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Dissertation Prospectus

Statement of Thesis [Note: Sample chapter not included]

Abstract

The recent turn toward experimental philosophy, particularly in ethics and epistemology, might appear to be supported by feminist epistemology, insofar as experimental philosophy signifies a break from the tradition of primarily white, middle-class men attempting to draw universal claims from within the limits of their own experience and research. However, the relationship between the two is not so straightforward, and an analysis of their connection bears on broader questions concerning philosophical methodology and epistemic standards more generally. This dissertation project aims to 1) explore a collection of concerns about experimental philosophy from a feminist perspective, with a focus on the ways in which experimental philosophy methodologies may undermine the epistemic status of the participants it recruits, 2) examine multiple varieties of feminist epistemology, particularly on standpoint theory and feminist empiricism, looking for ways to resolve said concerns, and 3) present a series of recommendations for experimental philosophy, and potential applications of said recommendations, that will both resolve some tensions between these two methodologies, and in doing so, highlight cooperative benefits and improve the methods of experimental philosophy. Ultimately, this dissertation accepts one broad premise of experimental philosophy – that the intuitions and insights of non-philosophers may be uniquely useful in addressing philosophical issues – and incorporates considerations from feminist epistemology to explore how to best integrate these viewpoints into theorizing.

Overview, Context, and Significance

My current research explores some theoretical considerations motivating a particular variety of experimental philosophy, as well as critiques of such, both presented with an eye toward input from the broad field of feminist epistemology. While the appeal to empirical results is not unique to experimental philosophy, nor is it controversial in many contexts, I aim my sights on a particular variety of experimental philosophy that advocates for the collection and exploration of data about philosophical intuitions as relevant or useful in resolving philosophical debates. An experimental philosopher of this stripe need not be committed to the idea that polling intuitions is the only or best way to resolve all philosophical debates, but merely to the notion that in debates in which intuitions play an evidentiary roll, a systematic collection of intuitions from a diverse sample set is preferable to the isolated intuitions of individual philosophers and their colleagues, which are likely to represent a homogenous perspective.

Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols, in the introduction to their anthology *Experimental Philosophy*, offer two explicit motivations for experimental philosophy that are also echoed broadly elsewhere: the theory-leadenness motivation and the diversity motivation. In short, the theory-leadenness motivation construes philosophers' intuitions as problematic precisely because of their experience and presumed expertise. The worry is that philosophers' intuitions in novel cases will in some way be biased by their previous theoretical commitments. The diversity motivation points to the fact that the profession of contemporary analytic philosophy is predominantly comprised of white, Western, middle-class, straight men. If the goal of philosophical inquiry is to find timeless truths or universal principles, it is unlikely that the intuitions of such a small subset of people, representing such a small subset of perspectives and experiences, would provide any insight at all. Where we find broad

divergence in intuitions that correlates to race, culture, class, etc., "we can ask more informed questions about the relative merits of these different ways of thinking about the world."[1]

At first glance, both the theory-leadenness and diversity motivations seem conducive to the goals of some varieties of feminist epistemology. While feminist epistemology is a broad and diverse field, for the purposes of the introductory sections of this project, I make the assumption that feminist epistemology shares some generalizable concerns related to identifying social factors that affect the possibility of knowledge for some or all (potential) knowers. In the latter parts of the project, I disambiguate the term "feminist epistemology" and discuss the motivations, commitments, and methodologies of specific varieties of feminist epistemology, and what they might add or contribute to experimental philosophy.

That said, the motivation to mitigate the effects of bias in theorizing has long been of concern to many feminist epistemologists, and has been discussed in relation to a Marxist standpoint framework (Nancy Hartsock, 1983; Alison Wylie, 2003; and others), a strong objectivity methodology (Sandra Harding, 1986), a science as social knowledge framework (Helen Longino, 1990), and a naturalized epistemology framework (Louise Antony, 2001), among others. Whether discussing the bias that may accompany fervent commitment to one's favored philosophical theories, or bias that might arise out of one's social position or lived experience, it seems reasonable to expect that methodologies for mitigating one type of bias might be transferable to the mitigation of other types of bias. So, if the theory-leadenness motivation offered by Nichols and Knobe (and others) in fact mitigates bias in the way that it suggests, there is at least a prima facie motivation for feminist epistemologists to endorse experimental philosophy.

[1] Knobe, 11.

It is perhaps even more obvious as to why the diversity motivation for experimental philosophy would be appealing to feminist epistemologists. While experimental philosophy allows for the possibility that social factors may influence philosophical intuitions, and subsequently affect which philosophical theories gain traction and acceptance (though the mechanism here is unclear and debatable), feminist epistemology takes as central the notion that social factors have epistemic import. Insofar as experimental philosophy endeavors to provide insight into when and how social factors influence theory building, the two seem naturally suited to cooperation.

Interestingly, despite the prima facie overlap between the concerns of experimental philosophy and feminist epistemology, there is a surprising scarcity of work being done at this intersection. In my research, I have come across only three journal articles that explicitly address experimental philosophy from a feminist perspective. Two of these three (Louise Antony and Lisa Schwartzman) take issue with the methods or results of specific works in experimental philosophy from a broadly feminist perspective, while the third (Gail Pohlhaus) specifically addresses the relationship between experimental philosophy and feminist epistemology.

Pohlhaus ultimately argues that the way in which experimental philosophy employs and exploits "difference" makes it antithetical to feminist projects. While much of the metaphilosophy surrounding intuitions concerns whether they are reliable sources of evidence, Pohlhaus' aim is to examine how and why these data points are being used in the theorizing of experimental philosophers. The presumed obviousness or immediate saliency of intuitions, Pohlhaus suggests, is precisely what gives them import in philosophical theorizing -- not as a mechanism for confirming or denying theories, but for re-orienting attention and research. Pohlhaus highlights a distinction between "orienting work" in philosophy, i.e. the focusing of researchers' or readers' attention on the saliency of the phenomenon one is interested in exploring, and "procedural work," i.e. engaging in agreed upon procedures to analyze possible answers. Experimental philosophy as it is currently practiced, Pohlhaus argues, divorces intuitions from

their integral role in orienting work and removes them from philosophical scrutiny by positioning them as merely evidence for procedural work. This, combined with the question of which groups have historically been allowed to lay claim to the "obviousness" of their intuitions, leads Pohlhaus to argue that experimental philosophy is in many ways antithetical to the aims of feminist epistemology.

While I do not believe that experimental philosophy *necessarily* stands in opposition to feminist epistemology, I am sympathetic to Pohlhaus' concerns about certain methods in experimental philosophy that seem to eliminate the need for critical, philosophical engagement with divergent intuitions. The point of the project is to suggest ways in which the methodology of experimental philosophy can be employed so as to avoid, or at the very least acknowledge, these concerns and other concerns stemming from feminist epistemology. I suggest that experimental philosophy's lack of engagement with the history of feminist epistemology has allowed it to develop along a trajectory that runs parallel to (but disconnected from) the lines of inquiry and methodologies carved out by feminist epistemologists in the last four decades. In some ways experimental philosophy, at least in some of the commitments required to motivate its methodology, is reinventing a wheel that feminist epistemology has been refining for some time.

To remediate this situation, I am interested in offering a comprehensive methodological overview of experimental philosophy within a feminist epistemology framework, with the ultimate goal of developing precise recommendations as to how decades of work in feminist epistemology and feminist philosophy of science might provide more robust motivations and more nuanced methodological guidance for experimental philosophy.

Project Proposal

In this section, I will briefly sketch each of the six proposed chapters of my project. Some will be more thoroughly fleshed out than others, and as there is the potential for some overlap among these proposed chapters, I expect some shifting of the borders between these chapters throughout the project.

Chapter 1: Some Prima Facie Concerns

The sample chapter included in this prospectus is the proposed first chapter of the project, which is largely critical in nature, paving the way for the positive position that begins to appear in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter highlights some concerns about experimental philosophy brought to light by Louise Antony, Lisa Schwartzman, and Gaile Pohlhaus, while contributing three new critiques from a feminist perspective. This chapter will serve as something of an introduction.

Antony's concerns, as they relate to the methodology of experimental philosophy, are primarily related to broader concerns about the underdetermination of data and confirmation bias in theory-building with empirical data. Schwartzman is concerned primarily about the impact of wide-spread social beliefs on intuitions that might counteract any effects that social-identity could be expected to have on philosophical intuitions – that is, certain biases may be so prevalent as to be manifest in the intuitions of all individuals regardless of race, class, gender, etc.. Gaile Pohlhaus is concerned primarily with the way in which "difference" is appealed to in experimental philosophy. My own critiques include 1) a concern about experimental philosophy treating individual data points as "native informants," a term borrowed from post-colonial theory as developed in the work of both Uma Narayan and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and echoed by Gail Pohlhaus with regard to experimental philosophy 2) a general threat of essentialism, and 3) a worry about shifts in Philosophy towards scientism, as influenced in part

by the current work of Nancy Bauer (to be explored further in chapter 3 of the dissertation). All three of these concerns speak to broader worries about the ways in which experimental philosophy may undermine the epistemic agency of the participants it recruits.

This chapter will draw on current work by Jesse Prinz and Kwame Anthony Appiah that disambiguates the particular kind of experimental philosophy I'm interested in, as well as the work of Louise Antony, Lisa Schwartzman, and Gail Pohlhaus, as mentioned above, in order to bring to light a handful of potential tension between experimental philosophy and feminist epistemology.

Chapter 2: Philosophical Intuitions

In this chapter I will draw on the work of Herman Cappelen, Jennifer Nagel, Ernest Sosa, Timothy Williamson, David Chalmers, Michael Devitt, Edouard Machery, Stephen Stich, and Jessica Brown to lay out a variety of positions on the role of intuitions in philosophical theorizing. I will also explore some work in the field of experimental philosophy, particularly experimental work that has been compiled in the Experimental Philosophy volumes edited by Nichols and Knobe, and the assumptions about intuitions that seem to underlie this work. Finally, I will highlight a model of intuition presented in the work of Gaile Pohlhaus and Miranda Fricker, and argue that this interpretation of the relationship between intuition and theory-building can support efforts in experimental philosophy while side-stepping many of the debates in contemporary work on intuitions and, in some ways, maintaining the epistemic agency of the non-philosopher study participants.

There is much contemporary debate about the role that intuitions should or could play in philosophical theorizing. These positions fall broadly into two camps, a psychological view and a non-psychological view. On the psychological view, it is the occurrence or experience of the intuition that provides evidence or support in theorizing, whereas on the non-psychological view, it is the content of

the intuition that plays this role. For example, in examining intuitions produced by a thought experiment like the trolley problem, assume that we are confronted with an individual (or a group of individuals) who report having the intuition that one would be ethically required to (or allowed to, etc., depending on which ethical phenomenon we are attempting to study) pull a lever to kill one person in order to save the lives of five others. There are two ways we might imagine that this information could be taken as evidence in theorizing about the viability of utilitarianism as an ethical theory. If x is a proposition like "one is required to pull a lever to kill one person in order to save the lives of five others," we could either take the proposition "x," or the proposition "y has the intuition that x," as evidence in support of utilitarianism. In the first case, we take the content of the intuition as evidence, in the second case, we take y's having or experiencing the intuition as evidence.

Whether the first order (nonpsychological) or second order (psychological) interpretation of philosophical evidence actually provides good or convincing support is a separate question. If one can settle the descriptive question of what role intuitions *do* play in philosophical theorizing, there remains the normative question of whether or not they *should* play that role – that is to say, on either the nonpsychological or psychological view, one can take a positive or negative position on intuitions. Furthermore, the argument presented as to why intuitions as interpreted on a psychological view provide bad (or good) evidence in theorizing would have to be different than the argument as to why intuitions as interpreted on a nonpsychological view provide bad (or good) evidence in theorizing. Though of course, there are perhaps as many unique positions on either side of these broad divisions as there are philosophers talking about intuitions.

Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt at surveying this landscape is presented in Cappelen's book *Philosophy Without Intuitions*, though the specifics of his taxonomy of positions do not necessarily represent the generally agreed-upon view. Cappelan presents a unique view of the role of intuitions in philosophy – namely, that no such role exists. He argues that philosophers, in fact, do not rely on

intuitions for any part of their theorizing, and thus the array of positions outlined in the literature on intuitions are all moot. I ultimately disagree with his primary claim, and plan to argue that the role of intuitions is actually even more embedded in theorizing than Cappelan's opponents suggest. Regardless, his taxonomy is fairly comprehensive, so using his framework and the general divisions explained in the previous paragraphs, I will attempt to relate this array of positions to some of the experimental work presented in the Nichols and Knobe anthologies while highlighting major disagreements, and how these disagreements bear on experimental philosophy.

The second goal of this chapter will be an exploration of how intuition has been treated with regard to theory-building in some work in feminist epistemology. It is somewhat remarkable that in the recent surge of interest in philosophical intuitions, little has been explored regarding the history of feminist epistemology's engagement with claims about "female intuition." Because of the particular historical and often oppressive alignment of women with "intuitive" ways of knowing, presented as less concrete and less reliable than the ideal of pure rationality, feminist epistemologists have variously celebrated and denied the existence of something like female intuition, or intuition more broadly.

For example, in her work on epistemic injustice, Miranda Fricker dwells at length on a quote from the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. The character Mr. Greenleaf, in what Fricker labels an act of epistemic injustice, questions the testimony of the female lead Marge: "Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts."[2] This is just one example of the ways in which feminist epistemology has focused on (female) intuition as a disparaged mode of reasoning or argumentation. However, according to Fricker and others, the line between intuition and other modes of reasoning may not be so sharp. My research in this chapter will explore how some feminist epistemologists, by rejecting a strict dichotomy between intuition and reason, have presented a more holistic view of how both reason and intuition together contribute to knowledge and theory-building.

[2] Fricker (2007), 14.

Drawing on these discussions of intuition from a feminist epistemological perspective, I plan to argue that much of the debate in contemporary analytic philosophy around intuitions assumes an implicit division and opposition between intuition and reason. In the debates discussed in the first section of this chapter, while intuition is the amorphous and controversial counterpart to reason, it appears that reason falls strictly within (or perhaps even defines) the province of philosophical methodology. How intuitions work and what kind of evidence they can or should play in philosophical theorizing is the question du jour, but on most of the views discussed, it appears that if these questions about intuition could be resolved, the inferences built upon intuitional evidence should be mechanical and obvious (and not inflicted with the theory-leadenness and bias that inflicts intuitions).

I plan to argue that a more holistic view of intuition and reason would avoid many of the contemporary psychological/non-psychological debates about intuitions, while positing a more precise picture as to how intuitions relate to theory-building and avoiding ways in which theory-leadenness and bias might also manifest elsewhere in theory-building. Whereas Cappelan argues that experimental philosophy is hopeless because intuitions aren't actually appealed to in theorizing, I argue that a less stringent, dualistic divide between intuitions and rationality would in fact support a version of experimental philosophy. Additionally, this revised view of intuitions may suggest changes to the ways in which experimental philosophers engage with study participants and other non-philosophers. If we allow that the line between intuition and reason is at least somewhat blurred, we may become more concerned with ferreting out bias in theory building (as bias inhabits both sides of the intuition/reason divide), but also more interested in finding new ways in which the intuitions and/or insights of non-philosophers might contribute to the work in our field.

Chapter 3: Experimental Philosophy and Scientism

Drawing primarily on the work of Nancy Bauer (and her engagement with Timothy Williamson and others) and its relation to contemporary practices in analytic philosophy, in this chapter I will argue that experimental philosophy, should it fail to address some of the apprehensions highlighted in previous chapters, may contribute to some of Bauer's concerns about scientism in the field of professional philosophy. The worry about scientism is not a rejection of science or scientific standards, but the worry that scientific methodologies and the results they produce may become the only allowable forms of explanation and discourse, and that the faith in their accuracy may be so dogmatically defended that other experiences, questions, and methods of intellectual exploration are ignored or suppressed. My worry is that the single-minded focus on experimental results, without the right caveats and structures in place, may lead to a situation in which important results, interpretations, and opportunities are lost. This chapter will also explore scientism briefly from a historical lens, without a specific focus on feminist critique, by looking at work by Hilary Putnam and other responses to logical positivism. This chapter will require some delicate maneuvering, as I do not intend to align experimental philosophy with logical positivism or verificationism, but I do want to highlight some issues that experimental philosophy may benefit from considering.

Additionally, this chapter may make reference to some current work in experimental philosophy I'm currently conducting. The purpose of my experimental work is to examine whether there is a correlation between gender-based credibility judgements and preferences for quantitative or qualitative reasoning. The survey will test two factors. First, do respondents' assessments of the credibility of expert advice vary based on the assumed gender of the expert? Second, do respondents show a consistent preference for quantitative research methods or qualitative research methods? The hypothesis is that respondents whose credibility judgements vary based on the gender of the expert (particularly if they skew towards affording higher credibility to male experts) will show some preference for quantitative research methods. Regardless of the outcome of this experiment, it may

play a role in my discussion of scientism, insofar as there exists a feminist strain of critique against scientism suggesting that an over-reliance on the scientific method and the search for a "god's-eye perspective" stands proxy for certain kinds of social-identity biases – the mechanism(s) through which these biases are purported to become manifest will be one of the questions I will grapple with in the interpretation of my experimental results.

Chapter 4: Feminist Standpoint Theory and Experimental Philosophy

This chapter will draw primarily on Nancy Hartsock's initial call for the development of a specifically feminist historical materialism and how it lead to a proliferation of feminist standpoint theory. It will also explore some more contemporary interpretations and articulations of standpoint theory from a handful of theorists, including Dorothy Rose, Hilary Smith, Alison Wylie, Kristin Intemann, and Patricia Hill Collins. There are a number of questions this chapter will aim to answer. First, does feminist standpoint theory appear to endorse a specific philosophical position on the import of intuitions in theorizing? Second, does standpoint theory share with experimental philosophy the motivation to mitigate bias and diversify theorizing? Third, what lessons (if any) are to be learned from standpoint theory regarding empirical methodologies, in general, and regarding empirical methodologies as they relate to philosophy, more specifically?

I anticipate that the relationship I draw between standpoint theory and experimental philosophy will not consist in specific recommendations to be taken on by experimental philosophers, but rather, a revision to the metaphilosophical motivations supporting experimental philosophy and potentially a new conceptual lens with which to view the importance of experimental philosophy in the context of epistemology more generally. One of the primary lessons to be extrapolated from standpoint theory is the suggestion to begin our theorizing from the perspective of marginalized peoples. Current

efforts in experimental philosophy, in their solicitation of participants, appear to be motivated by an attempt to accumulate experimental results that are representative of wide swaths of the population in order to support general or universal claims. One lesson to be gleaned from standpoint theory, however, might be a revised focus on collecting the perspectives most useful in mitigating the blind spots and biases that we believe already exist in our theorizing – which may mean a focus on the perspectives of marginalized groups.

Chapter 5: Feminist Empiricism and Experimental Philosophy

If experimental philosophy is simply a novel application of the scientific method (or a naturalistic movement) to as-yet unresolved philosophical problems (though, I will argue in this chapter and elsewhere that this is an oversimplification), it might appear that feminist empiricism has some obvious lessons to lend experimental philosophy.[3] Drawing primarily on the work of Helen Longino, Sandra Harding, Louise Antony, Nancy Tuana, and Elizabeth Lloyd, I will explore a variety of ways that feminist epistemologists have argued for the incorporation of feminist considerations into empiricism (or vice versa). From here, I will gather a list of concrete recommendations for experimental philosophy that align with the motivations explored in Chapter 1 and refined in Chapter 4.

In relating the work in this chapter to the broader project, I will also be required to explore some of the primary debates in feminist empiricism, and how they relate to experimental philosophy. One of the most pressing issues concerns whether methods or suggestions gleaned from feminist empiricism, insofar as they aim to improve the accuracy, reliability, and usefulness of empirical methodologies, should rightly be called "feminist" in any interesting or important way, or if these theorists are just doing good work in refining the requirements for a functional empiricism. Stemming

[3] For a discussion of experimental philosophy as a naturalistic movement, see Ernest Sosa's "Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Intuition."

from a more radical perspective, there may also remain the question of whether a perfectly refined empirical methodology might still benefit from feminist intervention – in other words, is there something inherently problematic about the goals, methods, or standards of what we take to be our best empiricism. Moreover, as the lurking threat of scientism has been a central concern for feminist empiricists, another major exploration of this chapter will examine how feminist empiricism approaches objectivity while carving out caveats to avoid or mitigate scientism.

Chapter 6: Recommendations for the Experimental Philosopher

The culminating goal of this project is to provide a set of methodological recommendations for experimental philosophers that will take into account work in feminist epistemology in the preceding decades – in an effort to both improve the methods of experimental philosophy, and to position experimental philosophy as a potentially useful tool for feminist epistemologists – with the ultimate aim of contributing to more truth-conducive philosophical methodologies in general.

From the research done to date, I anticipate that part of this chapter will include a section in which I attempt to revise the purported conceptual motivations backing experimental philosophy in a way that is more conducive to input from feminist epistemology. Not only would I plan to reframe the theory-leadenness motivation and the diversity motivation, but, assuming that I am able to defend the as-yet-to-be-determined methodological recommendations for experimental philosophy as making experimental philosophy useful to feminist epistemologists, this would mean that perhaps some broader motivations for feminist epistemology (particularly those around mitigating the effects of bias in theorizing) would be generally applicable to experimental philosophy as well. This chapter will also aim to revisit two or three of the experimental philosophy studies discussed elsewhere in the dissertation and proposing how, exactly, the recommendations laid out in this chapter could benefit such studies.

As for more specific methodological recommendations, these will be developed in the course of my research in the preceding chapters.

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