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ARGUMENTS ALL THE WAY DOWN: INFINITISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD**

Abstract

The paper presents a methodological regress problem for "intuition deniers," those philosophers who claim that philosophy does not rely on intuitions as evidence. It then proposes to solve this problem by adopting "methodological infinitism," a close cousin of infinitism about inferential justification. A proposal to the effect that conceptual engineering might allow methodologists to accept that intuitions are treated as evidence and thus sidestep the methodological regress problem is considered and rejected.

Keywords: arguments, intuitions, intuition denial, infinitism, conceptual engineering, methodology

In a series of papers, Peter Klein (1999, 2000, 2007) defends an *infinitist* solution to the problem of the regress of reasons.[1] I will argue here that Klein's infinitism suggests a plausible solution to a different problem, one facing those who reject a standard, "intuitions-as-evidence" methodology for philosophy. In Section 1, I present this methodological problem. In Section 2, I discuss the application of Klein's infinitism to this problem. In Section 3, I reply to potential objections to applying Klein's infinitism to solve the methodological problem, including an objection to the effect that the problem arises only on the assumption that *conceptual engineering* is not a fundamental component of philosophical methodology. I conclude, in Section 4, that the view that emerges – *methodological infinitism* – is a plausible metaphilosophical position.

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[1]The referenced papers are just a subset of a quite large set of Klein's papers on the topic of infinitism.

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1. THE PRESSING QUESTION FOR INTUITION DENIERS

Following Jennifer Nado (2016), I will call someone who rejects the view that philosophers routinely treat intuitions as evidence for philosophical claims an "intuition denier." Intuition denial is attractive first and foremost because an examination of first-order philosophical practice arguably bears it out: appeals to hypothetical "cases" are common in this practice, but *intuitions* about these cases are *not* typically appealed to. This, anyway, is what many intuition deniers claim: we can see, via examining examples, that widespread reliance on intuitions in philosophy is a myth. Intuition denial also represents a plausible answer to the charge, stemming from results from experimental philosophy, that philosophical intuitions are *unreliable*: the unreliability of intuitions is irrelevant if philosophers don't make evidential appeals to them in the first place.

Despite its attractiveness, there are several important objections to intuition denial, one of which stands out as perhaps the most serious: intuition deniers do not appear to have an adequate answer to the question of what *is* treated as evidence in philosophy, even if we grant that it is not intuitions that are treated as such. To have a label, I will call this question the *Pressing Question for Intuition Deniers* (the *Pressing Question*, for short):

> **The Pressing Question**
>
> If not intuitions, what? That is, what *is* routinely treated by philosophers as evidence for philosophical claims, if not intuitions?

When pressed by the Pressing Question, some intuition deniers (Cappelen 2012, Deutsch 2015) say that philosophers obviously argue for their philosophical claims, and thus that the obvious answer to the Pressing Question is: *arguments*. They hold, that is, that philosophers routinely treat arguments for their claims – or, better, the premises of these arguments – as the evidence for the truth of their claims. Call this the *Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question* (the *Arguments Answer*, for short):

> **The Arguments Answer**
>
> Philosophers routinely treat the premises of arguments – not intuitions – as evidence for philosophical claims.

Is the Arguments Answer an adequate answer to the Pressing Question? A reason to think it's not is that the Arguments Answer simply pushes the issue raised by

the Pressing Question back a step. Now the question is: What do philosophers routinely treat as evidence for the premises of the arguments they give for philosophical claims? If the answer to *this* question is intuitions, then it appears that the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question is inadequate. Perhaps it is the correct answer, but it does not seem to address the underlying issue raised by the Pressing Question, which is, roughly, whether intuitions play some ultimate and ineliminable evidential role in philosophical inquiry.

Of course, intuition deniers can, and have, replied to the question of what is treated as evidence for the premises of the arguments philosophers give for their claims by invoking *more* premises of *further* arguments (Deutsch 2015). But, *prima facie*, it seems that this repeated invocation of arguments must eventually reach bottom – a level at which it won't be plausible to insist that it is *still more premises* of *yet further arguments* that are being treated as evidence. The thought is that the Arguments Answer leads to a kind of regress: one can always press a version of the Pressing Question "one level down" against the next invocation of the Arguments Answer. And this regress can be blocked, or so it might seem, only by accepting that it is intuitions, not arguments, that are, ultimately and ineliminably, treated as philosophical evidence. As I understand it, it is this methodological regress problem that is the source of the sense that the Arguments Answer is an inadequate reply to the Pressing Question.[2]

In the remaining sections of the paper I will defend the adequacy of the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question, thus defending intuition denial as a plausible metaphilosophical view. However, I will also (in Section 3.4) touch briefly on a very different metaphilosophical view, one that allows that intuitions do play a key role in philosophical methodology and allows, even, that this role is evidential. This alternative appeals to ideas prominent in the recent literature on conceptual engineering – for example, the idea that some fundamental philosophical questions are not *descriptive* questions about nonconceptual philosophical phenomena but are rather *normative* questions about which concepts we should use. First, however, I turn in the next section to showing how Klein's infinitism might be retooled to apply to the methodological regress problem that arises from giving the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question.

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[2] Elijah Chudnoff's (2017) commentary on Deutsch (2015) raises a similar concern for the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question.

2. KLEIN'S INFINITISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

The methodological regress problem described in the last section bears a close resemblance to a different, more familiar regress problem, the so-called "regress of reasons," a problem that arises in the attempt to provide a satisfactory account of inferential justification. In order to justifiably infer *p*, one's reasons must themselves be justified. The question is then: What justifies the reasons? If the answer is "an inference from further reasons," then the question of justification crops up once again: What justifies these further reasons? Clearly, this question will crop up again and again, so long as the answer, each time, is: further reasons.

Foundationalism and *coherentism* are well-known solutions to the problem of the regress of reasons. Both solve the problem by insisting that there must be *non-inferential justifiers*, if any claim is genuinely inferentially justified. Somewhat less well known is the solution developed by Klein (1999): *infinitism*. According to Klein, "further reasons" is the correct answer to the question of justification at every level: inferential justification requires an infinite chain of justificatory reasons. Since it requires them, and since some beliefs really are inferentially justified, Klein concludes that infinite chains of justificatory reasons are actual. For every belief that is, in fact, inferentially justified, there is, in fact, an infinite chain of justifying reasons. Infinitists claim that justification amounts to there being reasons "all the way down," and that the route downwards has no end.

Infinitism faces many objections, some of which I will soon discuss. First, however, I want to draw attention to the fact that the infinitist solution to the problem of the regress of reasons appears to have a clear application to the methodological regress problem described in Section 1. Intuition deniers can defend the adequacy of the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question by claiming that, at every level at which the question arises, philosophers treat the premises of arguments as evidence for their claims: it's *arguments* "all the way down," and the route downwards has no end. If this is acceptable, there is no need for intuition deniers to worry that intuitions play some ultimate and ineliminable evidential role in philosophical inquiry. Intuitions don't play such a role – not if chains of premises treated as evidence by philosophers "ramify without end."[3]

[3]The phrase is Carl Ginet's (2014), who uses it to describe Klein's justificatory infinitism.

3. METHODOLOGICAL INFINITISM

I will call the view that, when it comes to philosophical methodology, it is arguments all the way down *methodological infinitism*. Is methodological infinitism a plausible view? One might think that this depends on whether *justificatory infinitism*, Klein's view, is plausible. However, some objections to justificatory infinitism, at least as Klein presents it, do not apply to the methodological variety. Other objections, though they do apply to the methodological variety of infinitism, can be answered in ways that justificatory infinitists have replied to analogous objections to their view. In the first three subsections (Sections 3.1–3.3) I discuss three well-known objections to justificatory infinitism and explore their applicability to the methodological variety of infinitism I seek to defend. In the final subsection (Section 3.4), I briefly explore the possibility that intuition denial is ill-motivated for reasons having to do with a potential role for the method of conceptual engineering in philosophical practice.

3.1. INTUITIONS AND NON-INFERENTIALLY JUSTIFIED BELIEF

Some have claimed that Klein's justificatory infinitism faces counterexamples: clear cases of non-inferentially justified belief.[4] An example: I am right now justified in my belief that my computer sits before me. But I don't infer this belief from any other; I just see the computer before me and this experience – seeing the computer – justifies my belief. Surely, some of my inferentially justified beliefs (e.g., that my computer has not been stolen) can "bottom out" in my belief that my computer is before me, a belief that is not justified by a reason, but instead by experience.

Why do examples like these appear to be counterexamples to Klein's infinitism? They appear so because Klein seems to require that justification is always in virtue of reasons, and holds that experiences, for example, aren't reasons.[5] I wonder whether this requirement is one a justificatory infinitist must accept. It could be that, sometimes, for some beliefs, the belief's justification is structured by an infinite series of reasons, while for other beliefs, their justificatory

[4]Ginet (2014) presents two such counterexamples, an a priori one and an a posteriori one.

[5]Klein (1999: 298) says infinitists hold that "only reasons can justify belief" and, in a note, agreeing with Davidson (1986), says that infinitism, like coherentism, holds that only beliefs can be reasons (see also Klein 1999: 301–303).

structure is finite, terminating in a "basic" belief, or in an experience. The answer to the question of whether reasons ramify without end could be: *sometimes*.[6]

In any case, *methodological* infinitism seems immune to this kind of counterexample. The methodological variety of infinitism is not an account of evidence or justification. Instead, it is an account of what philosophers *treat* as evidence or justification. Hence, counterexamples to an account of justification don't apply to it. Of course, if enough philosophers fail to defend their claims by producing arguments for them, that is grounds for rejecting methodological infinitism. But, as a matter of fact, philosophers do routinely defend their claims with arguments, or so the methodological infinitist can claim. This can be verified empirically, intuition deniers can also claim, by examining philosophical practice: Is this a practice wherein philosophers argue for their claims, argue for the premises of these arguments, and so on? If so, that is evidence in favor of the view I am here calling methodological infinitism.

Since methodological infinitism is silent about what counts as evidence, it is compatible with the view that experiences sometimes count. It is no part of methodological infinitism to deny, for example, that a perceptual experience as of a computer before one can non-inferentially serve as evidence for the belief that a computer is before one. More interestingly, methodological infinitism is also silent on the question of whether *intuitions* are evidence. It maintains only that they are not treated as such in philosophical practice.

Methodological infinitists can allow that there are such things as intuitions.[7] Indeed, they can allow that the best model of them is a "perceptual model," according to which intuitions are variety of phenomenal experience: intellectual "seemings" or "presentations" (Bengson 2015, Chudnoff 2013, Koksvik 2017). To allow these things – to allow, even, that intuitions thus can and do qualify as evidence – is not to allow that philosophical practice involves evidential *appeals* to intuitions, conceived as the perceptual model conceives of them. Whether it does is an empirical matter, to be settled by careful, case-study-based investigation of

[6]One is forced to choose between foundationalism, coherentism, and infinitism only if each option is somehow incompatible with the other two. But *logic* doesn't rule out the possibility that justification is sometimes foundationalist, sometimes coherentist, and sometimes infinitist, depending on the kind of (or perhaps even the particular) justified belief in question. "Agrippa's trilemma" assumes that *none* of the options can explain how an inferential belief manages ever to be justified. But if one rejects this assumption, one can accept a "mixed" (partly foundationalist, partly coherentist, partly infinitist) picture of inferential justification.

[7]Some intuition deniers, e.g., Cappelen (2012), express skepticism about the very existence of intuitions. Intuition denial, informed by methodological infinitism, need not go that far.

precisely the kind in which some intuition deniers have recently engaged. So far, this investigation has yielded no evidence at all that intuitions play an evidential role in philosophical practice, let alone any evidence that they play an ultimate and ineliminable evidential role. Instead, in the places where one might most expect to find appeals to intuitions – for example relative to judgments about philosophical thought experiments – one finds appeals to arguments instead.[8] This is strong grounds for intuition denial, and for a positive account of philosophical practice that views this practice as involving evidential appeals to arguments at every level: methodological infinitism.

3.2. "AVAILABILITY" AND FINITE MINDS

Klein's justificatory infinitism is sometimes held to be inconsistent with the fact that the human mind is finite: its finitude prevents any would-be justified believer from grasping the required infinity of reasons.[9] Klein's reply to this objection is, in part, to insist that the infinite reasons required for inferential justification need only be *available* to a believer, without being consciously, occurrently held. Perhaps the mind's finitude prevents possession of an infinity of *conscious* beliefs, but many beliefs are tacit, and there seems to be no logical or metaphysical bar to an infinity of tacit beliefs.

Some proponents of the *finite minds objection* have replied that the issue is not whether an infinity of tacit beliefs is possible, but rather whether *actual* justified believers do, *in fact*, have available an infinity of tacit reasons for each of their justified beliefs.[10] Empirical evidence that they don't is that most people's capacity for reasons-giving peters out fairly quickly. The average believer is lucky to be able to cite more than a few reasons for her beliefs, even in cases in which the belief seems clearly justified for her.[11] If she actually tacitly holds an infinity

[8] See (Deutsch 2015) and (Cappelen 2012) for the case-study evidence to this effect.

[9] See (Williams 1981) for a version of the finite minds objection. Klein replies to Williams's version in (Klein 1999) and to various versions of the objection in most of his papers on infinitism.

[10] See (Ginet 2014: 289–290) for a discussion of "actual" versus "potential" justification and his presentation of the "first problem" for infinitism. See also (Fantl 2003: 560–561) for a brief but illuminating discussion of the finite minds objection. I discuss Fantl's proposed solution to the objection below, in the main text.

[11] Also, and as foundationalists like to point out, there are some cases of justified belief for which a challenge to justify via *further beliefs* seems out of place. To cite a commonly cited example: What further belief justifies one's belief that one has a headache right now?

of reasons in every such case, why does not a challenge – "why do you believe *that*?" – trigger an appeal to *more* of these reasons? Suppose you ask someone why she believes that Helena is the capital of Montana and she says she was told so in school. If you then ask her why she believes she was told so in school, she might, if not already puzzled by the questioning, reply that she remembers this, but if you then press further, asking why she believes she remembers this, you are not very likely to get the citation of another reason. More probably, you'll instead get a reply such as, "I just *do* remember, that's all." Cases like this suggest that justified believers *don't* have available an infinity of tacit reasons for their beliefs, regardless of whether it is possible that they do.

In some places (Klein 2007), Klein seems inclined to reply to the finite minds objection by invoking the distinction between *propositional* and *doxastic* justification, which is roughly the distinction between a *proposition* being justified for a given believer versus a believer being justified *in believing* a given proposition. In cases in which the reasons a believer *cites* in defense of her belief give out quickly, the most we should conclude is that her belief is not doxastically justified. But it could still be propositionally justified, and this could consist in there being an infinite chain of reasons available to her, just as the justificatory infinitist maintains.

I don't think this reply adequately defends justificatory infinitism from the finite minds objection. But before I say why, let me first note that, strictly speaking, and as was the case with respect to the alleged counterexamples to infinitism discussed in the last section, the finite minds objection does not apply to the methodological infinitism that is my main concern here. The methodological infinitist's answer to the Pressing Question – a repeated invocation of the Arguments Answer – does not describe what makes a philosopher's claims propositionally or doxastically justified. It is instead a description of how philosophers *behave* when engaged in philosophical inquiry and dialectic. Do they appeal, at every stage, to arguments in defense of their claims? Or are there instead stages at which there are clear appeals to intuitions?[12] Insisting that it is the former, as

[12]An anonymous reviewer of this journal expresses skepticism about my talk, here and elsewhere in the paper, of *stages* of philosophical inquiry and of inquiry more generally, suggesting that this might be an idealization of what is in fact a quite messy practice lacking anything identifiable as discrete stages. I think my reviewer is right to be skeptical of such talk but that my defense of methodological infinitism does not strictly require it (so, yes, I treat such talk as a kind of "useful fiction"). For my purposes, the crucial aspect of inquiry, philosophical and otherwise, is that it involves both the *making of claims* (or the drawing of conclusions) and the *citation of evidence* for these claims. *When* or *where*

the methodological infinitist does, is not to insist that this potential infinity of arguments is *available*, even tacitly, to philosophers when defending their claims. Rather, the idea is that philosophers do in fact, or are disposed to, argue for their claims, and are disposed to argue for the premises of these arguments, and for the premises of the premises of these arguments – and so on, without end. The question asked by the Pressing Question is not the question of whether and how philosophical beliefs are justified. It is instead a question of how philosophers behave in attempting to demonstrate that they are; it's a question of what they *treat* as their evidence, not a question about what this evidence *is*.

So, the methodological infinitist needn't commit herself one way or the other with respect to availability. The availability of an infinity of tacit reasons or arguments might be a crucial ingredient of infinitist *justification*, but it isn't necessary for infinitist *methodology*. Still, there is a sense in which this neutrality is unsatisfying. If one is not a *skeptic* about philosophy – that is, if one thinks that philosophical methods at least sometimes yield justified philosophical belief and philosophical knowledge – one will want some reassurance that one can be both a methodological infinitist *and* an anti-skeptic about philosophy. This combination doesn't strictly *require* a convincing justificatory infinitist reply to the finite minds objection, but it would be satisfying if one could be both a methodological *and* a justificatory infinitist, as well as a non-skeptic about philosophy.[13] This trio of views does require a convincing infinitist reply to the finite minds objection.

Appealing to the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification seems doubly ineffective in this regard. On the one hand, justificatory infinitists can't simply concede that doxastic justification might not have an infinitary structure; the view is intended as an alternative to foundationalist and coherentist accounts of *both* propositional and doxastic justification. On the other hand, a justificatory infinitist about propositional justification wants to claim that, even in cases like the capital of Montana case discussed above, the relevant believers have available an infinity of propositionally-justifying reasons. But such cases are precisely cases that seem to provide evidence *against* this claim: someone

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in an inquiry these things are done is irrelevant; *that* they are done suffices for methodologists to ask their questions (Are intuitions treated as evidence? What kinds of claims are made? Etc.).

[13]The combination of methodological infinitism and anti-skepticism about philosophy doesn't require a reply to the finite minds objection for the reason already canvassed in the main text: on its own, methodological infinitism does not commit one to any particular account of justification, including an infinitist account.

who says "I just *do* remember, that's all" is indicating that *there are no more* propositionally-justifying reasons available to her for the relevant belief, or so it certainly seems. On the face of it, then, such cases argue against the infinitist account of propositional justification.

However, Jeremy Fantl (2003) has offered a straightforward infinitist reply to the finite minds objection. Since justification *comes in degrees*, finite minds might have *enough* reasons available to justify many of their beliefs. Having more available might *better* justify them, but perhaps, in some cases, having only a few justifies the belief to a sufficient degree – to the degree required, for example, for knowledge. Fantl draws a distinction between *complete* justification and *incomplete* justification, one useful for describing a more nuanced form of justificatory infinitism. Such infinitists need only commit themselves to the view that *complete* justification requires an infinity of available reasons. Finite minds are never completely justified in their beliefs, but these beliefs can still be justified, if only incompletely.

Applied to philosophical claims, Fantl's version of justificatory infinitism allows that these can be justified and even known, even if philosophers don't in fact have available an infinity of reasons or arguments for them. So Fantl's version presents infinitists who are non-skeptics about philosophy with an attractive option. It is also nicely compatible with the obvious fact that philosophical *texts* are finite, and hence can contain only so much justificatory structure. Every argumentative philosophical text, written with the intention of establishing some or other philosophical claim, contains at least one claim "taken as granted." Fantl's infinitism allows that some philosophical texts, finite though they are, really do justify their target claims to a sufficient degree, and that philosophers sometimes manage to establish their conclusions, and transmit knowledge of these conclusions, by putting arguments to paper.

3.3. "ADEQUACY" AND EASY ARGUMENTS

It's easy to produce "arguments" for one's claims: just make several further claims and then say or imply that the originals follow from these. Perhaps philosophers are disposed to argue even for those claims that others describe as intuitive, just as the methodological infinitist's Arguments Answer to the repeated invocation of the Pressing Question maintains. But, if it's too *easy* for philosophers to cough up further arguments whenever challenged, then the Arguments Answer, while

perhaps correct, seems to miss something important.[14] We want to know not just how philosophers behave, methodologically speaking, but rather how they behave when they're behaving methodologically *responsibly*. It's methodologically irresponsible to cite just any old set of reasons and claim these as reasons for one's philosophical beliefs. Another problem with the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question is thus that it seems to allow for a fair bit of methodological irresponsibility of precisely this kind: the citation of not just arguments, but *bad* arguments for one's philosophical views.

Klein's justificatory infinitism faces an analogous objection. For any belief one has, one can say, or make as if, it is justified by some further reason. But that will hardly suffice for the belief to *be* justified on that reason's basis. Reasons, when truly justifying reasons, must be *adequate*; they must actually support, to a sufficient degree, the beliefs for which they are reasons. If justificatory infinitism requires only an infinity of tacit beliefs, inferentially linked, which could be *said* to be adequate reasons, then it too seems to allow too much epistemic irresponsibility.

Klein replies to a variant of this objection to justificatory infinitism by agreeing that adequacy is necessary.[15] It's not enough that there be available an infinite series of reasons, inferentially chained together. Justified belief has a certain structure, an infinitary one, but this is just one necessary condition. The infinity of reasons must be not only available, but adequate.[16]

A similar reply can be made on behalf of methodological infinitism. Behaving methodologically responsibly requires not just the production of an argument, but a good (or at least halfway decent!) argument when challenged. The methodological infinitist can say that some arguments are too easy, just as the justificatory

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[14] In a commentary on (Cappelen 2012), Chalmers (2014) claims that "it is plausible that any justified claim can be given an inferential justification: one can argue for anything." I take this to be a relative of the complaint against methodological infinitism I am addressing in the main text.

[15] The variant is the "reductio" objection to justificatory infinitism that Klein (1999) attributes to John Post (1980), one to the effect that infinitism implies that every contingent claim is justified, since, in each case, an infinite set of further claims, all inferentially linked, can be cited in its defense. In later work, Klein describes a similar objection as the "AC/DC" objection, emphasizing that infinitism seems to imply that there will be infinite chains of reasons both in support of any old contingent p (an "affirmation chain") and in denial of p (a "denial chain"). See also the discussion of the "Anything Goes" objection in (Klein 2000).

[16] In (Klein 1999), Klein calls adequacy "objective availability." Thus his reply to Post (1980) is put in terms of objective availability.

infinitist can say that not just anything goes when it comes to truly justifying reasons.

Importantly, however, both methodological and justificatory infinitism of course *allow* that, sometimes, arguments are bad and reasons are inadequate. In fact, in this respect, these infinitisms offer much better descriptive metaphilosophies than their competitors. Consider the "intuitions-as-evidence" competitor to methodological infinitism. If philosophy is, in the end, or at bottom, just a war of opposing intuitions, then it's unclear how philosophical disputes can ever be adjudicated. For one thing, why should we think our intuitions are any better than any other group's, as experimental philosophers might encourage us to ask? And, while it is perhaps easy to claim that any old set of propositions qualifies as an argument for one's philosophical views, surely it is even *easier* to simply declare that one's premises are "intuitive" or "self-evident." There are, at least, reasonably clear objective standards for assessing arguments. The same cannot be said for assessing the strength or probity of intuitions.

So, not only can methodological infinitism accommodate the fact that there are, and that we should want there to be, norms of good philosophical argumentation and reasoning, but, descriptively, the view pictures philosophical practice in such a way that it is far easier to see how this accommodation can and does occur. According to the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question, philosophers are always ready with a further argument in reply to a challenge, leaving no mystery as to how the challenges and replies should be evaluated, namely by appeal to the objective standards for evaluating arguments generally speaking.

3.4. INTUITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

I have been assuming, thus far, that the *contents* of philosophical claims or theories concern mostly nonconceptual, non-metalinguistic, descriptive matters of (putative) fact. For example, the claim that justified true belief suffices for knowledge is a descriptive claim about knowledge itself, not a normative claim about the word "knowledge" or the concept of knowledge. Thus, when considering the question of what gets treated as evidence for or against such claims, it makes sense to think of this – that is, what gets treated as evidence for or against philosophical claims or theories – as simply *further* nonconceptual, non-metalinguistic, descriptive matters of (putative) fact. The claim that there are possible and actual "Gettier cases" is an example: it is a descriptive, "object-level" claim which, if

true, falsifies the JTB theory of knowledge. I have, as I say, been presupposing this about the contents of philosophical claims and theories in my discussion, above, of the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question and of methodological infinitism: these theories and claims, and the premises of arguments for or against them, are, one and all, descriptive, object-level claims. This reflects my view of the *subject matter* of philosophy: philosophy is about philosophically significant kinds, properties, and phenomena; it is *not* about words or concepts, except insofar as words and concepts are some of the more general phenomena that are of interest to philosophers (in, e.g., the philosophy of language and mind).

Recently, however, some philosophers have challenged this assumption, claiming that a fruitful interpretation of philosophical methodology makes room for the method of *conceptual engineering* as a central component, making room, thereby, for *normative* conceptual or metalinguistic questions as an integral part of many or most philosophical investigations. Some of these same philosophers argue that viewing conceptual engineering as a core component of philosophical methodology makes sense of appeals to intuitions in philosophical practice: intuitions are treated, not as evidence for or against descriptive, non-normative, object-level philosophical theories, but instead, as James Andow (2023) has put it, as evidence for "how we should think," i.e., as evidence for which concepts we *should* employ in theorizing, or how we *ought* to define certain key terms framing a philosophical debate or inquiry. Other proponents of this general picture of philosophical methodology (one, that is, that views conceptual engineering as a core component), such as Krzysztof Sękowski (2024), argue that the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question does not distinguish between two ways of interpreting the relevant arguments. These can be taken, and perhaps should sometimes be taken, to be arguments that Sękowski calls "concept-revision" arguments. In other words, they are normative arguments for adopting certain concepts as opposed to others, not arguments for or against some descriptive, object-level claim. Interestingly, Sękowski, like Andow, allows a role for intuitions in philosophical practice but at a later stage. On his view, concept-revision arguments, in effect, stop the methodological regress by encoding intuitive principles that we *ought* to take as structuring the content of the relevant concept.

How do views like Andow's or Sękowski's affect the assessment of methodological infinitism as I have characterized and defended it above? If these views are on the right track, then it would seem that there is no need for methodologists to "go infinitist." Indeed, if views like Andow's and Sękowski's are on the right

track, then intuition denial is itself called into question, since, on these views, intuitions *do* play a key methodological role in philosophical inquiry, one which is not challenged by the alleged unreliability of intuition.

These conceptual-engineering-friendly, intuition-friendly views face a significant challenge of their own, however: they involve interpreting large swathes of philosophical argumentation, now and in the past, as if they involve the normative conceptual or metalinguistic proposals characteristic of explicit instances of conceptual engineering. In other words, these views ask us to take what *looks like* purely descriptive philosophy that is not concerned with concepts or word meanings and treat it as though normative questions about conceptual or metalinguistic matters are nevertheless part and parcel of the larger philosophical projects being pursued in virtually all philosophical investigations. This strikes me as an enormous interpretive leap. To take just one example: Is it really at all plausible to suppose that Gettier (1963) was, in addition to attempting to refute the JTB theory of knowledge, also proposing to revise the concept of knowledge? To the extent that this is implausible, we should, I think, be suspicious of conceptual-engineering-friendly, intuition-friendly views like Andow's and Sękowski's. These views ask us to accept a very dubious descriptive metaphilosophy, namely that philosophers are everywhere engaged in implicit conceptual engineering. Andow and Sękowski are perhaps right that *if* this is an accurate descriptive metaphilosophy, then reliance on intuitions can be explained and justified. But that, in my view, is an enormous "if."

A recent paper coauthored by Sękowski and Ethan Landes (2024) attempts to address this concern. According to Sękowski and Landes, (Gettier 1963), for example, can and should be interpreted as engaged in conceptual engineering and offering a revision of the concept of knowledge, regardless of Gettier's *intentions*. Hence, on their view (as I understand it), Gettier need not even be engaged in *implicit* conceptual engineering for an interpretation of (Gettier 1963) as a proposed revision of the concept of knowledge to be appropriate or fruitful. Rather, we *consumers* of Gettier's argument can and should treat it *as if* it is a concept-revision argument. That it is not in fact a concept-revision argument, or intended by Gettier himself to be such, does not make the interpretation implausible or unhelpful. After all, or so Sękowski and Landes would argue, interpreting Gettier's argument as a concept-revision argument allows us to treat it as if neither intuition denial nor methodological infinitism, of the kind I have been defending here, are so much as relevant to explaining and defending Gettier's method. When treating it

as a concept-revision argument, we are treating Gettier's argument as though it does not give rise to the methodological regress that has been my main concern in the preceding sections of this paper.

I am not opposed to Sękowski and Landes's *interpretive liberalism* (as it might be called) relative to philosophical texts. In fact, my own view, perhaps even more liberal, is that such texts can, and sometimes should, be interpreted *however some reader or group of readers pleases*. Suppose a group of readers somewhere finds interpreting (Gettier 1963) as a Sękowskian concept-revision argument to be extremely exciting and enjoyable. Then they should interpret it that way! Life is short. But this group of readers, as I am imagining things, is *not* engaged in the project of what I earlier described as *descriptive metaphilosophy*, the project of trying to accurately characterize the methods philosophers actually employ in their philosophizing.[17] I, and sometimes Sękowski and Landes, on the other hand, *are* engaged in descriptive metaphilosophy, and this constrains the admissible interpretations of philosophical texts and arguments we can and should give (and giving these interpretations might not be especially exciting or enjoyable, sadly). For example, Gettier's intentions in writing (Gettier 1963) clearly *do* matter to a good descriptive metaphilosophical account of Gettier's paper and the argument therein. After all, Gettier's intentions are crucial for understanding what Gettier was *doing*, or trying to do, in writing the paper in the first place. So there is no getting around or setting aside authorial intentions when interpreting philosophical texts – not if one's aim is accurate descriptive metaphilosophy relative to those texts. Of course, one might have different aims, and since I am, like Sękowski and Landes, liberal about how philosophical texts can and should be interpreted, I am happy to let a thousand interpretations bloom. But I think it is obvious that relative to the aim of, for instance, accurately describing Gettier's method in (Gettier 1963), the concept-revision interpretation is a complete non-starter. Indeed, my view is that it should be obvious to all readers that (Gettier 1963) is not about the concept of knowledge or any other concept. The claims in (Gettier 1963) are, one and all, descriptive, object-level claims about the *phenomena* of knowledge and justified true belief; they do not concern concepts, so do not concern the concept of knowledge, and hence

[17] Sękowski and Landes (2024) are only partly engaged in descriptive metaphilosophy, spending a good portion of their paper discussing and defending interpretations of philosophical texts unconstrained by accurately characterizing the methods employed by the authors of these texts. My point is simply that *if* one is doing descriptive metaphilosophy, then one is not free to interpret the relevant text however one pleases.

clearly cannot be accurately characterized as proposing a revision of the concept of knowledge.

There is, furthermore, a serious question about whether interpreting a philosophical argument *as if* it is concept-revision argument is genuinely metaphilosophically beneficial. I mentioned earlier that Sękowski and Landes would likely maintain that, if we treat the argument in (Gettier 1963) as if it is a concept-revision argument, then we can treat it as if it does not give rise to the methodological regress that has been my focus throughout this paper. But what good can this do, metaphilosophically speaking? Suppose I treat my banana as if it were a telephone, pretending to use it to make phone calls. That won't magically turn my banana into an actual telephone, useful for making real phone calls. So, similarly, merely treating a philosophical argument as if it were a concept-revision argument won't magically solve any methodological problem to which the argument in fact gives rise. In particular, treating Gettier's argument in (Gettier 1963) as if it is a concept-revision argument that doesn't give rise to the methodological regress won't show that the argument does not, in fact, give rise to the methodological regress. If the argument gives rise to the methodological regress, merely treating it *as if* it doesn't won't change this.

4. CONCLUSION

I have argued (Section 3.4) that attempting to dodge the methodological regress problem by defending a role for intuitions and conceptual engineering in philosophical practice either presupposes an implausible descriptive metaphilosophy or else involves unhelpfully treating a variety of philosophical arguments *as if* they do not face the methodological regress problem when in fact they do. I have also argued (Sections 3.1–3.3) that three well-known objections to justificatory infinitism either do not apply to the methodological version or can be satisfactorily answered for both versions. This defends the Arguments Answer to the Pressing Question for Intuition Deniers: plausibly, the right view of philosophical methodology is one according to which, at every stage in defense of their philosophical claims, philosophers appeal to arguments, not intuitions. Plausibly, methodologically speaking, it's arguments all the way down, with no intuitive foundations or stopping points.

Even some staunch justificatory foundationalists appear inclined towards the view I've here described as methodological infinitism. Here is Richard Fumer-

ton (2014), who, after defending justificatory foundationalism and criticizing justificatory infinitism, describes what he thinks infinitists get right:

> Rather, I suspect, the view is more plausible as the reflection of widely accepted, or at least natural, constraints on what count as legitimate "moves" in a philosophical dialectic. As philosophers most of us are committed to getting at the truth through debate – through argument with each other. We don't like the embarrassing silence that follows when we end up simply staring at each other having endorsed respective claims that are incompatible, each of us having asserted that his or her claim is simply self-evident. When this happens, we can, of course, call it quits for the day, but we are, by nature, almost irresistibly inclined to find some way of persuading our opponent to come over to our side. And given the hypothetical situation just described, a louder claim to self-evidence is unlikely to have any persuasive effect. Here it does seem that if one is going to accomplish one's dialectical philosophical ends, one will need to come up with an argument for one's position. (Fumerton 2014: 84)

Although I disagree with Fumerton about the implausibility of justificatory infinitism, I wholeheartedly agree with the central idea in this passage, namely that, as I would put it, methodological infinitism is an attractive account of philosophical methodology. We should want an account of philosophical methods that allows us to see how these methods might be employed to accomplish our "dialectical philosophical ends." Methodological infinitism allows us to see this; the "intuitions-as-evidence" alternative does not.

I have not quite argued *for* intuition denial. Rather, I take myself to have shown that one of the perceived difficulties for intuition denial – adequately answering the Pressing Question with a repeated invocation of the Arguments Answer – is not really a difficulty at all. Intuition denial, combined with methodological infinitism, deserves to be taken seriously as compelling alternative to philosophical methodologies that carve out a significant role for intuitions.[18]

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[18]An anonymous reviewer (this journal) suggests that methodological infinitism is unnecessary for defending intuition denial. The intuition denier need claim only that (a) all philosophical arguments rest on unargued for premises, but (b) these premises are not intuitions about cases. My view is that (b) is true but that (a) is doubtful. In support of (a), my reviewer cites the finitude of philosophical texts. Is not this finitude evidence that, methodologically, philosophers do not, in fact, make repeated appeals to further premises in support of every claim? I am unsure about this. I think a case can be made that philosophers are at least disposed to give still further arguments when challenged relative to their as-yet unargued-for starting points. Despite my doubts about (a), I think my reviewer is right that there is a possible defense of intuition denial that does not depend on methodological infinitism. My doubts about (a) might be wrong, after all.

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