

<sup>13</sup> C.f. (Kornblith 2002).



It is easy to see why the first condition matters to the appropriateness of using a presentation of an intuition as (at least) a meaning-directed probe. It may be, for instance, that some case is too weird or too complex, so that it is hard or impossible for the intuitor to interpret the case as she would interpret more normal cases, and thereby make the presuppositions that she would ordinarily make in the course of deploying the implicated concept. Consider, for instance, a presentation that involves implicating someone's concept of moral responsibility, where the case used to elicit the intuition describes a scenario in which events occur that obviously violate the actual laws of physics. It is not unreasonable to suspect, about such cases, that an intuitor would make operative presuppositions that are different than the operative presuppositions that she would make about more natural cases. So, intuitions about "unnatural" cases should not be interpreted as revealing anything about the representational structure of the implicated concept as it would be used in actual circumstances by the intuitor, and for this reason it is therefore inappropriate to use presentations that include such cases as evidence.

As for the condition requiring that presentations of intuitions occur in favourable circumstances, the justification for this second condition is the observation that the circumstances in which an intuition is elicited may impact the reliability of the presentation, even if the intuitor is able to make ordinary operative presuppositions about the case (and even if the implicated concept is sufficiently accurate—see below). For example, presentations of someone's intuitions may not be reliable in circumstances that are fraught with heated feeling of outrage or indignation, or in circumstances that present an opportunity to significantly advance one's own interests at the cost of doing the right thing. Certain contexts may offer incentives for an intuitor to get the "right" intuition, as opposed to the intuition that would actually result from applying the implicated concept to the salient features of the case. Finally, an intuitor may find herself appealing to her intuitions in a distracting environment. There is in fact some experimental evidence that priming and framing techniques can manipulate the content of a person's intuitions.<sup>14</sup>

As for the other way of using the presentation of an intuition, it seems that in order for it to be rational to use a presentation as a world directed probe, one further condition must be satisfied, namely we must have a good

<sup>14</sup> See (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008) for a nice review of the evidence. He also seems to reach the conclusion that this evidence shows that intuitions are not reliable. However, I think that this evidence shows only that we should pay attention to the environment in which we elicit intuitions. Maybe armchairs are, after all, a pretty good place in which to elicit reliable intuitions.

reason to believe that the intuition at the heart of the presentation is very likely to be true. Of course, we will have this reason only if we have evidence that the concept implicated in the intuition is itself relevantly reliable. The upshot, then, is that

*It is rational to use a presentation of an intuition as a world-directed probe if there is reason to believe that the intuitor is able to make ordinary operative presuppositions about the case, and the intuition manifest in the presentation occurs in favourable circumstances, and that the implicated concept is sufficiently accurate.*

And I think that an intuitor's concept of  $x$  will ordinarily—but certainly not always; more about this in just a moment—be sufficiently accurate if it maps onto the prevailing conception of  $x$ , and where both the prevailing conception of  $x$  is embedded in a conceptual network that has achieved some inductive and/or explanatory success and this success is at least in part explained by the fact that the intensional content of the prevailing conception encodes properties that correspond well enough to the properties that are typically instantiated by  $x$ s.

Here are some important caveats. First of all, I do not mean to suggest that it is impossible for some individual to possess a concept that is more accurate than the associated prevailing conception. Situations of this kind may be extremely rare in some discourses (high energy physics, say), but occur frequently in other discourses (such as public political discourse about the moral appropriateness of using military force, and maybe also epistemology—see section 7 below). And second, this proposal is not meant to deny that some individual may possess concepts that are more “sufficiently accurate” than another individual's concepts. Suppose that two people have concepts that correspond well enough, as it were, to the things that fall under the concepts. It is of course possible that one of these two concepts corresponds more accurately than the other concept. In cases like these, it is appropriate to treat the more accurate concept as the concept that is sufficiently accurate, which in turn implies that presentations of intuitions that implicate the less accurate concept should not be used as world-directed probes.

## **6. Intuitions Implicating Technical Concepts and Expertise**

For presentations that involve intuitions that implicate technical concepts, our conditions imply that the following principle should guide uses of presentations as evidence when they are used as world-directed probes: use as evidence only presentations containing the intuitions of experts, where the intuition in question implicates a concept that finds its home in the intuitor's

field of expertise.

There are several reasons why this is a sensible principle to follow, the most obvious of which is that it will normally only be experts who have concepts that map onto the prevailing conceptions in the discipline in which the technical concept finds its home. Since technical concepts are, of course, just those concepts that have been developed by a discipline in order to help a theory being pursued by the members of the discipline achieve inductive and/or explanatory success, it will be rare for technical concepts to have any currency outside of the discipline in which that have been established. For example, it will be very hard to find someone who is not an expert about high energy physics and who, despite this, has a hadron concept that agrees with the prevailing conception of hadrons in high energy physics. But furthermore: it will normally only be experts in the discipline in which the prevailing conception associated with the implicated concept finds its home that will be in a position to make the appropriate operative presuppositions. And finally, for quite a few technical concepts, it will only be experts who actually possess instances of the concept in question. While ordinary people may have, amongst others, fairly unrefined hadron concepts, it is not implausible to think, that, for example, no one but a trained philosopher has the concepts of a natural kind, of supervenience, or of T-schemas.

In light of these points, it is interesting to observe that some philosophical uses of presentations already conform to the principle about technical concepts that we have just adduced. Let me offer two examples of presentations that are used as world-directed probes, where the evidential force of the presentation depends on the high probability that a certain kind of expert will share the intuition. The two examples come from a debate in the philosophy of biology concerning the metaphysics of species; both examples consist of presentations that are used to confirm the hypothesis that there can be historically disconnected species.

In our first example, Kristin Guyot makes use of a presentation that is designed to show that, if all living members of *Galeopsis tetrahit*, which is a herb that originally arose as a hybrid from *G. pubescens* and *G. speciosa*, were to die and then another hybridization event occurs between these last two species in the same environment, then the new plants would be *G. tetrahit* re-emerged. In this presentation, the case is the hypothetical scenario where all living *G. tetrahit* die and are almost instantaneously replaced with another hybrid in the same environment; the implicated concept is the concept of *G. tetrahit* qua biological species; and the intuition is, as Guyot says, that "*Galeopsis tetrahit* was resurrected." (Guyot 1986, 114) It is clear that she means to use this presentation as a world-directed probe. But more importantly, it is also clear that she thinks that her own intuition is representative of the intu-

itions that people who possess a certain amount of training in evolutionary theory would have about the case. Her aim is obviously not to present an intuition that agrees with the pre-theoretical species intuitions of non-experts in evolutionary theory.

Second example. Philip Kitcher uses a presentation that involves a different hybrid species, *Cnemidophorus tessellatus* (a unisexual species of lizard), which arose from crosses of *C. tigris* and *C. septemvittatus*. Once again, we are asked to suppose that all *C. tessellatus* die off, and then another hybridization event occurs soon thereafter in the same environment. Kitcher's intuition is, basically, that the new hybrid population are *C. tessellatus*. And as before, the cogency of Kitcher's argument turns on whether his fellow experts in evolutionary theory share the same intuition. His argument would have no more and no less impact if it turns out that people who are non-experts in evolutionary biology have intuitions that agree or disagree with Kitcher's own intuition (Kitcher 1984, 314–315).<sup>15</sup>

## 7. Intuitions Implicating Non-Technical Concepts

So, I think that the basic argument for deferring to experts when using presentations involving intuitions that implicate technical concepts is straightforward. There are of course a host of complicating issues that a more thorough treatment of expert intuitions should deal with. For example, individual members in a community of experts may have different yet equally reliable concepts of one and the same entity; for instance, a population biologist will usually have a different gene concept than a molecular chemist. But at this point, I think that is more important to address the role of intuitions in philosophical inquiry.

For, we now face the following question: do the intuitions normally used in philosophical theory always implicate technical concepts? At first blush, it may seem that the answer is 'no'. Notions like knowledge, justification, belief, moral responsibility, and causation (to list just a few) obviously have currency in discourses outside of academic philosophy. This may be taken to suggest that, while it might be appropriate to defer to the presentations of the intuitions of philosophers (qua experts) when we are considering technical notions like supervenience, it is not clear that we should do this for presentations of intuitions that implicate someone's concept of, say, knowledge. In fact, if philosophers should properly be engage in attempting to clarify ordinary or "folk" concepts, then *prima facie*, it seems as though the presentations of intuitions that philosophers do treat as evidence ought to

<sup>15</sup> Of course, it might be useful to test whether Kitcher's and Guyot's intuitions in fact agree with the intuitions of other experts in evolutionary biology.

agree with “folk” presentations of intuitions.

This conception of the proper activity of a philosopher is, I believe, the ultimate source of many experimental philosophers’ scepticism about allowing intuitive presentations that have not been shown to agree with related “folk” intuitive presentations to occupy an evidential role in philosophical inquiry. The worry is summed up rather clearly by the following passage, which is taken from a recent article written by two of the more visible proponents of experimental philosophy, Joshua Alexander and Jonathan Weinberg. They write that

Philosophical practice is not concerned with understanding the nature of knowledge (or belief, freedom, moral responsibility, etc.) in some technical sense, but of knowledge as the concept is ordinarily understood outside of strictly philosophical discourse and practice. If it were concerned only with the technical sense of the concept, it would be divorced from the concerns that led us to philosophical investigation of the concept in the first place and its verdicts would have little bearing on those initial concerns. As such, large and central swaths of philosophical practice must be concerned with the ordinary concepts. (Alexander and Weinberg 2007, 57)

From this, they extract the conclusion (though not in these words) that presentations that are used as evidence in philosophy must include intuitions that are consistent with the intuitions of non-philosophers, especially if these presentations are being used as world-directed probes. The upshot is clear: experimental evidence showing that “folk” intuitions routinely disagree with the intuitions that philosophers have treated as evidence in the past is a compelling reason to be sceptical of the philosophical intuitions, and a fortiori, sceptical of any philosophical theories that used these intuitions as evidence.<sup>16</sup>

However, I think that this line of reasoning should be resisted. Again, it is obvious why philosophers should not care about the ordinary notions of a T-schema or the supervenience relation, since there isn’t one available to study. But I want to argue that, even for ordinary notions like knowledge or

<sup>16</sup> Consider also the following quotes from more self-identified experimental philosophers. Thomas Nadelhoffer and Eddy Nahmias write of some of their work on intuitions related to free will, “the assumption that we set out to test was the well-worn claim among philosophers that incompatibilism is the commonsensical view” (Nadelhoffer and Nahmias 2007, 137). Concerning the status of a number of Kripke’s intuitions about reference, Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich write that they “suspect that philosophers employing these thought experiments take their own intuitions regarding the referents of terms, and those of their philosophical colleagues, to be universal. But our cases were modeled on one of the most influential thought experiments in the philosophy of reference, and we elicited culturally variable intuitions” (Machery et al. 2004, B8).

justified belief, just in case a certain kind of theoretical accomplishment has been realized, it is appropriate to defer to the presentations of the intuitions of philosophers.

Here's the idea. Suppose that we want to understand the nature of knowledge, and we have some reason to believe that the notion of justified belief may figure into our best explanation of knowledge. Suppose too that, in ordinary discourse, the notion of justified belief has a range of applications. It could be that only one of these applications is best suited for integration into our explanation of knowledge. In these circumstances, it is possible that the ordinary notion of justified belief can undergo something like a process of denotational refinement, as one of the prior applications of the notion of justified belief coalesces, under the pressures of philosophical inquiry, into the new "semi-technical" conception of epistemically justified belief.<sup>17</sup> Since this new semi-technical concept has more explanatory power in our account of knowledge than the ancestral ordinary notion, it makes sense to use it in our theory of knowledge. But this also means that the semi-technical concept is likely to be more accurate than the ancestral notion (which itself might be fairly accurate). Importantly, this example demonstrates that, unlike technical concepts, the most accurate semi-technical concepts will often *disagree* with the prevailing conceptions from which they have been derived. Still, this is clearly not a reason to suspect that the semi-technical concept is unreliable. So, my point here is this: for presentations used as world-directed probes that involve intuitions that implicate semi-technical concepts, it does not matter, evidentially speaking, whether the intuition agrees with presentations of "folk" intuitions that implicate concepts which agree with the prevailing conception from which the semi-technical concept was derived. So long as the semi-technical concept of, say, epistemic justification carries some weight in an explanatorily successful theory of knowledge, it matters little if presentations of intuitions in which this concept is implicated agree with any related "folk" intuitive presentations.

Of course this argument requires that I reject the conception of philosophical inquiry represented by Alexandar and Weinberg's comments above. But this is a bullet that I am prepared to bite: I think philosophical practice is usually best understood as a (not always successful) attempt to come up with (at least approximately) true descriptions of various abstract features of the world. And in their attempts to do this, philosophers both invent new technical concepts and refine existing non-technical concepts into semi-technical concepts. So, perhaps there is a sense in which philosophers often enough try to "clarify" any number of folk concepts. But this may usu-

<sup>17</sup> A conception which itself may undergo further refinement, perhaps turning it into a "wholly technical" conception.

ally amount to an attempt to clean the folk concept up so that it can fulfill a meaningful role in a theory that has more epistemic virtues than some antecedent folk theory.

So, if this line of reasoning is right, then it is unfortunate that in recent years more than a few (though not all) experimental philosophers have put a lot of work into demonstrating that about a very wide range of subjects, non-philosophers consistently have intuitions that do not agree with the intuitions of many philosophers, and that the intuitions of non-philosophers can sometimes vary in accordance with such factors as the ethnic background of the intuitor or the intuitor's socio-economic status.<sup>18</sup> As previously mentioned, some of these experimental philosophers have used these data to argue that philosophers should be sceptical of philosophical theories that have been based more or less upon presentations of intuitions that have been treated as world-directed probes, and which implicated concepts that have currency in folk discourse—concepts such as the concepts of reference, of causation, and of knowledge.<sup>19</sup> But since in many of the relevant philosophical cases the implicated concept could be a semi-technical concept, in order to properly assess whether or not the implicated concept is “sufficiently accurate”—and thereby determine whether or not it is appropriate to use the presentation in which the intuition is embedded as a world-directed probe—requires asking whether the implicated concept carries some weight in an explanatorily successful theory. Of course, there is no guarantee that all of the presentations of intuitions that both disagree with “folk” intuitions and have been treated by philosophers as a world-directed source of evidence implicate concepts meeting this condition. So there is no guarantee that, for other reasons, the scepticism about philosophical theories based on philosophical intuitions recommended by some experimental philosophers is not appropriate.

But speaking for myself, I am optimistic that both analytic epistemology and philosophy language have been more or less successful in the relevant sense. I think that a properly thorough investigation of both sub-fields would reveal that philosophers in these fields are working with a suite of concepts that almost always carry more explanatory weight than any pre-theoretical concepts. But whether or not my optimism is justified, my point here is just that it is not an effective criticism of the practice of relying on presentations of intuitions as world-directed probes in philosophy to point out that the presentations that philosophers do use as world-directed probes may not

<sup>18</sup> Alexander and Weinberg (2007) provide a nice introduction to the literature. And since (Weinberg et al. 2001) serves as the paradigm or exemplar for the research programme, this paper is also a helpful resource.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., (Weinberg et al. 2001)

agree with the intuitive presentations of non-philosophers, or that the intuitions of non-philosophers vary according to, *inter alia*, the intuitor's ethnic background. Indeed, even if, say, the epistemological intuitions of philosophers are also shown to sometimes vary according to cultural background, for instance, then this would not be reason to be sceptical of presentations of these intuitions. After all, it is well known that the cultural milieu of a scientist can affect any number of her scientific judgments,<sup>20</sup> but this fact by itself is not enough to impugn the reliability of such judgments. So, perhaps the background cultural milieu has some influence over what epistemological concepts seem plausible to the standard epistemologist; even if so, one can still be optimistic that the dialectical pressures and rigour of philosophical inquiry have far more influence. Again, the crucial test would be to determine which, if any, of the epistemological concepts implicated in the relevant intuitions makes the most fruitful contribution to our epistemological theories.

## 8. Conclusion

So, we can see that the presentations of the intuitions of philosophers can be legitimately used as world-directed probes, even if they are not normally consistent with presentations of intuitions that implicate the concepts of non-philosophers.

But at the same time, I want to stress that this conclusion does not imply that it is *always* appropriate to treat presentations of philosophical intuitions as world-directed probes, even when the intuitions in question are related to a subject about which philosophers are ordinarily recognized as possessing expertise. Perceptions of expertise can be divorced from actual theoretical success, after all. Consider, for instance, the epistemic status of socially recognized experts on issues closely related to estimates of human potential in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because most of these individuals held sexist and/or racist views,<sup>21</sup> they had only a very limited understanding of their subject, and so were improperly treated as experts, at least with respect to issues involving human potential. The suggestion here is that it is possible that something like this state of affairs may exist for academic philosophy. It may turn out that the social epistemology of philosophy reveals that some of the typical philosopher's concepts are not sufficiently accurate, despite the fact that philosophers may be commonly recognized as possessing expertise about issues closely related to this collection of concepts.

Here's a quick (and to my mind, not implausible) example of how this

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., (Sur 1999) for a striking example of this.

<sup>21</sup> C.f. (Gould 1996)



might occur. Most philosophers in North America work in universities where roughly a third of the way through their career, they are offered a contract that guarantees them permanent employment. If a tenure contract is the only kind of contract that philosophers are normally exposed to, and philosophers are usually not in routine contact with people (such as lawyers and union organizers) who deal with a wider variety of contracts, then it may well be that the typical philosopher's concept of a fair contract is not sufficiently accurate, in virtue of the fact that a tenure contract is radically different than most other kinds of employment contracts. Still, philosophers are commonly recognized as experts on issues pertaining to social justice, and because of this, presentations of philosophical intuitions about fair contracts may be accorded more epistemic standing than they in fact deserve, perhaps resulting in these presentations being erroneously used as world-directed probes.

Of course, I do not deny that philosophical intuitions about fair contracts can be helpful if we want to figure out how philosophers conceive of fair contracts. So long as appropriate experimental controls are used, there is no reason why we should not use presentations of such intuitions as meaning-directed probes. But it is probably more interesting—and it is clearly more important—to focus on trying to figure out the nature of a fair contract instead, and we can now see why it is possible that philosophical intuitions, or, the intuitions of philosophers, may be of little use for this kind of inquiry.

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