

THE ADOLESCENCE OF EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF *FILozOFIA NAUKI*

Experimental philosophy (often referred to as “x-phi”) is a subdiscipline of philosophy that uses tools and methods traditionally associated with social sciences (psychology, cognitive science, or linguistics) to obtain empirical data that might shed light on various philosophical topics discussed in a variety of fields, such as moral philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of action, and even metaphysics or philosophy of science.

If we look at the history of experimental philosophy as an organized movement and an established subdiscipline within philosophy, we might metaphorically say that x-phi has reached its adolescent age: the seminal publications that encouraged other researchers to employ this novel approach to doing philosophy date back to the beginning of the 21st century. Early adolescence may be a good moment to take a look back at what experimental philosophy has achieved thus far. During its lifetime, x-phi researchers have collected a rich body of important empirical evidence, reshaped philosophical methodology, inspired many metaphilosophical debates, and sparked much controversy. Some of the most contentious findings that gave birth to x-phi as a movement, such as the evidence for variability of folk intuitions across demographic factors or across situations, are still subjects of lively debates. Given the richness of empirical evidence collected by experimental philosophers throughout the years, much more can be said on those topics than before, when x-phi was in its nascent age, fighting for its place in the philosophical landscape.

There is no question that over the past two decades experimental philosophy has earned a respected position as a branch of philosophy, and x-phi findings have received much well-deserved recognition. This special issue of *Filozofia Nauki* serves as a platform to discuss experimental philosophy in its own right: its methods, most important results, metaphilosophical consequences; as well as to report new findings obtained by adopting the x-phi paradigm.

I am proud to invite the readers of *Filozofia Nauki* to get familiar with seven x-phi papers representing philosophical centers from all over the world (both Americas, Europe, and New Zealand). Below, I briefly summarize the contents of the volume.

1. THE VARIABILITY AND STABILITY OF PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS

The issue of variability of philosophical intuitions across philosophically irrelevant factors (e.g., ethnic background, gender, age) has been lively debated since the very beginning of experimental philosophy. Data concerning such variability was used to fuel the so-called negative program in experimental philosophy, which questions the evidential role of intuitions in philosophical argumentation by pointing to instability and unreliability of intuitions. The discussion engaged not only experimental philosophers but also many “traditional” philosophers who were not primarily interested in conducting empirical research but found that empirical findings concerning such differences required closer investigation and explanation.

In the first paper of this volume, JOSHUA KNOBE provides a detailed survey of x-phi findings regarding variability (or stability) of intuitions and argues that we are now in possession of strong evidence that intuitions concerning various philosophical issues are *surprisingly stable*. The paper is rather lengthy, which serves as an illustration of how rich the body of empirical data collected by experimental philosophers currently is. Unlike many other researchers, who assumed that stability of philosophical intuitions is something to be expected by default, Knobe argues that the discovery of pervasive stability of intuitions is actually surprising and calls for an explanation. Although he does not provide such an explanation, the readers may greatly benefit from Knobe’s careful and insightful examination of x-phi findings concerning variability/stability of intuitions and feel encouraged to ponder the importance of these findings for the methodology of philosophy.

2. METAPHILOSOPHY AND EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

The next two contributions further investigate the metaphilosophical implications of experimental philosophy.

ROBERT BERNARD, JOSEPH ULATOWSKI, and JONATHAN M. WEINBERG propose to take a zoomed-out perspective on experimental philosophy and try to show a bigger picture that compares early x-phi projects and arguments with the more recent ones. According to the authors, viewing the bigger picture allows us to see that the traditional distinction between negative x-phi (characterized above) and positive x-phi (the experimental counterpart of conceptual analysis, to put it roughly) is not adequate at the current stage of development of experimental philosophy. Instead, they offer a new, more fine-grained taxonomy of x-phi projects, which they call the “fourfold route.” Their proposal goes beyond the traditional distinction between negative and positive x-phi and, according to the authors, shows that x-phi methods can be fruitfully applied even in fields such as metaphysics and formal philosophy. They also use their new taxonomy to argue against the critics who accuse x-phi of not being philosophy in the first place. According to the authors, the clear-cut division between philosophy and empirical sciences (including social and natural sciences) is unwarranted; in fact, philosophy has always been an empirically informed, interdisciplinary field, and experimental philosophy seems to be a natural extension of the traditional philosophical methodology.

In his paper, MIESZKO TAŁASIEWICZ contributes to the methodological discussion concerning the role of the so-called method of cases in philosophy. The method of cases is, according to many researchers, supposed to play a significant role in philosophizing about concepts. It consists in considering hypothetical scenarios that are designed to show some features critical for the application of certain philosophical concepts. It is often taken for granted that the method of cases serves its role by eliciting intuitions about the conditions for concept application and that these intuitions are treated as evidence in philosophical argumentation. Obviously, the method of cases is the basis for the survey-based methods employed in typical x-phi studies. Tałasiewicz argues that the picture sketched above — that cases are primarily used in philosophy to elicit intuitions — is a misconception; in fact, according to him, the famous philosophical cases are used by philosophers to show certain important philosophical facts and draw some significant philosophical distinctions. This, in turn, might shift our perspective when we look at the results of some x-phi findings — Tałasiewicz discusses x-phi studies concerning Gettier cases as an example.

3. EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

The next two papers report new insightful data that can shed light on the topics discussed in philosophy of language.

In his contribution, DAVID BORDONABA-PLOU provides a smooth transition from metaphilosophy to more specific issues that can be tested using x-phi methods. He approaches the problem of the role of intuitions in philosophy by taking a closer look at an empirically testable phenomenon: the use of “intuition talk” in philosophy. Most interestingly, the author does not adopt the standard survey-based methods most popular in experimental philosophy; instead, he uses corpus analysis to see how prevalent the intuition talk is in the literature concerning taste disagreements (which is a problem lively discussed in recent philosophy of language). He concludes that the use of intuition talk is central in the literature on taste disagreements and that intuitions are taken as evidence in favor of theories that aim to explain the problem of taste disagreements. In addition to reporting these interesting findings, the paper shows that contemporary experimental philosophy often goes beyond the standard vignette-based methods typically used in x-phi research.

In the next paper, ADRIAN ZIÓŁKOWSKI (the guest editor of this volume) employs the standard x-phi survey (vignette-based) methods to investigate the topic of context-sensitivity of color adjectives in context-shifting experiments. However, the goals of the project were twofold: one was to establish whether contextualist predictions regarding the context-dependence of color adjectives are supported by folk judgments (i.e., whether laypersons truth-evaluations in context-shifting experiments are sensitive to contextual shift); the other concerned methodological issues — namely, the question whether different experimental designs yield different results in x-phi adaptations of context-shifting experiments. When it comes to the former issue, while the data show some of the effects expected by contextualists, it is disputable whether they lend strong support to contextualism with respect to color adjectives. When it comes to the latter, contrary to some previous worries addressed in the literature, the results are highly consistent across the methodological variants employed in the studies (within-subjects, between-subjects, and “contrastive design”), which, as the paper concludes, is good news for the methodology of experimental philosophy.

4. EXPLORATION OF NEW RESEARCH FIELDS IN EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

The remaining two papers cannot be easily classified using the standard division of philosophical disciplines; they both fall into the gray area one might call “interdisciplinary research.” It is worth noting that interdisciplinarity is a rather common trait of contemporary x-phi projects, and both papers illustrate this fact nicely.

EZRI CHERNAK, KURT DIETRICH, ASHLEY RASPOPOVIC, SARAH TURRI, and JOHN TURRI report data collected in a series of insightful experiments designed to test how laypersons perceive the phenomenon of lying. Specifically, the researchers were interested in establishing whether the popular theoretical assumption that lying involves asserting is reflected in folk judgments regarding lying. The main question addressed in the experiments was: is assertion a necessary condition for lying according to the folk, or, to put it differently, do laypersons think that lying by omission (i.e., by not asserting something) is possible? On the basis of the collected data, the authors conclude that folk intuitions about lying seem to be in line with the claim that asserting is necessary for lying. Moreover, the paper argues that when people call an omission (lack of assertion) a lie, which was observed in some of the experiments presented in the paper, it is probably due to the fact that a more appropriate word is not available to the respondents.

The paper by JOANNA KOMOROWSKA-MACH and ANDRZEJ SZCZEPURA, which concludes this volume, investigates a topic that might be located at the intersection of philosophy of mind and psychology. In their study, the authors decided to take a closer look at folk mental state ascription practices and, in particular, establish whether laypersons judge first-person attributions (i.e., self-ascriptions) and third-person attributions of mental states differently in the case of disagreement between the two. The data indicates that the sociolinguistic practices regarding mental state ascriptions grant a special status to self-ascriptions (i.e., there is evidence for “first-person authority” with respect to mental state attributions). The paper also takes into account the distinction (lively discussed in philosophy of mind) between phenomenal and intentional mental states and finds that the strength of the first-person authority in mental state ascription is different when these two types of mental states are compared.

I hope you will find the papers included in this volume an intellectually stimulating read.

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