The Methodology of Analytic Philosophy: Intuitions, Concepts, and Conceptual Analysis

Abstract: In this essay I defend intuitions and conceptual analysis as being crucial to a social scientific analytic linguistic philosophy. This essay recognizes a distinction between *worldview intuitions* and *linguistic intuitions* as beliefs that motivate conceptual analyses. I argue that since a theory cannot be constructed solely out of unbiased and neutral worldview intuitions, the analytic philosopher must provide a theory with hypotheses and examples that provide reasons to believe that a given worldview is true. An analytic theory mediates between 'worldview intuitions' (e.g., about theism, naturalism, possible-worlds realism) and 'linguistic intuitions' (i.e., involving the use of particular concepts and sentences). Six key kinds of concepts are postulated. The intuitions of Williamson (2007), Cappelen (2012), and Deutsch (2015) about methodology are critiqued. While it is agreed with experimental philosophers that intuitions are not typically neutral, nor always reliable, this fact doesn't prevent the legitimate use of intuitions as data for constructing and evaluating philosophical theories.

The question of 'what is proper philosophical methodology?' has become the subject of lively debate over the past three decades. While there is a long-running historical debate about methodology between rationalists and empiricists, there has recently been a more focused debate about the relevance of philosophical intuitions. In this essay, I defend the use of intuitions and conceptual analysis as being crucial to a social scientific analytic linguistic philosophy. In doing so I will (1) characterize the status of intuitions and the explanatory strategy of conceptual analysis, (2) defend the use

of 'abductive arguments,' (3) characterize what a 'concept' is, and recognize six kinds of concepts found in philosophy and psychology, (4) defend the use of intuitions as a source of evidence for conceptual analysis, (5) explain how philosophical decisions are made, (6) argue against experimental philosophers (who claim intuitions should have a limited evidential role in philosophy) and (7) respond to Williamson, Cappelen, and Deutsch, whom are skeptical about intuitions and conceptual analysis in analytic philosophy.

I. What are Intuitions?

Jaakko Hintikka (1999, p. 127) credits Noam Chomsky as being a major source of contemporary talk about 'linguistic intuitions':

> Intuitions came into fashion as a consequence of the popularity of Noam Chomsky's linguistics and its methodology. According to a widespread conception, generative linguists like Chomsky were accounting for competent speakers' intuitions of grammaticality by devising a grammar... intuitively accepted by these speakers. This kind of methodology was made attractive by the tremendous perceived success of Chomsky's theories in the 1960s and 1970s.

For Chomsky, the grammaticality of sentences is determined from the data of individual syntactic intuitions. These intuitions allowed construction of a set of *de facto* generative rules that produce all and only strings as 'grammatical.' The use of 'intuitions' followed into philosophical discourse. For example, most persons intuitively judge (a) as semantically well-formed but (b) ill-formed:

(a) I thought Sue was ill, but it turned out that she wasn't.

(b) I knew Sue was ill, but it turned out that she wasn't.

What is an intuition? Charles Parsons (1995) defines an 'intuition' as what a person takes to be true at the outset of an inquiry, or as a matter of common sense (p. 59). David Lewis (1983) and others similarly define an intuition as a kind of belief, or an opinion. Intuitions have been characterized as spontaneous mental judgments (Goldman & Pust, 1998). An intuition is a belief that we are committed to, inclined to believe, or seems intrinsically plausible. It is a report of 'what we would say' if asked our gut-level opinion about the correct answer to a given question. An intuition can be a 'seems to be the case' and unreflectively tentative, or alternatively, an intuition can be strongly held (but not infallible). Most times we have implicit intuitions (beliefs) that are reliably produced and true. But in other cases, a strongly held pre-theoretical implicit belief (e.g. 'the sun moves around the earth,' 'there are moral truths,' 'I know that I'm not a brain-in-a-vat') may be discovered false after investigation.

Some philosophers have denied that 'intuitions' are kinds of beliefs, because persons can intuitively 'believe in the truth' of a proposition, but still know that the proposition is false (e.g., because of a deductive argument, or scientific evidence, showing it false). They argue that since an intuition isn't always a belief, it must be something else. Intuitions are just 'inclinations to believe' or 'intellectual seeming' and not actual beliefs. For Peter van Inwagen (1997), intuitions are "tendencies that make certain beliefs attractive to us… without taking us all the way to acceptance" (p. 309). This seems wrong. A better interpretation is that *some* intuitions are tentative and weakly held. These are beliefs that we are inclined to have, not decisively, perhaps because we lack expertise. Other times, we have very strong nonnegotiable intuitions.

On the view presented here, what distinguishes empirical physical science from analytic philosophy, is philosophy's reliance on personal intuitions. Intuitions are the starting point for a philosophical theory. Intuitions differ from empirical beliefs because they more prominently involve an *interpretation* of *the way things are* and initially are *non-inferential* (i.e., without conscious explicit reasons). Intuitions are evidential data to be explained and scrutinized by a theory. Both a person's 'worldview' intuitions and 'linguistic' intuitions play a role in conceptual analyses.

World-View Intuitions

World-view intuitions are a person's beliefs about the overall character of a phenomenon (or domain) being discussed. Worldview intuitions are *not* just intuitions about the *physical* world. Instead 'worldview intuitions' are intuitions about everything, including linguistic intuitions, and intuitions about human psychology and behavior (e.g., if a choice was available, most persons prefer to be freely given a $1000 bill instead of a $1 bill, to maximize utility). For philosophers, worldview intuitions include beliefs about theism, evolution theory, empiricism, naturalism, semantic theory, possible-worlds realism, mathematics, metaethics, aesthetics, and the practice of philosophy. A philosopher's worldview intuitions are found in the preface, introduction, and abstracts of their published works. There it is stated (1) what questions are important and require answers, (2) what distinctions and associated concepts are useful, and (3) the viewpoint to be articulated and defended. E.J. Lowe (2000) correctly maintains that one's 'personal metaphysics' about 'reality' is unavoidable for any rational thinker including physical scientists (p. 5). One's 'personal metaphysics' is one's worldview.

Jay Rosenberg, in *The Practice of Philosophy* (1996), acknowledges the concept of 'worldview,' stating that the methodology of philosophy demands an elaborate sequential structure of competing worldview arguments:

> Ultimately any challenge is addressed not to this or that individual thesis but to the consistency and coherence of a whole family of beliefs in which the thesis is embedded. What is genuinely at issue in a philosophical dispute, then, is not a particular statement or claim but rather a rich, more or less systematic *world view*. A philosophical encounter is like the collision of two icebergs. What lies beneath the surface is larger than, and gives shape and force to, what is visible above the waters. These philosophical world views have a special sort of comprehensiveness and elasticity. They shape our whole way of seeing the world. Opposition among them is *dialectical*… A pair of world views stand in what I call *dialectical opposition* just in case they are incompatible but nevertheless are both *tempting*, in that there's an initial pull toward each of them; both *pivotal*, in that they serve as centers for ordering and regrouping families of beliefs; and both reformulatable, in that they are expressible by a variety of different specific claims or theses (pp. 50-51).

Rosenberg then goes on to contrast 'theistic' and 'non-theistic' worldviews.

A recent example of an important worldview is that of methodological 'naturalism' as advocated by W.V.O. Quine (1953, 1969) and Hilary Kornblith (2002). This is the view that the 'primary existents' are physical or mathematical, and that the problems of philosophy should be empirically investigated. For reasons articulated

below, I don't share this worldview. Other examples of worldview intuitions that are widely-held true, but I believe are *false* include: (1) that moral assertions function to represent reality, (2) that linguistic entities found in sentences and used in a context have reference, which allows them 'meaning,' (3) that the meaning of sentences depends upon the meanings of the words that they are composed of (i.e., principle of compositionality), (4) that there exists *a priori* knowledge, (5) that any significant assertion is true or false (i.e. the principle of bivalence), (6) that I can know that I'm not a brain-in-a-vat (i.e., I deny epistemic closure), and (7) that the primary argumentative methodology of analytic philosophy should be deduction. Hopefully, this confessed worldview will not dissuade some readers from continuing to read this essay.

Linguistic Intuitions

Linguistic intuitions are narrower in scope and are about the proper application and use of particular concepts and sentences. Linguistic intuitions are a subset of a person's worldview intuitions. Linguistic intuitions are beliefs about the use of concepts and sentence meaning. A person's possessing a concept makes one disposed to have beliefs (or intuitions) about the correct application of a concept in various cases. A conceptual analysis is the practice of analyzing terms (e.g. knowledge, justification, truth, reference, relevance, intuition, beauty, number) by exploring the normal uses of terms and sentences and the intentions behind them that give a concept a significance (or meaning, intelligibility) in a context. Ideally with the analysis of linguistic intuitions, and worldview beliefs about how things are, the epistemology and function of various declarative propositions (e.g. empirical, moral, mathematical, aesthetic) can be explained.

Intuitions Summarized

The overall character of a philosophical 'intuitive judgment' is well-summarized by Geoff Pynn (2017, p. 39):

> By calling the judgments 'intuitive,' I mean two things, first they, are more-or-less non-inferential and cognitively effortless; second, they are generated by intellectual reflection or imagination, rather than perception (Nagel 2007, Nado and Johnson 2014). When I say that something "intuitively seems" the case, I mean that we (I and hopefully the reader) are inclined to make an intuitive judgment that it is the case. When I say that an intuitive judgment is "accepted" or that we "defer to" an intuition or intuitive judgment, I mean we accept that judgment's content is true.

Pynn rightly conceives an 'intuition' as a judgment (or belief) that one 'accepts' as true.

The Explanatory Strategy of Conceptual Analysis

Conceptual analyses attempt to describe our linguistic practices and intentions and interpret various natural (and artificial) language uses of sentences and words. Conceptual analyses involve clarifying, resolving ambiguities, and promoting consistency. Conceptual analysis centers upon the evaluation of competing philosophical theories using best-explanation inferences. Analyses often include functional explanations and hypotheses about how language is used and the intentions of particular users. Functional explanations provide a theory of a person's reasons, assumptions, and goals for making an assertion. Many times, a concept is defined (or explained) in part as a response to imagined hypothetical situations (i.e. the method of cases). Participants in a

discussion critically assess their linguistic and worldview intuitions about case studies (e.g., 'Tom Grabit' and 'Henry and the Barn'). It is verdicts about concrete cases that are given the primary weight by the standard justificatory procedure of conceptual analysis. Rejecting or modifying beliefs and theses in the face of convincing examples and counterexamples is a characteristic of philosophical argumentation. Being critical of one's own and others' intuitions helps resolve questions and puzzles.

Intuitions are not reliably produced perceptions (i.e., empirical beliefs), and thus are not capable of being independently (objectively) tested. Analytic philosophy is characterized by its not-always-reliable intuitions (as beliefs) as the grounding-point (or starting-point) for evaluating philosophical theories. Intuitions are the initial, and in the end, the final, reflective data from which a theory is evaluated. Theories are generated from the conjunction of *questions* asked, *concepts* adopted, and *background beliefs* assumed. The goal of a substantive philosophical theory is to transform a person's non-inferential 'intuitions' (i.e., *seeming* to be the case) into more strongly confirmed beliefs; or otherwise dispel a person's initial false intuitions and replace them with new beliefs.

The methodology of analytic philosophy *should* be that of an abductive 'social science' whereby hypotheses are sought to explain beliefs and behaviors by rendering them intelligible and by explaining human action. A philosopher's interest should be in developing a lay reader's conceptual and linguistic competence that allows for a better understanding of a natural world that includes the beliefs, desires, values, and intentions of persons in it. Analyses should assist in the development of true beliefs about core

issues in epistemology, ethics, mathematics, aesthetics, and language (e.g., about 'concepts' and 'definition').[1]

Who is best suited to lead a conceptual analysis?   Not surprisingly conceptual analysis is best led by analytic philosophers who have thought long and hard about certain questions related to the use (or meaning) of a certain concept. Philosophers tend to have an explicit (or implicit) systematic theory (or hypothesis) for how words are used and how beliefs and knowledge are obtained. Alvin Goldman (2007) argues that conceptual investigation is a proto-scientific, quasi-experimental enterprise, where the aim is to reveal the contents of category-representing states as a starting point for seeking a derivative public concept. He states that the best way to understand one's personal psychological conception of a given concept is to contrast it with other conceptions found in 'analyses' led by experts. We systemize our intuitions and test them against other intuitions. A philosopher must be cautious about whether the proper use and applicability of a given concept is (universally) the same for all people; but it is assumed that there is a strong degree of similarity. (Goldman, pp. 17-20).

II. Argumentative Methodology: Deduction and Abduction

A. Deductive Methodology

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[1] This goal is modest in contrast to a philosopher such as George Bealer (1998) who is interested in the concepts of 'universality,' 'generality,' and 'necessity' as they are related to "nature of substance, mind, intelligence, consciousness, sensation, perception, knowledge, wisdom, truth, identity, infinity, divinity, time, explanation, causation, freedom, purpose, goodness, duty, the virtues, love, life, happiness, …" (p. 203).

Historically, deduction has been a favored argumentative form of philosophers. A deductive argument consists of reasons expressed as premises in an argument that, if the premises are true, entail a necessarily true conclusion using the standard rules of deductive inference. The premises should be true or plausible to someone who might not have initially agreed to the conclusion of the argument. With the possibility of finding agreed-on (and true) premises, a valid deductive argument seeks to prove the necessary truth of a conclusion. Natural language sentences are translated into a perspicuous logical language in order to deductively resolve pertinent philosophical issues.

But in practice, it is often found difficult to find agreement about whether certain premises are true, and to state premises using informative, non-technical, and non-idiosyncratic concepts. Everyday deductions using ordinary vocabulary are easy and transparent. But when it comes to complex philosophical questions, a deductive argument often fails to produce an argument that is consensually accepted as sound. The form of a deductive argument is rarely disputed (as invalid) because most philosophers are capable of presenting valid deductive arguments. Instead, the premises are in dispute.

Although symbolic logic cannot resolve philosophical problems by itself, the benefit of a deductive argument is that it routinely leads to the valuable identification of the premise(s) that are in dispute. This is where arguments about truth of certain premises and the adequacy of concepts can be debated. Attention is paid to whether the premises are true and whether the concepts contained in the premises can be expected to be fruitful in resolving a question. Deductive logic is best understood as a 'tool' in the practice of philosophy; but is *not* the 'standard' or 'required' methodology.

B. Abductive Methodology

In actual philosophical practice, arguments include the frequent use of *abductive* inferences. 'Abduction' is defined as 'an inference to best explanation.' Abduction is used often in everyday and professional reasoning. If I have misplaced my car keys, I search in a sequence of places where the keys may be (i.e., the process of elimination). Medical doctors initially diagnose a patient's specific ailment as a best-explanation inferential hypothesis based upon their symptoms. In the judicial system, lawyers, judges, and juries rely on inductive evidence and make best-explanation inferences to decide whether a defendant is guilty. James Andow (2016) concurs that "philosophy is at heart an abductive exercise… which includes intuitions and evidence about intuitions" (p. 362).

III. What is a Concept? A Worldview.

A concept is a *functional physical entity* that is found in sentient creatures that in humans can be *expressed* (i.e., defined, explained) by *words and sentences* (i.e., linguistic entities). Concepts are not empirical beliefs; they have a different form of function than beliefs. Concepts function to categorize entities. Persons possess 'mental representations' of 'categories' with associated thoughts (or tacit beliefs) about what a concept (or word) is about. Concepts are sub-propositional psychological entities that with extended thought, can be described or stipulated in detail with language. This characterization of a 'concept' as being a mental particular is accepted by many contemporary philosophers, psychologists, and cognitive scientists (including Laurence & Margolis, 1999, p. 8). The explicit definition of the content of a given concept is the same across individuals to the

extent that individuals have similar (or identical) characteristic properties in mind for items that fall under that concept.

Six Key Kinds of Concepts

What *kinds* of 'concepts' there are? As stated, for a human to possess a concept is to have a capacity for having beliefs about the applicability of the concept in certain contexts. Persons have *mental representations* of different kinds of concepts. A major scientific goal in psychology is to empirically understand what kinds of 'mental representations' there are. In reviewing recent literature involving the notion of 'concept' we can tentatively make the following distinctions between six kinds of concepts (elaborated in detail elsewhere):

(1) *Natural kind concepts* are about natural kind entities. A natural kind entity is thought to have intrinsic properties (and/or extrinsic properties) with an independent nature. Water is a natural kind. Natural kinds need not be physical or found in nature. Knowledge can be analyzed as a natural kind.

(2) *Group resemblance concepts* are about entities (or things) that have superficial resemblance or loose similarity, but may not have a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions that strictly defines the entity as a unique kind. These nouns, predicates, verbs, and adjectives are often called 'cluster concepts.' Group resemblance terms can be the subject of a unified characterization or a disjunctive definition of 'normal use' if desired (e.g., 'art,' 'chair,' 'democracy'). Other examples are 'game,' 'friend,' 'poverty,' 'mountain,' 'snowball,' 'toothpaste,' 'white,' 'good,' 'noise,' 'jump,' 'rude,' 'flat,' and 'tall' (i.e., most concepts).

(3) *Fixed definiens concepts* (i.e., 'closed concept,' 'formal concept') have two characteristics that make up their uniqueness. First, a fixed definiens concept is a term that is stipulatively defined to *unequivocally identify* any item(s) that fall under its definition. The definiens is precise enough to distinctly exclude any entity that doesn't fall under the definition. Second, a fixed definiens concept is stable and not subject to alteration (without creating a new concept). The definiens determines what a term's proper referents (or extensions) are, if any. Fixed definiens concepts often involve 'measurement' in a broad sense. With fixed-definiens concepts, *the consistency of informative fixed definiens concepts* and *their (e.g., logical or spatial) relations* are sought. Examples of fixed definiens concepts occur in (a) kinship/gender vocabularies (e.g. a 'bachelor,' 'vixen'), (b) the deductive sciences (e.g. a 'valid deductive argument' is where if the premises are true, it is impossible for the conclusion to be false; the 'successor' of ordinal number x is the next ordinal number, or x +1), (c) grammatical concepts; indexicals/pronouns (e.g. 'I' refers to speaker), connectives (e.g. 'not' is to make negative a given proposition), and (d) miscellaneous instances (e.g. the 'equator' is an imaginary circle around the earth).

 (4) *Fictional entity concepts* are about entities created (or brought into existence) at a certain time through the acts of an author or story-teller. We ordinarily accept that we can talk about fictional entities to account for the truth of various intuitively true sentences that purportedly refer to fictional things.

(5) *Definite description concepts* are phrases used to designate, denote, or specify entities that may or may not exist (or may be fictional). The concept of 'the first man on the moon' designates Neil Armstrong. The concept of 'the first person on Mars' designates nothing. The concept of 'a fat jolly fellow from the North Pole that delivers presents,' designates a fictional Santa Claus. The concept of the 'largest known prime number' designates a large number most recently discovered by a mathematician using a computer. The concept 'the couch in my living room' designates a concrete physical entity (in a context). Definite (or indefinite) descriptions can be used to refer to (or assert descriptions of) particular items.

(6) *Proper name concepts* are understood to designate or denote particular existing or fictional entities (when used in a context). A proper name is normally used in a context where a listener can infer the speaker's intended denotation.

In viewing these six kinds of concepts as manifested in the internal mental structure in the brains of humans, we suppose them to be physically instantiated akin to how beliefs, desires, values, and intentions are found (by function) in the brain.

Concepts are the constituents of thoughts and are combined in a systematic way to contribute to a thought's content. Persons manipulate concepts in much the same way a language is the manipulation of linguistic symbols. But when viewing concepts as mental representations instantiated in physical space (i.e., our brains), Nick Riemer (2010) warns it is "unclear, given the present state of research, whether the postulation of concepts is scientifically justifiable, or whether it is simply a term we have adopted from our untutored, pre-theoretical views about the nature of our mental lives..." (p. 31).

The above survey of six categories of concepts isn't exhaustive. Most words fall outside of this categorization (and have no intentional content) and are conceptualized (and defined) according to their use. Concepts that lie outside these categories have *reported uses* and definitions: e.g., the word 'there' is defined by an ordinary dictionary as having three senses/uses: 1) as an adverb 'to indicate in or at that place' (e.g., there is the cat), 2) as a pronoun (e.g., there's a pen here), and 3) as a noun (e.g., get away from there). In psychology and philosophy, the serious scholarship of the concept of 'concept' is only decades old. The postulation of six (or seven) kinds of concepts helps explain how persons think, communicate, and understand the world.[2]

What Concepts Are Subject to Analysis?

Goldman (2007) states that "concepts that correspond to natural kinds should be privileged, those that don't, shouldn't" (p. 17). Goldman states that natural kind concepts should be given philosophical attention, but the big problem is that it's doubtful that the target of every analysis has a corresponding natural kind. What are the natural kind concepts in philosophy? Besides the concepts of knowledge, reference, identity, and causation (all mentioned by Goldman), the concepts of truth, belief, justification, reason,

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[2] Malt et al. (2015) state that "Despite claims that cognition centrally involves concepts, it is hard to pin down a satisfying definition of what they are. Smith and Medin (1981), in their seminal book that spurred much subsequent use of the term, never provided an explicit definition of what concepts are" (p. 314). Likewise, the theory of what a 'concept' is, and its six prominent kinds, as presented here, is an explanation (or a description), and not a precise theoretic definition.

representation, fact, intention, explanation, mind, mentality, consciousness, pain, freedom, beauty, art, goodness, virtue, happiness, justice, number, set, infinity, existence, meaning, proper name, and necessity have all been subject (at some time) to philosophical analysis as natural kind concepts. With natural kind concepts, attention is paid to *the (objective) nature of the phenomena* involved.[3] With respect to this list of concepts, which can be interpreted as natural kind concepts? The answer will partially depend on a philosopher's broad worldview beliefs. A metaethical moral realist, for example, will have a different viewpoint about what concepts denote 'natural kinds' compared with those who hold a non-cognitive anti-realist position.

IV. Linguistic Intuitions as Data and Evidence in an Abductive Argument

Philosophers practicing conceptual analysis don't seek to just measure intuitions (i.e., existing beliefs) and theorize around that; but instead, they try to make more precise linguistic and conceptual intuitions as part of a theory to support or undermine a given worldview. Because theories are an intermediate result between how an individual interprets the world and beliefs about the proper use of linguistic terms and sentences, such theories are in a sense self-affirming. But an exposition can be even-handed, unlike an advertising campaign. A person's post-theoretic 'worldview' and 'linguistic beliefs' are in 'reflective equilibrium' when one's intuitions coincide with a theory's explanation.

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[3] Contrast to 'group resemblance' concepts, where its definitions are about *how persons use a term in natural language,* and 'fixed-definiens' concepts, where stipulated definitions are concerned with the *consistency of concepts* in systems of measurement.

How are conceptual analyses judged? The best indication of the truth of a given conceptual-linguistic analysis is to be found in its appeal to persons who are well-informed but not strongly committed (or biased) toward a theoretic position. If a theory generates explanations, hypotheses, or predictions about the appropriateness (and correctness) of whether '**S** *knows* moral-**p**,' '**x** is an *axiom*,' '**x** is *art*,' or '**S** *refers* to **x**' in case study situations, and if the open-minded reader agrees with the results of the case studies, then that theory may be respected as explaining the details (i.e., intension-extensions) of a shared-concept.   Although it isn't possible for persons to have an unbiased worldview, a willingness to openly examine alternative worldviews is a virtue.

V. Philosophical Decisions: Example Cases of Divergent World-View Intuitions

In order to have a viewpoint about a philosophical issue, the initial step is to explain and contrast opposing worldviews. Let's examine intuitions with respect to some of its subdisciplines: metaethics, mathematics, aesthetics, epistemology, and language.

(i.) Metaethics: Moral Realism vs. Non-Cognitive Anti-realism

According to moral realism, moral value has a real nature and existence that is independent of humans. Moral value is independent of our psychology and of our likes, dislikes, interests, and desires. Value is often characterized as an inherent, intrinsic property that is found in material objects, actions, and states of affairs, and is knowable. According to some cognitivists, value, virtue, and vice can be investigated with objective reasons and sound deductive arguments to support rational and eternal ethical truths. Russ Shafer-Landau (2003) applauds moral realism because it "preserves ordinary talk of moral truth." He says that when *we* face a moral perplexity, "we often see ourselves as

engaged in a search for the truth about who is in the right, or where our obligations lie. We can well explain the point and persistence of moral disagreement by attributing to agents the presupposition that there is a right answer awaiting discovery" (p. 23).

In contrast, a non-cognitive anti-realist believes that moral value owes its existence to the interests and desires of humans. Values can be changed or adjusted based upon new information, or with sensitivity to differences in value. Ethical assertions can be agreed-on, adopted, or accepted by persons having shared values. Moral assertions do not function to 'represent reality' as beliefs, but function to represent choice and guide action. A social consensus is sought, and not the discovery of ethical truth.

(ii.) Mathematics: Realism vs. Anti-Realism

Mathematical realists contend that: (1) there exist mathematical objects, (2) mathematical objects are abstract, and (3) mathematical objects are independent of persons, including their thought, language, and practices. For numbers or squares to exist, and for mathematical knowledge to be possible, their propositions must be *about* something. Mathematics is believed to be about a realm of objective 'abstract objects.' These 'abstract objects' are non-spatiotemporal, nonphysical, unchanging, and causally inert. Plato is the early originator of realism, believing that mathematical objects (e.g., squares, numbers) are 'universals' and that they are eternal and cannot be created, destroyed, nor changed. Axioms are believed to be 'self-evidently true' or *a priori* true.

In contrast to mathematical realism, 'anti-realism' was in effect proposed by David Hilbert (1899, 1934). Hilbert's 'formalism' describes mathematics as systems concerned with the manipulation of symbols and sets of stipulated operations, without attention to

the meaning of the symbols. Formal systems *may be interpreted* as a set of meaningless assertions. Axioms within a system provide 'implicit definitions' with a simultaneous characterization of a number of other terms in relation to each other. An axiomatic system is not (always) a system of statements about a subject matter, but a system of statements of a 'relational structure.' An axiomatic system consists in accepting without proof certain independent axioms (or postulates). An axiom is *assumed-true* (not literally true) only under a consistent interpretation (or model) that gives meaning to the system.

(iii.) Aesthetic Judgments: Objective Realism vs. Subjective Experience

When **S** asserts 'this painting is beautiful,' what is this sentence about? Is the speaker reporting that the *painting* is beautiful, in the sense of asserting that there are *properties in the painting* which make it objectively true that the painting is beautiful? Or alternatively is the speaker reporting a *subjective experience* when viewing the painting?

An aesthetic realist will respond that an aesthetic judgment 'this painting is beautiful' is about the *painting*, and that the particular painting has the *property* of 'beauty' that emerges from its base physical properties. According to the realist, there are objective perceivable properties that explain why one can make a true or false assertion about the painting having beauty. 'Aesthetic properties' were originally hypothesized by Frank Sibley (1959). Aesthetic properties are higher-order perceptual properties that emerge from the lower-level physical properties of an aesthetic item, that are directly experienced rather than inferred, and elicit a positive (or negative) aesthetic experience. A 'property' is understood as an attribute, feature, trait, or aspect of a thing. Aesthetic

judgments possess an objective truth value in virtue of their properties and a reality that exists independent of perceivers. Beauty is an objective property of an aesthetic item.

An aesthetic subjectivist, on the contrary, believes that 'this painting is beautiful' reports a *subjective experience*, and is about whether a painting satisfies one's interests and tastes. The speaker in context is asserting a *relationship* between one's perceptual experience and an aesthetic item. Aesthetic judgments are *true or false* in that they are *descriptions of actual subjective evaluations*. The subjectivist will further describe how an aesthetic judgment implies something *beyond* just a *report* of one's own likes and dislikes, and how some tastes can be more refined, and perhaps better, than others.

(iv.) Epistemology: Is Knowledge Closed Under Known Entailment?

Epistemology abounds with diverse intuitions. An example of a well-known debate is between Fred Dretske and John Hawthorne about 'epistemic closure' in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Steup et. al. 2014). Their exact formulations of epistemic closure differ slightly, but this is Hawthorne's: 'If one knows **p** and competently deduces **q** from **p**, thereby coming to believe **q**, while retaining one's knowledge that **p**, one comes to know that **q**.' This question about closure, as well as contemporary debates about contextualism, luck, and *a priori* knowledge, continue as this anthology illustrates.

(v.) Language: The Debate about Proper Name Reference

In recent times a controversy has developed about how proper names allow persons to refer to their designated entities. How does the utterance of a proper name (e.g., of a person) in a sentence by a speaker in a context, allow that person to refer to the person whom they are talking about? What is the mechanism that explains how the

ordinary use of proper names allows persons to know of whom they are speaking? In the philosophy of language, it is typically assumed that forms of expressions (e.g. proper names, sentences, predicates) possess 'semantic values' that can *mean* this or *refer* to that.

(a) The Description Theory of Proper Name Reference

The 'description theory' of proper name reference is the traditional explanation of proper name reference going back to Frege (1892) and Bertrand Russell (1905). Both theorists thought that there was no fundamental difference between proper names and definite descriptions. Frege used definite descriptions to explain the 'senses' of proper names and Russell claimed that the meanings of proper names were equivalent to (or abbreviate) the descriptions associated with those names by a speaker.

(b) The Causal-Historical Theory of Proper Name Reference

With respect to proper names, Saul Kripke (1980) takes a different perspective about 'linguistic reference.' Kripke believes that items are given 'initial baptisms' where a speaker dubs a certain object (or a definite description) with a particular name. Speakers succeed in referring to something because the use of a proper name is a link in a causal chain going back to the initial naming of the object.

(c) A Speaker Theory of Reference

With a 'speaker theory' of reference, the reference of proper names is understood to be a pragmatic notion among speakers. Intentions and a context allow a speaker (and audience) to identify the referent of a proper name. If there is an issue of reference with a proper name, speakers can specify a lexical definition of the properties and relations attributed to the referent. Instead of assuming that linguistic entities acquire meaning in a

context (to mean this, or to refer to that) it is fruitful to describe how *persons* can *use* expressions (e.g., a proper name, a definite description, a definition) to *refer* to entities (a planet, a fictional character, a number, a word). 'Compositionality' can be challenged.

The Philosophical Decision

Given that there is a 'realism- anti-realism' debate in metaethics, mathematics, and aesthetics, a debate about 'closure' in epistemology, and questions about 'reference' in the philosophy of language, how does one decide which positions to accept? As indicated, the reader must peruse opposing theories and case studies to determine whether a theory coincides with one's worldview and linguistic intuitions. However, if one has a misinterpretation (or misconception) about the basic nature of the domain studied, one's linguistic intuitions may also be in error.

VI. A Reply to Experimental Philosophy: Yes, Intuitions Aren't Neutral/Reliable

'Experimental philosophers' have recently shown that from survey results the intuitions of ordinary speakers about hypothetical thought experiments and conceptual intuitions can be diverse and conflicting. Philosophers such as Machery, Mallon, Nichols & Stich (2004) have raised the objection that because intuitions are culturally variable, they cannot serve as the fixed-point for philosophical theorizing. They argue that since intuitions in the Godel case study about the concept of 'reference' are culturally divided, case studies should be abandoned, and the use of 'expert intuitions' limited. But there is another reason for divided intuitions. Since 'description' and 'causal' theories are *both false*, this explains a lack of consensus. The 'speaker theory' should be added.

A Defense of Intuitions

It has been maintained here that *neither* personal worldview nor conceptual intuitions should be understood as the 'neutral data' that is in need of explanation. Intuitive beliefs about how the world is and how persons make use of concepts aren't always expected to be reliable (or truth-connecting) as the foundations for a true theory. Instead, social-scientific conceptual and linguistic analyses are an attempt to make more precise one's sentential and conceptual intuitions. An explanatory theory using intuitions and conceptual analysis can accommodate new philosophical positions and lead to a reconsideration of older traditional metaphysical positions, and vague and sometimes inconsistent 'folk theory' intuitions.

VII. A Response to Williamson

Among the greatest contrasts with the conceptual analysis methodology advocated here, is the view presented by Timothy Williamson in *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (2007). Williamson is vehemently against conceptual analysis. He criticizes the "classic epistemic error of psychologizing the data" as follows:

> … our evidence is sometimes presented as consisting of our intuitions: not their content, since it is allowed that some of our intuitions may be false, but rather our psychological states of having those intuitions. We are then supposed to infer to the philosophical theory that best explains the evidence. But since it is allowed that philosophical questions are typically not psychological questions, the link between the philosophical theory of a non-psychological subject matter and the psychological evidence that it is supposed to explain becomes problematic: the

description of the methodology makes the methodology hard to sustain. Again, philosophy is often presented as systematizing and stabilizing our beliefs, bringing them into reflective equilibrium: the picture is that in doing philosophy what we have to go on is what our beliefs currently are, as though our epistemic access were only to those belief states and not to the states of the world that they are about. The picture is wrong, we frequently have better epistemic access to our immediate physical environment than to our own psychology. A popular remark is that we have no choice but to start where we are, with our current beliefs. But where we are, is not only having various beliefs about the world; it is also having significant knowledge of the world. Starting from where we are involves starting from what we already know, and the goal is to know more (of course, how much more we come to know cannot be measured just by the number of propositions learnt). To characterize our method as one of achieving reflective equilibrium is to fail to engage with epistemologically crucial features of our situation. Our understanding of philosophical methodology must be rid of internalist preconceptions (p. 5).[4]

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[4] Williamson says that the method of conducting opinion polls among non-philosophers is not very likely to be the best way of answering philosophical questions (p. 7). In Williamson's wider philosophical worldview, he accepts mathematics as a genuine science and wishes to extend the same method to philosophy. He states that "Philosophy can never be reduced to mathematics. But we can often produce mathematical models of fragments of philosophy and, when we can, we should" (p. 291).

Let us evaluate this quote: First, Williamson's description of 'intuitions' and the philosophical value of intuitions, as merely psychological reports, is in error. Second, Williamson's metaphysical realism is debatable. Finally, Williamson's belief that theoreticians 'build upon past knowledge' is flawed. We briefly discuss these deficiencies.

Williamson's description of how 'intuitions' are used as evidence in philosophy is false. Contrary to Williamson, our intuitions, as beliefs, are *not* just psychological evidence (or sociological reports) about what we believe. Instead, we characterize intuitions as *true (or false) beliefs*, the same as other explicit assertions that purport to *describe* how things are. With our intuitions, we not only describe *our thoughts* (as accepted beliefs) we simultaneously attempt to describe *how things are*.

Williamson's realist metaphysical view can also be vigorously contested. Williamson's interpretation of 'metaphysics' is that this subdiscipline seeks to "discover what fundamental kinds of things there are and what properties and relations that they have, not to study the structure of our thought about them… metaphysics studies substance and essences, universals and particulars, space and time, possibility and necessity" (p. 19). But Williamson's strong metaphysical worldview is either true or false. If there are no objective metaphysical properties, relations, and necessity, as an opposing metaphysical anti-realist maintains, then Williamson's worldview is false. A false worldview leads to perverse questions and problems, the creation of dubious technical concepts, and irrelevant linguistic intuitions.

Williamson's belief that theoreticians typically build upon past knowledge and start with "what we already know" is also false. Theoreticians many times build theories

upon false beliefs (e.g., about linguistic reference, semantic compositionality, epistemic closure, existence, and necessity) as well as upon unfruitful vague concepts (e.g. analyticity, apriority). Unfortunately, much of contemporary philosophy is built upon fundamentally false metaphysical and semantic beliefs. There should be nothing compelling in Williamson's remarks to dissuade philosophers from using intuitions as a part of conceptual analysis. Further, it is suggested that analytic philosophers should reevaluate the importance and informativeness of formal methods and refocus on dialectical debates about core issues that are of importance to non-philosophers.

VIII. A Response to Cappelen

In *Philosophy Without Intuitions* (2012), Herman Cappelen strongly denies the usefulness of talk about 'intuitions' in philosophical discourse. He believes the word has no discernible meaning. He argues that if there is (1) no definition of 'intuition,' nor (2) consensus of what 'intuitions' are about, then the Centrality of Intuitions (p. 3) is false:

Centrality: Contemporary analytic philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence

(or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories.

For Cappelen, if there is *no unique function, meaning, or definition* assignable to 'intuition,' then it can't play a central role in philosophical theories (p. 47, 52). He argues that no kind of mental state is picked out by intuition and talk about intuitions is a verbal tick (p. 50). The word 'intuition' is used in a very wide range of ways with radically different purposes (p. 57). Cappelen believes that this renders the term meaningless (p. 59) with no possible charitable reinterpretation (p. 60). If there is no single, clear interpretation of 'intuition' then this undermines the case for using the concept as fruitful

for explanation (p. 63, 77). Cappelen believes that "intuition" is basically synonymous with "it seems to me" (p. 83) with an "undisciplined variability in use" (p. 86).

Is Cappelen correct? Is it true that 'intuition' is synonymous with 'it seems to me' with an undisciplined variability in use? Not quite. In addition to the 'it seems to me' qualification, intuitive propositions are simultaneously expressed as beliefs which have true or false content. Intuitions are different from empirical beliefs because they more prominently involve an *interpretation* of the way things are, and may be initially non-inferential (i.e., foundational, without conscious reasons). In vast contrast to Cappelen, I understand 'intuitions' as the data to be explained and scrutinized by a theory. With the method of cases, we seek to *explain*, *clarify*, and perhaps *change* our linguistic and worldview intuitions. Intuitions (i.e., our beliefs) are the object of study, and this is consistent with intuitions as a source of evidence. As a source of evidence, the measurement of one's existing intuitions (what seems true) is central (but partial) evidence for accepting (or rejecting) a philosophical theory. With analysis and argument, we seek true propositions (or theories) by critically examining our 'seems to me' beliefs.

IX. A Response to Deutsch

In *The Myth of the Intuitive* (2015), Max Deutsch responds to experimental philosophers' use of folk intuitions (as data) to question the reliability of philosophers' intuitions. Deutsch simply denies that philosophical theories are supported by intuitions in the first place. He states that it is a myth that philosophers rely on intuitions to support their theories (p. xv). Analytic philosophy doesn't rely evidentially on 'intuitions' or 'what is intuitive.' Instead, philosophers rely on *arguments*. Philosophers argue for their

judgments about cases and the cogency of these arguments are independent of who intuits them (p. 155). Deutsch's belief about 'the primacy of arguments' is based upon his first-order observation about philosophical practice (p. 155). For example, Deutsch claims that in the Godel case, Kripke argues that in *fact* John is not talking about Schmidt (and refutes descriptivism), and in the Gettier case it is argued as a *fact* that the protagonist doesn't have knowledge (p. 45)**.** Since philosophers use arguments (not intuitions) to support a theory, philosophers don't need to be concerned with the results of experimental surveys about folk intuitions. Philosophers are better than non-philosophers at arguing for, and defending, philosophical judgments (p. 141). For these reasons, Deutsch denies the evidential relevancy of personal intuitions.

Is Deutsch correct? Even if philosophers primarily use abductive and deductive arguments to advance their theories, aren't the theories judged by the beliefs (or intuitions) of those doing the judging? Based upon my first-order worldview interpretation of philosophical practice, it seems that expert and lay intuitions (i.e., beliefs) are *evidence* for whether a theory is true. The measurement of one's existing beliefs (i.e., what seems true) counts as (partial) evidence for accepting (or rejecting) a philosophical theory. Propositions that a person deems to be 'intuitive' need not be true; but they can be a fallible guide to the truth. If one's intuition is challenged and might be false, then it will take conceptual analysis and arguments (not just unsupported intuitive beliefs) to elicit a change in one's belief. A dialogue involving *arguments* and *intuitive beliefs* between divergent viewpoints is required to potentially resolve theoretical differences.

X. Conclusion

In understanding an 'intuition' as a kind of *belief* (excluding ethical intuitions), it is maintained that intuitions involve a significant *interpretation* about how the world is. The goal of conceptual analysis is to transform a person's *non-inferential* 'intuitions' (seeming to be the case) into theoretical *inferential* beliefs (more strongly held); or otherwise, to dispel a person's false intuitions with new (true) beliefs. The philosophical theory constructed in the middle (or equilibrium) of a person's worldview intuitions and linguistic intuitions is subject to debate as being true or false (as well as those occurrent linguistic and worldview intuitions themselves). Hopefully, the question about *what theory is to be believed* will be based on the overall strength of a philosopher's argument, its clarity, and its intuitive plausibility.

Although this essay is very fast paced, it presents a distinct worldview about how intuitions, concepts, and conceptual analysis are related in a social scientific analytic philosophy. The contrasting intuitions in metaethics, mathematical ontology, aesthetics, epistemology, and natural language are *illustrations* of competing 'worldview intuitions.' As a central feature of this essay, the account of 'concepts' is another *illustration* of a 'worldview' which is obviously not supported with adequate argument. This theory of (six) concepts leaves out details, objections, and alternative viewpoints. Certainly, this worldview about 'concepts' doesn't coincide with that of Jerry Fodor (1998) nor most philosophers. But this worldview is just that, a disputable worldview. What has been successfully argued here, is that 'intuitions' are a kind of belief, and that the methodology of philosophy *should* be (and often is) an inference or a theory of best explanation.

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