Can There Be a Discipline of Philosophy? And Can It Be Founded on Intuitions?

ERNEST SOSA

Abstract: This paper takes up the critique of armchair philosophy drawn by some experimental philosophers from survey results. It also takes up a more recent development with increased methodological sophistication. The argument based on disagreement among respondents suggests a much more serious problem for armchair philosophy and puts in question the standing of our would-be discipline.

Armchair philosophy has come under attack through experimentalist survey results. These are said to uncover disagreement in people's responses to thought experiments. People's responses allegedly reflect their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, not their intuitive perception of some objective order.

When people ostensibly disagree on a thought experiment, however, they respond to the scenario *as it appears to them*. Since the same text can be read in different ways, the surveys may reveal no real intuitive disagreement, based on cultural or socio-economic background. Instead they may reveal only people talking past each other, as they vary in how they read the text of an example. Maybe it's really these different readings that manifest the differences in background. What is more, disagreement that pits experts against casual respondents may pose no real threat to expert intuitions.

That defense of intuitions has been offered in the past. More recently, a natural sequel to the earlier survey-based attack is philosophically deeper. Here I will respond to this more sophisticated treatment. In the end our dialectic has a troubling upshot, which I try to accommodate in defense of the armchair.

1. The Dialectic Up to Now

Experimental philosophers have argued against armchair philosophy based on one main lemma: that intuitions on philosophical thought experiments disagree extensively.[1] Since intuitions disagree, they cannot all be perceptions of some objective philosophical order. Not every disagreeing intuition can be a perception

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Address for correspondence: Ernest Sosa, Department of Philosophy, Rutgers University, 1 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA.
Email: ernsosa@rci.rutgers.edu

[1] They *have* so argued, based on that lemma, and this has been perhaps the main, best known attack on the armchair. It is this line of attack that we take up in what follows. Other objections have of course been leveled against the armchair, based for example on order effects. But

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of a fact. Some at least must be *mis*perceptions. With misperception common enough among intuiters, intuition sinks into disrepute. In that case, intuitions are explained through the influence of culture, perhaps, or socioeconomic status, or which graduate program one is in or hails from.

That line of attack is put in doubt by the fact that intuition reports respond most directly to the texts of thought experiments. What a text puts before a subject's mind depends on how it is read. Culture and socioeconomic status may influence how the texts are read and not so much how subjects react to shared contents.

The critique from survey results has recently given way to a philosophically deeper argument. (See, for example, Weinberg 2007.) Intuition is now said to be *untestable* as an epistemic source for armchair philosophy. At least, so the argument goes, armchair intuition is insufficiently testable. It is hopeless that way. It has nothing like the sort of standing enjoyed by scientific observation. Forms of scientific observation are all highly testable, and indeed test well.

This new critique is a natural sequel to the objection based on survey-revealed clashes of intuitions. If intuition is to be saved, we must consider whether a certain *sort* of intuition can attain better epistemic standing. Perhaps *expert* intuition is defensible despite its disagreement with street-corner opinion. But this will require testing such intuition for epistemic efficacy. And its failure to be properly testable would block that line of defense.

This further critique does raise important issues. In what follows, I will try to accommodate its insights while limiting the damage to the armchair. Eventually these objections to the armchair—both the survey-based objection, and the charge of hopeless untestability—lead to a far more troubling critique whose premises are well known to all philosophers already, with no need of experimental help.

Our topic is the epistemology of philosophy. Here first is some relevant background.

2. The Need for Foundations

Philosophy wants to know what in general makes our attitudes justified, if and when they are. Epistemology in particular inquires into how our beliefs are justified.[2] Some owe their justification to further beliefs on which they are based. A further belief can give justification only when it has justification of its own, however, which ushers in the familiar regress/circle/foundations problematic.

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these problems must still be shown to be *serious enough*. The attack must somehow move from the premise that there are sources of unreliability (which there are for *all* human sources of knowledge) to the conclusion that these sources of unreliability are problematic *enough* to yield whatever practical conclusion one might wish to draw about the armchair.

[2] How they are *epistemically* justified, how they attain the justification that is constitutive of knowledge. The confidence of a hospital patient that he will recover, or of an athlete that he will prevail, may derive pragmatic justification by enabling success, without contributing to the *epistemic* standing of such confidence as knowledge.

Beliefs cluster in rationally structured wholes. How so? One option is the foundationalist pyramid with its asymmetry of support. Coherentists, by contrast, allow mutual support. For the coherentist, our belief system is a raft that floats free, each belief deriving *all* its epistemic justification from its place in the structure. Although it is good for a body of beliefs to be so well integrated, however, it is not so good for it to be unmoored from the world beyond. Such beliefs would be lacking, *epistemically* lacking. Mutual basing cannot be all there is to justification.

We can of course define a kind of internal justification available even to the brain in a vat. But epistemic evaluation involves more than such internal status, even apart from Gettier issues. Intellectual competence requires more than free-floating coherence. There is a broader competence that more fully constitutes knowledge.[3] What in general renders a belief competent? Often it is the belief's being based rationally on other beliefs competently formed in their own right. But that can't go on forever, nor can *each* of a set of beliefs be competent by being based rationally on the others, and nothing more. Some beliefs must be competent through something other than support from other beliefs (at least *in part* through something other than that).[4]

Perception and introspection are thought to give us what we need. Perceptual and introspective beliefs need not be based on other beliefs. They can be based rationally on states beyond justification and unjustification, such as sensory experiences. A sensory experience can ground either or both of the following: (i) a perceptual belief about the surroundings; (ii) an introspective belief about the presence of that very experience. Perceptual and introspective beliefs are thus foundationally rational. They are conceptual deployments evaluable as justified based on *other* mental states, which provide *reasons for which* they are held, and not just *reasons why* they are held. These other states are regress-stoppers, by having only one foot in the space of reasons. They provide justification without in turn requiring it, or even sensibly allowing it.

3. Beyond the Given to Competence

Consider a belief whose content is a certain proposition, <p>.[5] What relation must an experience bear to that belief in order to give it epistemic support? Foundationalists of the given offer a twofold answer.

[3] Consider the kindred view that intellectual seemings, or attractions to assent, are ipso facto 'justified.' This falls short in a similar way.

[4] Presumably not even internalists would think that any belief whatsoever held in the absence of reasons is ipso facto prima facie justified, so they face the question of what the further source of justification might be, beyond rational basing. This will be seen to push them towards a more objective conception that includes competence and not just blamelessness.

[5] A belief with propositional content <p> might have as its conceptual content the thought [t] when [t] is a mode of presentation of <p> to the subject at the time. Although a full treatment would need to go into this distinction and its implications, here for simplicity we work with propositional contents only.

Take first a experiential state E with that same propositional content <p>. B(p) is said to derive justification from being based rationally on E(p), as when B(p) is the belief that one sees that p, and E(p) is a visual experience as if one sees that p. That is how perceptual justification is supposed to work.

Introspective justification works differently. E might itself amount to the fact that p, as an ache suffered by S might amount to the fact that S aches (in a certain way). Alternatively, it might constitute a truth-maker for that fact.

Our twofold answer faces the speckled hen problem on both its perceptual and its introspective side. Someone might believe that his conscious experience is of a certain sort, or that his surroundings have a certain perceptible feature, while his visual experience *is* of that sort, and *does* have the content attributed to the surroundings, and yet his belief might fall short nonetheless. Why so? Because the subject's ability to subitize is limited to complexity of degree four or so.[6] If one takes the dots to number eight—whether on the seen surface, or in one's subjective visual field—one may be right only by luck. Neither the perceptual nor the introspective belief is then so much as competently formed: it oversteps one's subitizing limits.

Even for proper understanding of perceptual and introspective foundations, therefore, one must invoke the subject's competence. Here the competence is reason-involving. Only by subitizing based on concurrent experience can the subject properly form certain perceptual and/or introspective beliefs, which are thereby justified. The difference is that beliefs *so* based are reliably true. The subject *is* able competently to discern whether there are three visible dots on the seen surface, or in his visual field.

Must all foundational competence be thus reason-based? That is put in doubt by the possibility of reliable blindsight. In the actual world blindsight has low reliability. But it might easily have been more reliable. What are we to say about such easily possible blindsight judgments? Are they all incompetent? They deploy concepts, as do contentful seemings and beliefs generally. Are blindsight deployments all necessarily faulty, even when they are nearly infallible?

Consider, moreover, basic arithmetic, geometry, and logic. How do we gain access to such facts? Does anything mediate our access to them in the way visual sensory experience mediates our access to visible facts? Not plausibly. The simplest beliefs of math and logic have no discernible basis, none beyond one's inclination or attraction to assent. Thus are we led to a conception of intuitions as seemings, as inclinations or attractions to assent. Intuitions are seemings based on nothing beyond sheer understanding of the question. Such seemings are conceptual: assent requires understanding, and understanding requires concepts. This distinguishes seemings from sensory experiences. One can experience contents that one could

[6] Whether the items are moving, or very big, or qualitatively different from each other, etc., will presumably matter.

not entertain in thought, for lack of the required concepts. In contrast, seemings are conceptual deployments, and rationally evaluable as such.

4. The Importance of Competence

The foregoing suggests that the importance of *experience* in epistemology is vastly overrated. Major categories, and distinctions among them—the a priori/a posteriori distinction for one—should not turn on something so limited in epistemological importance, so limited by comparison with *competence*. Nor of course should major divisions—such as rationalism versus empiricism—be defined by reference to experience.[7] More plausibly we can first highlight our competent access to *particular contingencies* through some combination of introspection, perception, testimony, and memory; and then distinguish a posteriori knowledge as follows:

> *A posteriori* knowledge is knowledge of particular contingencies or knowledge through inference from such knowledge.[8]

A priori knowledge then involves some source *other* than inference from particular contingencies. This includes *abstract* general knowledge (not of particular contingencies).

Given the notion of competent access to particular contingencies, we can ask: Is our general, substantive knowledge always based on such particular data? Is it always ultimately so-based through inductive reasoning? Advocates of empirical science can then line up on one side, while on the other side gather rationalists claiming direct access to abstract, general substantive truths, not mediated essentially by knowledge of particular contingencies.

We can thus recover the a priori/a posteriori, rationalism/empiricism oppositions with no dependence on dispensable experience.

What distinguishes foundational seemings that are justified? Shall we adopt a *latitudinarian* position for which *all* intuitive seemings are *thereby automatically* justified? This would include all seemings based on nothing other than presentationally given, subjective states beyond justification and unjustification.[9] Unfortunately, this would entail that biases and superstitions are all justified, if they are imbibed from one's culture with no rational basis, which is how such beliefs are too often acquired. They are absorbed through enculturation that need include no explicit verbal instruction. They enter rather through the osmosis of body language, tone of voice, the perceived behavior first of elders and later of peer trend-setters, and so forth.

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[7] Of course, *historical* divisions might still be defined quite properly in terms of experience if that is how the historical protagonists conceived of the matters in dispute.

[8] With inference understood broadly as rational basing.

[9] Based on nothing but such states except only for the subject's understanding of the proposition involved. In what follows this exception will be left implicit.

That poses the problem of justified intuition: What distinguishes intuitions that are epistemically justified from those that are not? Recall that even beliefs based on the phenomenal given can derive justification only through the subject's relevant competence. Accordingly, justified intuitions can now be distinguished by invoking a competence that does *not* involve the basing of beliefs on reasons. Rational intuition may *instead* sub-personally enable us to discern the true from the false in the relevant abstract subject matter.

What distinguishes rationally justified intuitions from intuitive though irrational biases and superstitions? What's distinctive of justified intuitions, I suggest, is that they manifest an epistemic competence, a rational ability to discern the true from the false, and to do so reliably.[10]

5. Competence and Hopeful Testability

Consider again the faculty of blindsight. Even if we had no independent confirmation of its reliability, blindsight would be an epistemic gift: a way to discover truths concerning, for example, the orientation of facing lines. That is not nothing, epistemically. It is what it is: a reliable mode of access to a certain body of truths. Nevertheless, the deliverances of that source can still fall short. Proper epistemic practice might preclude their acceptance at face value. It might instead require suspension of belief, or at least suspension of endorsed belief. Suppose, again, that the source of these deliverances is *not* independently testable. Suppose further that we have no theoretical understanding of its modus operandi. How then could we possibly endorse such deliverances? Their source is deplorably untestable, while only testable sources are subject to rational correction. Only such sources are subject to rational calibration, so as to be given proper, reliable scopes of application.[11]

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[10] Here and in what follows I assume that the 'rational' justification of a belief or a seeming need not derive from its being based on reasons; rather, it can be present simply because that belief or seeming is competently acquired, involves the deployment of concepts, and can be properly influenced by reasons.

[11] Jonathan Weinberg has recently invoked such a concept of the hopeful in his renewed critical opposition to the armchair (Weinberg, 2007). His concept is close kin to our concept of the sufficiently testable (the closest kinship being the limiting case of identity). Robert Cummins had earlier already launched a similar attack on armchair intuitions, based on the supposed fact that they are not subject to independent calibration (Cummins, 1999). Our concept of the testable enough is also closely related to the self-correctiveness invoked by methodologists of science for many decades prior to its most famous use by C. S. Peirce, followed eventually by a descendant of that line of argument in the work of Hans Reichenbach and Wesley Salmon. (See Reichenbach, 1938 and 1940, and Salmon, 1991, respectively.) It has been argued in this line that the methods of science will uncover their own errors, at least in the long run. The attempt to show that this is so has encountered serious objections, however, discussed for example in publications by Larry Laudan (Laudan, 1981a and 1981b) and Nicholas Rescher (Rescher, 1992 and 1999). Compare, finally, the weaker requirement in Hartry Field's twist on the Benacerraf problem: that we can attain knowledge of a domain only provided we do

And the same goes for intuition as for blindsight. How does intuition's low-test standing bear on its use as a source of evidence in philosophy? If intuition is not so much as sufficiently testable, it has little chance of testing well. A pall is thus cast over the continued use of such methodology. Even if we should not abandon it forthwith, doubt still clouds continued reliance on such a thin reed.

Why thin? Might not a source be highly reliable while not much amenable to proper testing? A highly reliable source might admit paltry external corroboration, or none. Furthermore: It might yield no deliverances of high-enough quality to be discernibly reliable. Its workings might also be quite opaque to our theoretical understanding, finally, while its deliverances neither cohere nor clash, not discernibly.

Say one has the gift of blindsight, again, with no theoretical understanding of its workings. Say one can assess that faculty only by direct reliance on its own deliverances, which seems viciously circular. Acceptance of such deliverances would then be restricted to a first-order animal level. One would lack any perspective from which to endorse them. Only aided by such a (now missing) perspective, however, could one possibly ascend to reflective knowledge. Despite that, one might still attain animal knowledge, with its required reliability, through blindsight access to the relevant domain of facts.

We have relied on a thought experiment involving a faculty of blindsight that is reliable though untestable. Anyone unpersuaded might compare early astronomy, based as it was on a commonsense perception still poorly understood, one whose deliverances about the night sky enjoyed little external corroboration. I hear the reply: 'Well, then those early efforts had little epistemic worth.' Little indeed, in those early days, compared to our astronomy today; little, but not zero. And the same may be true of us as we peer into dark philosophical issues. Here again proper reliance on a source is compatible, surely, with how uncertain its deliverances may be when we target philosophical issues, now by comparison with their certainty when we target elementary math or logic.

True, in a scientific discipline we would hope to surpass the animal level. We would hope for external support, tight coherence, high-quality deliverances, and theoretical understanding of our sources, such as the instruments whose readings we trust. True, that hope *is* fulfilled for our sources in the natural sciences. There we do attain high-level reflective knowledge. We go beyond mere animal trust in sources that happen to be reliable. In mature sciences we go well beyond our halting early efforts. Such disciplines do not emerge fully formed from anyone's head, however; they develop gradually and collaboratively through much less testable means.

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not believe that there's no way for us to understand how our beliefs about that domain could be formed reliably enough. In Field, 1989, we are told that 'we should view with suspicion any claim to know facts about a certain domain if we believe it impossible to explain the reliability of our beliefs about that domain' (pp. 232-3). Also relevant are the last two sections of Field, 2005.

Mature scientific experimentation and observation, in all their amazing variety and sophistication, rely on highly testable sources, whose reliability is corroborated when they test positive. What of the use of intuition in philosophy, as in our intuitive responses to thought experiments? How amenable is philosophical intuition to proper epistemic testing and assessment? Does it gain enough support through our theoretical understanding of its workings? Low-level sources in empirical science, such as instrumental observation, are of course independently testable, and do receive independent corroboration. Unfortunately, the same is not true of philosophical intuition. It is hard to see what external sources might much confirm or infirm the deliverances of intuition, by giving us good independent access to how reliably or unreliably intuition delivers truth rather than falsity. True, we do have examples where intuition stands correction: as concerns sets, for example, or heaps, or the analysis of knowledge, or even about simultaneity in the light of physical theory. But such corrigibility is much more limited in scope than our ability to calibrate scientific instruments.

Nevertheless, that does not show intuition-based philosophical methodology to be hopeless, not if early astronomy was hopeful enough to enable our eventual development of a science. If astronomy could rely in its beginnings on its main early source of data—namely, bare-eyed perception of the heavens—even without independent corroboration of this source's reliability, it follows that such lack is not definitive. Will it be said that bare-eyed perception was known to be reliable independently of its use on the night sky? Fair enough, but then intuition is *also* known to be reliable independently of its use on the difficult subject matter of interest to philosophers.[12]

6. What is the Real Problem for Intuition?

Let's assume for a moment that we can successfully rebut the argument from the widespread disagreement that surveys allegedly reveal. And let's assume that we can

[12] Extrapolation is of course involved in both instances, and that does carry risk. We trust our understanding-based insight not only in logic and math, not only about the plethora of things obviously known intuitively, such as that certain shapes differ, that a given shape is distinct from any color, etc. Extrapolating from these to trust in our judgments about Gettier cases carries risk, no doubt, but so does extrapolation from eyesight used at noon for arm's length perception of one's hand, to eyesight used at midnight for perception of the night sky. More worrisome is the possibility that extrapolation from mathematical or logical intuition to philosophical intuition turn out to be like extrapolation from established good eyesight to trust in our hearing. This is indeed a possibility that we would need to guard against. More worrisome yet is this possibility: that extrapolation from math and logic to philosophy might turn out to be like extrapolation from shape perception to color perception. This suggests that even when two such domains might *seem* quite closely related—they both involve the eyes, good light, etc.—extrapolation from one to the other might still be fraught. And of course it must be granted that cognition *is* risky business. We can only do our best to feel our way while taking due precautions. Refusing to move carries its own risks.

also repel the attack based on the supposed untestability of armchair intuition. Can we then relax into our armchairs, and carry on with analytic business as usual?

Not clearly. Consider again the divide between professional philosophers on one side and street-corner respondents on the other. Disagreement across this divide was supposed to create a problem for intuition generally. If that problem is real, then armchair philosophy faces a much more serious problem, which we all recognize only too well already, at least implicitly.

The disagreement across the expertise divide is not so alarming. We can plausibly downgrade the significance of any disagreement that pits reflective experts against unreflective passersby. Moreover, the disagreement across the expertise divide was meant to expose problems for just one component of philosophical methodology: namely, philosophical intuition.

Unfortunately, there is a bigger problem of disagreement for armchair philosophy. This problem is much more troubling for two reasons. First of all, it concerns disagreement among the experts themselves, at the highest levels of expertise. And, secondly, it concerns not just one component of armchair methodology, but also the most complete and carefully conducted methodology available in our field, which includes intuitions, but also inference, dialectical discussion—through seminars, conferences, journals and books—in a collective endeavor of broad scope, over centuries of inquiry.

Sadly, it is not just any narrow, observation-like method of intuitions that has a problem of disagreement. Even the broadest, most complete method available, one applied with care and dedication through broad cooperation, still yields a troubling measure of disagreement. So even this best and most complete method is in danger of sinking into disrepute.

That anyhow is the more troubling argument to which we are led as we move beyond the surveys. Let us consider what scope remains for philosophy as a discipline, even if its disciplinary status is still more potential than actual.

Is there such a thing as knowledge within the discipline of philosophy? By that I mean not just whether particular philosophers have knowledge that counts as philosophical. I mean to ask rather this: *whether anything is accepted as established within the discipline at large*.

Let's leave aside logic and the history of philosophy. Let's leave aside any purely negative knowledge, such as the knowledge that justified true belief is not necessarily equivalent to knowledge. Let's leave aside, finally, any essentially disjunctive knowledge, such as, perhaps, that either libertarianism or hard determinism or compatibilism is true. Leaving all of that aside, little established knowledge can be discerned in our discipline.

Unfortunately, on one important question after another, a troubling number of us fail to agree with the rest. No sufficient agreement or consensus often forms, none of the sort required for a fact to be *established* in the discipline at large.

Pre-scientific stages are similarly problematic even in fields that reach maturity in our sciences of today. Pre-scientific stages fail extensively to attain consensus. Such dissensus is overcome only through determined scientific inquiry, with its

distinctive methodology. It remains to be seen whether cultivation of philosophical subfields will produce the consensus required for established results and respective sciences.

Widespread disagreement in a subject area could take either of two forms: first, disagreement on answers to agreed-upon questions; second, lack of known agreement on the questions. We need to consider the extent to which progress in philosophy must overcome the second rather than the first sort of disagreement. If disagreement concerns mostly the questions, then our lack of testability is of a quite distinctive sort.

Compare a simple domain of phenomena, that of the temperature of a liquid in a container. We gain some limited access to that domain by inserting a hand in the liquid. This source of seemings and judgments might become independently testable with the development of thermometers. Locking up the thermometers would then push us back to a stage where our hand-insertion source was less testable. But such diminished testability is superficial, and resolvable through renewed access to the thermometers.

Analogously, lack of agreement on questions in a philosophical subfield is a practical matter of what attracts attention. If people fail to coincide clearly enough on the questions, this denies us the ability to properly test our intuitions. Such practical lack might be superficial, and remediable with due diligence. By attaining clear enough coincidence on the same questions, on the same thought experiments, we would be able to test our intuitions. Sustained dialectic, for example, might eventually yield the required coincidence.

It seems an open question how much of our ostensible philosophical disagreement is real and how much is based on an illusion of shared questions, an illusion that hides the divergence of our questions. Either way low testability is of limited importance for assessing philosophical sources, such as philosophical intuition. This may be seen as follows.

Take first the case where the disagreement is in the questions. Lack of testability is in that case superficial, and should be remediable in practice. It is like the lack of testability for our hand-insertion source when the thermometers are locked up, while remaining available in principle.

Take second the case where the disagreement is in the answers. Now the problem is not that philosophical sources are untestable. They are testable all right, but they test negative. Disagreement in the deliverances of a source tends to reveal the unreliability of that source.

The problem for armchair philosophy is, therefore, not so much that intuition is insufficiently testable. Evident coincidence on the questions brings hopeful testability, making philosophical sources increasingly subject to the test of agreement. It is just unfortunate that they have yet to pass this test, which must be passed for a discipline to count as scientific.

The real present or looming danger is the actual or potential disagreement that pervades our field. This is not disagreement that pits experienced philosophers

against street-corner respondents. It is rather the longstanding, well known disagreement among the 'experts' themselves. Let us turn next to this.

7. Is Low-Test Philosophy Entirely Hopeless?

In considering whether intuition can be a source of evidence in philosophy, let's focus on philosophical methodology generally. Let's compare intuition with the way of forming opinions used by our best practitioners through the centuries. Philosophical methodology would include not only bare individual intuition, but also argumentation, public dialectic, and whatever forms of explanatory inference might be of use in our discipline. We shift the focus thus to 'philosophical method', the best that can be found on offer either historically or on the contemporary scene, from across the domain of philosophy.

> How 'hopeful' is such broader methodology? Has it been appropriately sensitive to its errors, and capable of correction? Has it manifested these virtues to a sufficiently high degree? In fact our global philosophical method seems little more testable than its component intuition.

What is it, more specifically, that drains hope from the method of intuition, and from philosophical method more broadly? Is it not largely an inability to overcome disagreement among apparent peers? Disagreement does I think deserve much of the blame, if it is really substantive.

The same is true, moreover, not only of philosophy, but also of art, morality, and politics; and even of how we judge the character and motivation of our fellow humans. All of these fall well short of the standards of objective agreement proper to scientific inquiry. If our threshold of proper hope is set by the standards of scientific objectivity, then in none of these domains do our judgments deserve trust.

The epistemic problems in such domains, I am suggesting, are pervasive, and characteristic of the domains themselves, not of any particular method that one might single out. Indeed, 'philosophical method' seems not distinctive of philosophy. It amounts to little more than *thinking carefully, in medias res, through the use of deductive and inductive inference, and with the help of imagination, counterfactual thinking, and public discussion*.[13]

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[13] It might be thought that modal intuitions are never used outside philosophy. But whenever we face alternative outcomes as we decide what to do, we surely rule out a plethora of them (automatically and implicitly) simply because they are obviously impossible. Their obvious impossibility seems accessible to us just through what we are calling 'intuition.' Some such intuitions even prove questionable eventually, as did simultaneity intuitions after Einstein.

It might be questioned whether we do any such ruling out. That in some sense we do so may be appreciated, however, by comparison with the fact that we rely on the solidity of a floor in a room as we stride confidently into it, even if we give no conscious thought whatever to that

We thus arrive at a general question of attitude. What can we reasonably hope for when we face vital unscientific questions? Can we hope to develop *scientific* modes of belief formation, and in effect *scientific disciplines*? Consider artistic criticism, morality, and politics. Consider how we know about our friends and loved ones, and the judgments required for our life-guiding choices, big and small. Could there possibly be sciences to replace our views concerning such subject matter? And even if there possibly *could* be such sciences, what are we to do while we await their consummation? Should we just hold ourselves generally aloof?[14] That would be to check out of life. And if the judgments required for living well admit a distinction between the good and the bad, we can properly reflect on this distinction, we can try to understand it, even if it is not quite the distinction between the scientific and the unscientific.

Accordingly, the fact that philosophical methodology is less amenable to independent test than is scientific methodology does not show it to be hopeless for its proper domain. Philosophical intuition might after all enjoy a role analogous to scientific observation even while substantially less hopeful. For it is in service of methods used where the requirements for proper hope are substantially lower.[15]

We have staved off one kind of pessimism about our prospects for a discipline of philosophy. We have deflected the objection that the methods of philosophy, such as intuition, are insufficiently testable. And we have resisted the inference that philosophy is hopeless from the premise that it is polluted by disagreement. Even supposing we have succeeded in that endeavor, that is not enough. We might still

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relied-upon fact. It is in this sense that we rule out walking through the wall and opt for the door.

[14] Might we just sprinkle probability qualifiers freely enough to escape our problems? I don't see that this would help much. Plenty of disagreement would still remain, even once it was clear what meaning was imported by the qualification.

[15] A further thought deserves more sustained attention than we can give it here. Recall that 'hope' includes the degree to which the method assessed is free of self-undermining, since it includes a requirement of coherence. And suppose we include the following among the ways in which a method can undermine itself:

> *A method M undermines itself in proportion to how the deliverances of M are repeatedly shown to have been false by later deliverances of M itself.*

In that case, we are all aware of a reason why scientific method now seems surprisingly less hopeful than it might have seemed.

We have seen how the use of intuition and of philosophical method must face troubling considerations that apparently drain them of hope. And now we find a similarly troubling concern about the use of scientific method. If we wish to defend scientific method, we must find some way to defuse the problem raised initially by the pessimistic induction. This would seem to require philosophical reflection at a high level of generality. And something similar would be required in order to overcome the hope-draining considerations adduced against the use of intuition in philosophy.

Both problems are of course familiar; yet, so far as I know, neither one has been laid to rest decisively: neither the problem posed by peer-disagreement for philosophical method, nor the problem posed by the pessimistic induction for scientific method.

fall deplorably short. Thus, we might agree with evident unanimity both on a set of questions that define a subfield, and on the right doxastic attitude to take to those questions. But the right doxastic attitude might just be that of suspension. And we might still be in the dark on how to answer our questions, even if we agree completely on the testable sources available to us. Our sources might simply fail to deliver what we need in order to reach the desired answers.

'Mysterians' have drawn that pessimistic conclusion about important sectors of our field (e.g. McGinn, 1991 and 1993, and Chomsky, 1987 and 2009). Their stance is equally dispiriting, though in a quite different way from the stance targeted above. The stance we have examined in this paper is not a mysterian claim that the agreed upon, testable methods of our discipline fail (and will fail) to deliver on certain questions. We have instead examined a prior doubt concerning our methods: namely, that they are hopelessly untestable, or produce too much disagreement. It is this prior doubt and its alleged implications that we have here found reasons to resist.

Most recently the experimentalist critique has turned even more sophisticated but also more concessive.[16] It is now granted that philosophy has made progress, not only through its development of formal logics, but also through helpful distinctions broadly recognized and used: the distinction between use and mention, for example, or between semantics and pragmatics, or between epistemic and metaphysical possibility. These developments, note well, are all accomplished by thinkers comfortably seated in their armchairs.

In addition, it is now recognized that the earlier critique of armchair intuition relies essentially on presuppositions that derive from the armchair. Thus, in concluding that intuitions are distorted by cultural or socioeconomic bias, we presuppose a metaphysical view of the subject matter, one that makes the distortion immediately plausible.

The substance of the critique is now that experimental inquiry has uncovered unhealthy influences on our intuitive responses. We must therefore redouble our efforts to discern the true extent of such influences, so as to be able to protect against them in further philosophical inquiry.

This seems to me a more reasonable critique, one deserving of more serious consideration. However, it faces a dilemma.

Either experimental inquiry will uncover *serious* divergence in subject responses or it will not.

If it does *not*, then the effects of the operative factors are not thereby problematic. Suppose, in particular, that respondents are *nearly all* in agreement. Their agreement will then be problematic only on the premise that they are getting it wrong anyhow, despite the substantial agreement. And this will require that we have access to the truth on the philosophical subject matter in question. This way of

[16] Once again Jonathan Weinberg has led the way, in his talk at a conference on experimental philosophy at the University of Calgary in November of 2009.

arguing presupposes, therefore, that we *already* have philosophical access to the facts in that domain.

True, the source that delivers the seemings or beliefs in the target domain might have been shown to be distorting in *other* domains, where disagreement is much more extensive. But how would we know that the distortion carries over to the target domain? This may require independent access to the target domain after all.

That's all, again, on the assumption that the experiments uncover no serious divergence in responses within the relevant domain.

If serious divergence *is* revealed experimentally, on the other hand, how then can we be sure that the respondents are interpreting the relevant texts in the same way? Note that we will then start out with a substantial reason for suspecting that people are talking past each other. Unless we can spot reasons to suspect relevantly different positioning, or divergence of competence, we should suspect divergence of meaning, as this will quite possibly best explain the persistent ostensible disagreement.

True, this last thought will not apply in the case where the disagreement is with one's counterfactual self. This may be due, for example, to order effects. But why think that these effects cause *serious enough* distortions that require special attention? We would still need an answer to this obvious question.

It is not at all evident, therefore, that or how the extent of experimentally revealed divergence in responses would create a serious problem for the continued use of armchair methods in philosophy.

Department of Philosophy
Rutgers University

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