



X-Phi Meets A-Phi

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What are the Targets?

- What is experimental philosophy?
- What is conceptual analysis?

Experimental Metaphilosophy

- Try addressing these questions using experimental philosophy...

Experiment

- “Josh is a philosopher. He questions 12 people in Washington Square Park about whether a chairman who knowingly harms or helps the environment as a side effect harms or helps the environment intentionally. Most answer yes for harm, no for help. He concludes that morality is relevant to the concept of intentional action.”
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Questions

- Is Josh doing experimental philosophy?
 - Is Josh doing conceptual analysis?
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Experiment

- “Jane is a philosopher. She questions one person in Washington Square Park about whether a chairman who knowingly harms or helps the environment as a side effect harms or helps the environment intentionally. The person answers yes for harm, no for help. Jane concludes that morality is relevant to the concept of intentional action.”
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Questions

- Is Jane doing experimental philosophy?
 - Is Jane doing conceptual analysis?
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Experiment

- “Frank is a philosopher. He ask himself whether a chairman who knowingly harms or helps the environment as a side effect harms or helps the environment intentionally. He judges that the answer is yes for harm, no for help. Frank concludes that morality is relevant to the concept of intentional action.”
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Questions

- Is Frank doing experimental philosophy?
 - Is Frank doing conceptual analysis?
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Question 1

- Question 1: Are conceptual analysis and experimental philosophy continuous with one another?

Conceptual Metaphilosophy

- Alternative: Try conceptual analysis.

Analysis 1

- Experimental philosophy: The empirical study of philosophically relevant judgments and intuitions.

Empirical Philosophy vs Experimental Philosophy

- Empirical Philosophy (broad x-phi): The use of empirical data in philosophy
 - Experimental Philosophy (narrow x-phi): The use of data on philosophical judgments and intuitions [generated by the philosopher].
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Analysis 2

- Conceptual analysis: The a priori study of the conditions of application of our concepts.

Narrow and Broad Conceptual Analysis

- Narrow conceptual analysis: Analyzes application conditions grounded wholly in conceptual competence.
 - Broad conceptual analysis: Analyzes application conditions grounded partly in substantive reasoning and judgment
 - E.g. normative analysis: Analyzes conditions of application of normative concepts such as *good*, *right*, *rational*.
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Formal and Material Conceptual Analysis

- Formal conceptual analysis: Draws conclusions about application conditions in the formal mode
 - 'Bachelor' refers to unmarried men
 - Material conceptual analysis: Draws conclusions about application conditions in the material mode
 - Something is a bachelor iff it is an unmarried man
 - Formal conceptual analysis is empirical; material conceptual analysis is a priori [on the traditional picture].
 - Formal conceptual analysis concerns words; material conceptual analysis concerns the world.
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Q2: Is Conceptual Analysis Philosophically Important?

- Formal conceptual analysis is dangerously close to lexicography
 - Conclusions of interest to the philosopher of language, but only tenuously of interest to others
 - Material/narrow conceptual analysis concerns the world, but its conclusions are usually trivialities, yielding verbal disputes.
 - If narrow conceptual analysis tells me 'free will is X1' and tells you 'free will is X2', then the disagreement seems verbal.
 - Material/broad conceptual analysis is more interesting, but counts only tenuously as conceptual analysis
 - The interesting work is done by the substantive reasoning/judgment
 - Experimental Philosophy vs A Priori Philosophy?
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Positive and Negative X-Phi

- Negative X-Phi: Investigates disagreement on philosophically important intuitions and judgments
 - Potentially *undermines* parts of traditional philosophy
 - Positive X-Phi: Investigates patterns in the application of ordinary concepts
 - Potentially *extends* parts of traditional philosophy
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Positive X-Phi

- Positive X-Phi is arguably continuous with traditional conceptual analysis
- Versions of its conclusions *could* have been reached via armchair philosophy

Q3: Where Does Positive X-Phi Go Beyond A-Phi?

- Q3: What does positive x-phi offer us that traditional conceptual analysis does not?
 - Greater systematicity of investigation?
 - Automatic crossvalidation of data?
 - Avoidance of theoretical corruption of data?
 - Discovery of surprising regularities?
 - Focus on psychological mechanisms?
 - Continuity with social psychology?
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Q4: Where Does A-Phi Go Beyond Positive X-Phi?

- Q4: What does traditional conceptual analysis offer us that experimental philosophy does not?
 - More ideal reflection?
 - Easier critical scrutiny of judgments?
 - Quickness and cheapness?
 - Conclusions in material mode, not formal mode?
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Material and Formal Use of Positive X-Phi

- A-phi might use judgments akin to those of positive x-phi to draw philosophical conclusions in the material mode.
 - E.g. to argue that moral considerations are relevant to whether actions are performed intentionally, that belief is a functional property, etc
 - Thereby refuting/supporting/refining analyses of intentional action, belief, causation, etc.
 - Practitioners of positive x-phi often deliberately refrain from doing this (the New Jersey Plan):
 - Instead leaving conclusions in the formal mode, concerning people's use of concepts and expressions.
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Q5: Why Refrain from Material Conclusions?

- Q5: Why refrain?
 - Psychology is philosophically interesting enough?
 - But action is philosophically interesting too!
 - Worry that subject's judgments are incorrect?
 - But this can be addressed, e.g. by debunking explanations of error.
 - Worry that subjects are using a different concept from ours?
 - Not especially plausible.
 - *If the subjects' judgments are not in error, and they are using the same concept as us, then material conclusions follow.*
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Material Conclusion is Uninteresting?

- A broader worry: the material conclusion, “moral considerations are relevant to intentional action” is uninteresting because it simply reflects what we happen to pick out with the term “intentional action”
 - If someone has different intuitions about the cases, then we’d just be having a terminological dispute (cf. narrow conceptual analysis).
 - But we can address this by making the case that intentional action (so understood) has an important explanatory role.
 - If we can’t do this, the project is less interesting in any case.
 - Non-verbal conclusion:
 - There is an important feature of actions, crucial in explaining such-and-such, which is sensitive to moral considerations.
 - There are two distinct important features (corresponding to “acting intentionally”, “acting with an intention”) where we might have thought there was just one.
 - ...
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Continuity

- These considerations concerning positive experimental philosophy are largely analogous to considerations concerning conceptual analysis.
 - Perhaps: Positive experimental philosophy is itself a form of conceptual analysis
 - Performed in the third person rather than the first person
 - With $n > 1$
 - Somewhat less idealized/reflective
 - Initially in the formal mode
 - But the two are very much continuous, and have much to offer each other.
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Negative X-Phi

- Negative X-phi: Investigates disagreement (especially crosscultural) in philosophically relevant intuitions and judgments.
 - Potentially undermines aspects of traditional philosophy
 - Sometimes a philosophical thesis
 - E.g. moral realism
 - Sometimes a philosophical method
 - E.g. intuition-driven epistemology, theory of reference
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Responses

- Possible responses from a traditional philosopher
 - 1. Question experimental design
 - 2. Appeal to idealization
 - 3. Appeal to verbal differences
 - 4. Embrace anti-realism, relativism, locality.
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The Appeal to Idealization

- Idealization: Distinguish prima facie judgments from idealized (maximally reflective) judgments, and hold that the latter are what matter philosophically.
 - Worry 1: In some cases, it looks like prima facie judgments are doing philosophical work
 - And not much reason to believe that differences in prima facie judgments will dissolve on reflection?
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Q6: What is Idealization?

- Worry 2: What is the idealization?
 - Can we get any independent grip on it, beyond “ideal reflection”?
 - If no: Can we get any epistemological grip on what the results of ideal reflection might be?
 - Or will any conclusions about ideal reflection be hopelessly corrupted by our first-order views?
 - If yes: What is this grip? Is it topic-neutral and thesis-neutral?
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Q7: Can We Test for Idealization Experimentally?

- If we can articulate an independent grip on the notion of idealization, then might we eventually test for it experimentally?
 - If so: then perhaps we can get experimental evidence about the extent to which greater idealization produces greater convergence.
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The Appeal to Conceptual Difference

- Conceptual difference: The subjects who (apparently) disagree are using different concepts
 - So they don't really disagree, and both may be correct
 - E.g. *knowledge, good, causation...*
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Plausibility

- Worry: Sometimes this move seems more plausible than others
 - For disputes about what falls under 'chair', plausible.
 - For disputes about what falls under 'right', less plausible.
- Q: Which cases fall on which side?
- For disagreements over narrow conceptual analysis, the move is often plausible.
 - So negative x -phi doesn't really target narrow conceptual analysis.
- For disagreements over in normative analysis (concerning what one ought to do or believe), the move seems less plausible.
 - But even for intuitively normative terms (e.g. knowledge), it's not obvious that clear that disputes ramify into disputes concerning what one ought to do or believe.

Q8: Can We Test for Conceptual Difference Experimentally?

- Can we test for conceptual difference experimentally?
 - If so, we can use this method to help resolve the issue..
 - But it's not obvious that this is possible, or tractable: perhaps diagnosing conceptual difference will always involve the use of quasi-philosophical judgment
 - And even if it is possible, our tests for conceptual difference will probably presuppose some substantive (a priori?) philosophy.
 - So traditional philosophy may be essentially required here.
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Q9: What is the Scope of Negative X-Phi?

- How much a priori/armchair philosophy does negative x-phi potentially undermine?
 - So far: some specific theses (moral realism), and some specific intuitions (Gettier and Kripke) and the conclusions based on them.
 - Potentially: All intuition-based philosophy? Or just a small subset of intuitions?
 - A priori/armchair philosophy more generally?
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Whither Armchair Philosophy?

- Does negative x-phi potentially undermine armchair:
 - Interpretation of probability?
 - Decision theory?
 - Normative/applied ethics?
 - Metaphysics of supervenience, modality, physicalism?
 - Metaphysics of objects?
 - Philosophy of skepticism?
 - Aesthetics?
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Suspicion

- Suspicion: negative x-phi will end up one of many useful tools brought to bear on issues in traditional philosophy
 - Results of local relevance, bearing on various specific debates (which philosophers disagreeing about which)
 - But the import will only be assessable in conjunction with a lot of armchair philosophy at the same time
 - Both to interpret the relevance of experimental data
 - And to weigh along with the evidential weight of experimental data.
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Q10: What Does Negative X-phi Offer as a Positive Replacement?

- Say that negative x-phi is widely successful in undermining traditional armchair philosophy. What does it offer instead?
 - Stich, Knobe: conclusions about psychology
 - Useful, but we still want to know the answer to philosophical questions about action, belief, consciousness, decision, ethics, freedom, ...
 - E.g. what ought one to do/believe?
 - Alternatives: either (i) reject the questions, or (ii) offer a non-armchair, non-intuition-involving replacement
 - Lesson of much recent philosophy: (i) is ostrich-like, and (ii) requires a lot of armchair philosophy along the way.
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What Are Intuitions?

- Types of Intuitions
 - Intuition about cases vs. about principles
 - Prima facie intuitions vs. reflective intuitions

Conceptual, Normative, Substantive Intuitions

- Conceptual intuitions: concerns the “shallow” application of a concept to a case.
 - E.g., is such-and-such a chair?
 - Usually very confident judgments with the flavor of decision.
 - Normative intuitions: concerns the application of normative concepts to cases.
 - E.g., is such-and-such the right thing to do?
 - Often very confident judgments, but with less flavor of decision.
 - Substantive intuitions: e.g., is a fly conscious?
 - Often not confident, and has the flavor of an educated guess about a matter of which one may be ignorant.
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Q11: Can we Distinguish These Intuitions Experimentally?

- Can we experimentally distinguish conceptual vs non-conceptual intuitions?
 - E.g., by asking subjects something about the character of their judgment -- are they confident, might they be wrong, etc?
- This may be relevant to the use of experimental philosophy in discovering conceptual content
 - Conceptual intuitions are highly relevant here, while substantive intuitions are less relevant.

Q12: How Might X-Phi and A-Phi Combine?

- Q: How can experimental philosophy and armchair philosophy constructively combine to yield philosophical conclusions?
 - Experimental development of conceptual analysis
 - Experimental checks on philosophical intuitions
 - Armchair interpretation of experimental data
 - Idealized assessment/systematization of intuitive data
 - Armchair philosophy in devising experimental tests
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Kum Ba Ya Conclusion

$$X\text{-Phi} + A\text{-Phi} = \text{Phi}$$
