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Guest Editors' Preface

Over the last decades, a renewed interest for metaphilosophical issues has prompted many philosophers in the analytic tradition to raise questions on the epistemic status and the methodology of philosophical inquiry. Reflection has focused especially on the nature and reliability of intuitions, on the notion of *a priori* and on the plausibility of the idea that philosophical knowledge can be gained, as the phrase goes, “in the armchair”.

This attitude stems from various sources, such as the cognitive turn that has shaped a consistent part of recent Anglophone philosophy, the revival of metaphysics encouraged by Kripke's rehabilitation of *de re* necessity, and the formulation of new accounts of analyticity and *a priori* knowledge. In part, however, metaphilosophical issues have become so urgent for analytical philosophers as a result of the increasing attraction of so-called “experimental philosophy”.

Upholders of experimental philosophy are driven by the idea that philosophical inquiry cannot afford to ignore the data gathered by empirical sciences. Considering the tendency to discount empirical results and to retreat into the domain of the *a priori* as a relatively recent development in philosophical methodology, they advocate a return to an earlier idea of philosophy, conceived as the study of the deepest questions raised by the human condition, a study necessarily open to the contributions of various empirical disciplines, such as psychology, cognitive sciences, social sciences and history.

Moreover, in the last fifteen years or so, practitioners of experimental philosophy have collected several sets of empirical data, from which they wish to draw significant consequences about the plausibility of various philosophical views concerning linguistic reference, the nature of knowledge, various issues in moral philosophy and several other subjects. Many experimental philosophers believe that empirical research can enhance the reliability of philosophical inquiry by helping its practitioners to detect their own susceptibilities to bias and error. The aim of these experimental philosophers is to make a “positive” contribution to the practice of philosophical analysis.

Some experimental philosophers, however, are more radical: their “negative programme” is to show that the traditional way of doing philosophy, with its reliance on counterfactual reasoning and intuitions prompted by

mental experiments, is intrinsically unreliable. As one would expect, this more radical position has sparked serious concern among practitioners of traditional philosophical analysis, who have reacted to its challenge in various ways: by questioning the soundness of the methodology employed by experimental philosophers in collecting their data, by denying that such empirical data can have any genuine bearing on philosophical research, or by refining their own view of the nature of the intuitions and/or methods employed in conceptual and/or philosophical analysis.

This issue of *Discipline filosofiche* collects papers representing a wide range of approaches and positions on many of the issues raised by this clash of metaphilosophical paradigms. The opening papers have been written by two leading exponents of the opposite sides of the debate, Ernest Sosa and Jonathan Weinberg, whom we thank for accepting our invitation to contribute to the issue.

The focus of Sosa's paper is on metaphysical analysis. A careful discussion of the ways in which Gettier-type counterexamples challenge the Justified True Belief account of knowledge brings to light the variety of issues philosophers have in mind when they appeal to intuitions in the attempt to corroborate (or refute) different sorts of modal, explanatory and constitutive claims. By distinguishing metaphysical analysis from conceptual and semantic inquiry (as well as from the mere search for necessary biconditionals) Sosa addresses a number of objections against philosophers' reliance on intuitions that have been raised on different grounds by Timothy Williamson and experimental philosophers.

On the opposite side of the debate, Weinberg's paper offers reasons for incorporating the tools of experimental science into the methodology of philosophy. Standard analytical practice, he argues, does not include adequate resources for detecting and correcting philosophers' own biases and susceptibilities to error. Weinberg illustrates this point by discussing two specific deficiencies of such practice – cognitive diversity and subtle contextual effects – and then recommends the adoption of some “modest x-phy methodological norms”, which would fare much better, in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, than a “norm of universal experimentation”.

The next two papers also tackle general metaphilosophical issues. Steven Bland analyzes the “method of possible cases”, designed to prompt intuitions about the use of concepts in counterfactual circumstances, and challenges its monopoly over the practice of conceptual analysis. Discussing Frege's logical analysis of arithmetic, Hilbert's axiomatic analysis of geometry and Poincaré's transcendental analysis of physics, he questions both the metaphilosophical claim that the method of possible cases provides the only effective way of doing conceptual analysis and the historical claim that it has always been the standard procedure employed by analytic philosophers.

Bryce Huebner has a very different agenda: he discusses the construction of philosophical intuitions in order to strengthen and extend the “negative programme” in experimental philosophy. In his paper he reflects on the psychological mechanisms that are likely to underlie the construction of representations of thought experimental scenarios, proposes a model of the cognitive architecture that leads to the creation of “blended mental spaces”, and argues that neuroscientific research on counterfactual thinking provides some initial support for this model.

The proposals of experimental philosophers are often part of a broader naturalistic view of the world. So it is helpful, in addressing the specific topic of this issue, to broaden the focus to include the global naturalistic attitude on the background of which such proposals are often endorsed or discarded. In his article, Alfredo Tomasetta examines critically three standard arguments for physicalist naturalism in the philosophy of mind: the argument from the success of science, the argument from methodological naturalism, and the argument from the causal closure of the physical. All of them, in his view, fall short of establishing their purported conclusion.

The issues addressed in the following papers also arise from specific philosophical disciplines, where the approaches of classical analysis and experimental philosophy lead to interestingly different outcomes. Reflecting on the so-called “Empirical Philosophy of Mathematics”, Markus Pantsar scrutinizes the methodology of a questionnaire-based study of the intuitions of professional mathematicians on mathematical knowledge and mathematical proofs. Questioning the conclusions drawn from this study, he suggests that philosophical insight into mathematics is more likely to come from a broader study of mathematical *practice* than from the sociological study of mathematicians' *beliefs*.

Huginn Freyr Thorsteinsson discusses the importance of intuitions for the philosophy of language. He maintains that cross-cultural studies of speakers' intuitions about the reference of proper names have not shown that such intuitions vary within and across cultures. However, he also claims that the role of these intuitions in the construction and assessment of theories of reference has been unduly emphasized: a satisfactory theory of reference should not only do justice to speakers' intuitions, but address the sceptical challenges posed by the *qua* problem and the triviality problem of reference.

The paper by Francesca Ervas, Elisabetta Gola, Antonio Ledda and Giuseppe Sergioli also explores linguistic issues. The focus is on argumentation theory, and the topic is the way in which common lexical ambiguities (homonymy, polysemy and metaphor) affect speakers' intuitions concerning the strength of syllogistic arguments. The authors present a pilot study of *quaternio terminorum* which indicates that the detection of a four terms fallacy

relies to a considerable extent on the nature of the ambiguity of the middle term; they discuss the methodology of this study, and suggest that it may throw light on the divergences between the intuitions of speakers and scholars concerning the strength of arguments.

In the last paper, Richard Davies focuses on political philosophy. He examines Rawls's "veil of ignorance" thought experiment, which requires us to imagine having complete knowledge of the social sciences while lacking all knowledge about the position we occupy in society. He argues that operations suggested by Rawls's thought experiment can produce remarkable philosophical results about justice, exposing widespread and often invisible prejudices which render irrational or unjust (or both) almost all the social arrangements which have emerged so far in human history.

Although the articles collected in this issue cannot provide a comprehensive overview of the current debate on philosophical analysis and experimental philosophy, they offer a fairly representative sample of the positions, methodologies and disciplinary issues involved in this exciting philosophical discussion.

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