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Response to Akagi, Hughes, and Springle

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I am extremely grateful to Mikio Akagi, Nick Hughes, and Alison Springle for their insightful and challenging comments on Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds (Machery 2017). In this response, I will address the main themes discussed by these three critics. In Section 1, I defend anti-exceptionalism about the method of cases. In Section 2, I show that the differences between what participants are asked to do when they take part to an experimental-philosophy study and what philosophers do when they engage with philosophical cases do not justify any skepticism about the metaphilosophical relevance of experimental-philosophy studies. In Section 3, I show that the disturbing properties of philosophical cases are genuinely disturbing. In Section 4, I discuss the inductive nature of the three arguments put forward against the method of cases (Unreliability, Dogmatism, and Parochialism). In

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Section 5, I address the concerns that these three arguments ultimately depend on the use of cases. In Section 6, I examine the scope of the method of cases 2.0 and the place of naturalized conceptual analysis in philosophy. I conclude by discussing what should be done in philosophy.

1. The Method of Cases

Cases such as the Gödel case, the fake barn case, and the trolley case are used in several ways in philosophy, most of which are innocuous. Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds is concerned with the use of cases to support philosophical conclusions about either the meaning of words or content of concepts of philosophical interest (what I call ‘the formal use of cases’) or what these words or concepts are about (‘the material use of cases’). I use the expression ‘the method of cases’ to denote this particular use of cases. An important aspect of my account of the method of cases is its anti-exceptionalism: I reject the idea that philosophers’ activity in response to cases is sui generis, and I instead emphasize its continuity with what philosophers and non-philosophers do in everyday life. On my minimalist account of the method of cases (defended in Chapter 1), the attitude elicited by a case is not a distinct kind of mental state such as an intuition or a distinct form of judgment such as an analytic judgment, but rather an everyday judgment; what we do when we make a judgment in response to reading a case is similar to what we do when we read some article in a newspaper or some scene in a novel; we draw on the same cognitive resources and our justification is of a similar kind. In this respect at least, Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds embraces an important trend in recent metaphilosophy, illustrated by Williamson’s (2007) Philosophy of Philosophy, Cappelen’s rejection of the role of intuitions in philosophy (2012, 16–19), or Nagel’s claim that knowledge ascription works similarly when we read novels and epistemological cases (2012, Section 3).

Springle objects to this anti-exceptionalism: ‘When philosophers exercise concepts in the context of doing philosophy, they do something distinct from what they and others do in non-philosophical contexts’ (this issue, AS2). Springle is unfortunately not entirely clear about the nature and significance of this difference, but she distinguishes two uses of concepts, ‘the ordinary use of concepts’ and ‘the philosophical use.’ She elaborates on this distinction as follows: ‘In ordinary contexts, one’s interests are practical; one makes judgements about scenarios with the aim of helping one get around in the world. In philosophical contexts, one makes judgements about scenarios with the aim of better understanding the nature of the properties and kinds that correspond to the concepts’ (AS2).

To specify Springle’s distinction a bit more, she is not concerned with the use of concepts in general: It is trivial that philosophers and non-
philosophers do not use the concepts of philosophical interest identically since only the former theorize about the right, knowledge, fairness, causation, or democracy in a philosophical way. She is rather concerned with how philosophers and non-philosophers use concepts to make judgments about the situations described by cases (what she calls ‘scenarios’). However, the distinction she draws is puzzling: When a reader of *Othello* judges that Othello doesn’t *know* that Desdemona is faithful, her immediate goal is to get it right about Othello’s epistemic situation in Shakespeare’s fiction – she wants to make a true judgment; when a reader of the *New York Times* judges that it is *wrong* to separate children from their immigrant parents, her immediate goal is to get it right about the current moral situation – she too wants to make a true judgment; when Gettier (1963) judges that Smith does not know that Jones has ten coins in his pocket, his immediate goal is to get it right about the epistemic situation in the fictional situation he invented – he too wants to make a true judgment. Admittedly, they are aiming at making a true judgment for different reasons: The reader of *Othello* wants to understand its plot; the reader of the *New York Times* wants to decide what attitude to adopt about Trump’s policies; Gettier wants to theorize about knowledge. However, despite this variation, non-philosophers and philosophers alike are aiming at making true judgments about the relevant situations.

Springle gives an example to illustrate the difference between the deployment of concepts in response to a scenario in and outside philosophy, but it does not help clarify this difference: ‘If I judge that “Jill knows but Jack doesn’t” in an everyday context, my interest is in facts about Jill and Jack. If I make this judgement in a philosophical context, my interest is in the epistemic properties I’ve ascribed to them’ (AS2). But whether I am doing philosophy or not, if I judge that Jill knows that *p* but Jack doesn’t, my immediate ‘interest’ is to assign to Jill the right propositional attitude and to correctly deny that Jack has this attitude. That my non-philosophical counterpart and I might have different ultimate ‘interests’ or goals is irrelevant to whatever it is we are doing when we are assigning or denying knowledge to Jill and Jack. At the very least Springle hasn’t told us why these ultimate interests would make a difference.

Springle sometimes writes as if philosophers and non-philosophers have different concepts: She refers for instance to philosophers’ ‘own concepts.’ Philosophers do sometimes develop new concepts for technical reasons, as do any academic scholars: Think of the concepts of explication, possible worlds, propositions, senses, Dasein, or ideology. However, when they engage in conceptual analysis, they are often interested in the very concepts non-philosophers have (or, if one wants to put the point in material terms, in the very properties people are referring to). When a philosopher theorizes about just punishment, her goal is typically to assess whether non-philosophers (e.g. in a legal context) punish appropriately, and this goal would not
make sense if philosophers and non-philosophers had different concepts or theorized about different things. The point generalizes to most philosophical projects that have an ameliorative bent (be they in ethics, in epistemology, etc.). Projects that do not have a normative bent are also often concerned with lay concepts or with the properties these refer to. When Strawson theorizes about free will and responsibility, it is to understand the tensions in the ordinary concept of free will (Strawson 1962, 1963).

Springle also criticizes the distinction between the formal and material uses of cases as follows: ‘The practitioner of the method of cases illuminates the nature of a concept’s reference by way of reflecting on its use. So while Machery is right to emphasize philosophers’ goals, he mischaracterizes their goals with respect to formal uses of the method of cases and consequently thinks there are two methods (or modes) where there’s only one’ (AS1). Springle is undoubtedly right that some philosophers analyze concepts in order to learn about their referents, but she is wrong to think that she characterizes a common use of cases in philosophy. While philosophers who aim to theorize about knowledge, causation, etc. do use concepts, they need not theorize about the use of these concepts, a point repeatedly made by leading contributors to recent metaphilosophical debates (Williamson 2007; Deutsch 2015). Not only need they not theorize about the use of concepts, they often do not: Gettier’s classic paper does not contain any musings about the use of ‘knowledge’ in common English or in his own idiolect. For instance, when Gettier (1963) assesses the ten-coins case (aka case I), he asserts that ‘it is equally clear that Smith does not KNOW that (e) is true.’ This is a claim about knowledge, not about ‘knowledge’ or the concept of knowledge. Furthermore, theorizing in a formal mode in order to gain material knowledge is only meaningful if some controversial Fregean views about concepts are right (e.g. Peacocke 1992; Jackson 1998). If, e.g. the concept of belief refers in a non-Fregean manner (e.g. Lycan 1988), then theorizing about the concept of belief will say very little about what beliefs are (see also Boyd 1988 about moral concepts and properties). But even if the concept of belief does not refer in a Fregean manner, one may still think it is important to theorize about this concept, perhaps in order to reform it. To give another example, expressivists about moral or epistemic concepts do not think concepts refer, but they still think it is important to analyze these concepts. To summarize: One need not and indeed often does not engage in formal theorizing to theorize materially; one need not aim at theorizing materially to theorize formally. Upshot: It is important not to lose track of this distinction as Springle suggests doing.
2. What Do Experimental Philosophy Studies Show?

In large part, Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds aims at laying out the metaphilosophical significance of the two lessons to be drawn from fifteen years of experimental philosophy: Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, I argue that demographic effects and presentation effects are ubiquitous. Among the cases examined by experimental philosophers, very few cases are such that they elicit the same answers across various demographic groups (men and women, people in North America and in East Asia, etc.) and across trivial changes in the way the cases are presented.

Springle holds that these findings have no implications for metaphilosophy because participants were not in the proper ‘context’ and, as a result, findings about their judgments say very little about how philosophers would behave: ‘If an experiment is to be informative about the method of cases, it is not enough that subjects make judgements about philosophical cases, for judgements about such cases are only representative if they are made in the context of doing philosophy’ (AS9).

However, experimental evidence already speaks against Springle’s argument. If knowing the philosophical context made a difference to the reliability of the judgments elicited by cases, then philosophers would be immune to the effects reviewed in Chapter 2, but evidence is now substantial that the same effects are found with philosophers and non-philosophers. Lay people’s judgments about the footbridge and bystander cases are influenced by the order of presentation, and so are philosophers’ judgments (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2012, 2015); lay people’s judgments about such cases are influenced by the number of options available, and so are philosophers’ (Wiegmann, Horvath, and Meyer Forthcoming); lay people’s judgments about free will are influenced by their personality, and so are experts’ (Schulz, Cokely, and Feltz 2011); lay people’s judgments elicited by the experience machine case are influenced by several presentation effects, and so are philosophers’, although to a lesser extent (Löhr 2019).

Springle may respond that while these studies do probe philosophers’ judgments, they do not probe them ‘in the context of doing philosophy.’ While participants were not doing philosophy when answering the survey, they are familiar with the dialectics around these cases; indeed, many philosophers have probably taught the articles using them. Where is the empirical evidence that sitting on an armchair and doing one of the many things that count as philosophy (thinking about possible arguments, assessing an argument in a paper, preparing a philosophy class, etc.) would make any difference?
3. The Illusory Promise of Good Cases

Akagi notices that the three arguments against the method of cases in *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds* are inductive: All of them involve generalizing from the empirical research done on a subset of philosophical cases to the broader class of philosophical cases. And this induction could be reasonably challenged. As Akagi puts it, ‘Since these arguments have only inductive strength, it is possible to accept Machery’s premises and still believe that some instances of the method of cases are unobjectionable’ (this issue, MA3).

In *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds*, I have drawn a distinction between the disturbing cases, which lead to unreliable judgments, and the good cases, which don’t (2017, 121). I further granted the existence of good cases. First, a case is just a piece of text describing an actual or possible situation, and I am no skeptic about judgments in general. So there must be many cases that elicit reliable judgment: I do not question the moral judgment elicited by a text describing a physical assault or the epistemic judgment elicited by a text describing the ignorant assertions of a guru (2017, 110). Second, even among the cases commonly used in philosophy, some may be good (2017, 95–96): Perhaps the Gettier case is one of them since it does not seem to elicit much demographic variation (Machery et al. 2017a, 2017b), although it too can be framed (Machery et al. 2018). Indeed, the conclusion of the three arguments against the method of cases leaves room for good cases: For instance, the conclusion of Unreliability is ‘except when a philosophical case is known to elicit a reliable judgment, philosophers ought to suspend judgment about the situations described by philosophical cases’ (2017, 103; emphasis added).

Thus, Akagi and I agree on the plausible existence of cases that do not elicit unreliable judgments, but we draw different lessons from their existence. For Akagi, it suggests that the method of cases could be reformed: ‘It is conceivable that we could find a way to identify and construct less “disturbing” cases’ (MA4). By contrast, as Akagi notes, I am ‘not optimistic’ about reforming the method of cases. However, Akagi misidentifies the sources of my pessimism when he states that ‘Machery contends that if . . . we cannot know which instances these [unobjectionable cases] are, but this claim is somewhat overstated. Machery’s inductive arguments are based on overall patterns of deficiency in the cases examined by experimental philosophers, taken as a group’ (MA3). Here again I agree with Akagi that we can probably identify the disturbing cases and I indeed take a stab at identifying the properties that lead to unreliable judgments in Chapter 3 (more on this in Section 4). Rather, my skepticism derives from the following sources: First, most current cases are disturbing, and we should at the very least suspend judgment about those cases and the modal propositions they are meant to support; second, and more important, useful cases in philosophy are likely to be disturbing: As I put it in
Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds (96), ‘to fulfill some important dialectical functions in material-mode philosophical debate, cases are likely to possess those properties resulting in epistemically inappropriate judgments.’ Good cases are unlikely to allow us to distinguish between philosophical theories or principles: How many moral theories are inconsistent with the judgment that it is wrong to physically assault someone?

4. The Disturbing Properties are Disturbing

As Akagi notes, the three arguments against the method of cases assume that ‘overall patterns of deficiency’ underlie the unreliability of the judgments elicited by philosophical cases – what I call ‘the disturbing properties’ of philosophical cases. I identify, somewhat speculatively, three of those: (1) the unusual nature of the cases used in philosophy, (2) the fact that these cases split the properties that go together in most circumstances, and (3) the entanglement of the narrative, superficial content of cases and of their target content. Springle is skeptical that these properties really render judgments unreliable. Before addressing her objections, note that even if I had failed to properly identify why the judgments elicited by philosophical cases are unreliable, this would not undermine the claim that philosophical cases tend to elicit unreliable judgments – an induction that is based on the evidence reviewed in Chapter 2 and that could still be justified by one of the two inductive strategies discussed in Section 3.4 of Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds.

Springle defends the appeal to ‘fiction and narrative’ in philosophy, presumably to address my concern with the third disturbing property, but she fails to distinguish two orthogonal distinctions: on the one hand, fiction vs. nonfiction, on the other narrative vs. non-narrative text. A text is fictional if and only if it describes a non-actual situation; it is nonfictional otherwise; a text is more narrative the more it contains details about the situation it describes. Fictional and non-fictional texts can be more or less narrative. The concern expressed in Chapter 3 of Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds is about the narrative nature of cases, not their fictional content: They contain many details that are irrelevant to the point philosophers aim to make (they are part of the superficial rather than the target content). But most of Springle’s points are about the fictional nature of the cases and do not address the issue of narrativity. Her only relevant remark goes as follows: She writes that for me, ‘narrative details can trigger associations, affective responses, etc., that privilege certain interpretations over others,’ and she responds that ‘philosophical cases no doubt exploit these properties of fiction and narrative. But (...) [she] sees[s] little reason to worry that philosophers are manipulating their readers into making the judgements that serve the philosophers’ dialectical purposes’ (this issue, AS6). It is irrelevant whether philosophers intentionally use the narrative
aspect of thought experiments to trick their readers, or do it unintentionally. The point is that they do, as Turri points out (2016, 339):

Gettier . . . used language apt to prime attributions of ignorance. He confidently and unqualifiedly inserted his own verdict into the description of the case. In short, he manipulated his audience. Others followed his example. The manipulation might have been unconscious, as experimenter bias often is, but its effect is the same.

Springle also discusses the second, and most important, disturbing property, ‘feature splitting.’ She compares it to the practice of identifying the causes of a phenomenon by intervening on some of the properties associated with it: ‘In science, researchers use such interventions to identify probable causes of effects of interest, or components of a mechanism, where what was thought to be a single component might turn out to be, in actuality, multiple components. Philosophical interventions let philosophers do the same thing but with metaphysical causes or natures’ (AS7). Springle is right that there is a similarity between feature splitting in the method of cases and the identification of causes in science, but it is shallow and should provide little comfort to philosophers. To disentangle the possible causes of a phenomenon, we do not imagine intervening on one of them, leaving everything else constant: That would be a very unreliable way of identifying causes. Rather, we do intervene on each cause in turn, as precisely as possible, leaving everything else constant, as much as possible, and we observe the outcomes of such actual interventions. By contrast, when we consider cases in a philosophy paper, we typically merely imagine a situation where the properties that usually go together are disentangled, and we do not observe the outcome of any intervention; rather, we make a judgment on the basis of what we have stipulated. Upshot: Despite a superficial similarity with the method of cases, the similarity between feature splitting in philosophy and the reasonable practice of disentangling potential causes of an effect in science should give no solace to theponent of the method of cases.

5. Are Unreliability, Dogmatism, and Parochialism Self-Undermining?

Hughes puts forward an important objection against the three arguments developed in Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds: Unreliability, Dogmatism, and Parochialism are self-defeating because they rest on premises that are argued for or against on the basis of cases. As he puts it, ‘Machery will have to rely on the very method he thinks we should reject to justify his conclusion’ (NH1).

For illustration, Hughes focuses on Premise 4 of Dogmatism: ‘If epistemic peers are likely to disagree about a philosophical case, they ought to suspend
judgment about it.’ He rightly assumes that his concern with Dogmatism could generalize to the other two arguments of *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds*. He also correctly notes that in the epistemological literature on peer disagreement, views about what to do in the face of peer disagreement are defended by appeal to cases, and he quotes a few of such well known cases in his commentary. The worry, then, is that to support Premise 4, I too must appeal to judgments about cases. Hughes writes:

Rejecting dogmatism requires adopting a position on the epistemology of disagreement. Anti-dogmatic views in the epistemology of disagreement were motivated by judgments about precisely the kinds of cases that Machery would have banished from philosophical theorizing. Since, according to Machery, we shouldn’t be relying on such judgments, insofar as we accept his view we lack justification for rejecting dogmatism. (NH2)

Like Hughes, I will focus on Premise 4 of Dogmatism, and I will propose two responses to his concern. First, Hughes is assuming that one can only accept Premise 4 if one endorses a particular view about the epistemology of disagreement, but that is not the case. Suppose that either \( p \) or \( q \) is the case, and that both propositions entail \( r \); one is entitled to accept \( r \) if one can show that both propositions entail \( r \), even if one is unable to know whether \( p \) or \( q \) is the case. Let’s call this form of argument, ‘argument from disjunction.’ The argument for Premise 4 is similar, although not quite as compelling (more on this below). The leading views about peer disagreement suggest that in the particular case of the disagreement elicited by philosophical cases one ought to suspend judgment; this gives us an inductive reason to accept that when it comes to the disagreement elicited by philosophical cases one ought to suspend judgment; at the very least if one accepts one of these leading views, then one ought to do so. Hence, one need not appeal to the method of cases to accept Premise 4 of Dogmatism, although most epistemologists working on peer disagreement do indeed trade in cases.

Hughes may think that arguments from disjunction are flawed, but he says nothing to suggest he does, and it is unclear what their flaw would be. More plausibly, Hughes may think that no argument from disjunction can support Premise 4. Why would that be the case? Remember that I am not denying that modally immodest philosophical claims have truth values, just that we cannot know whether they are true. Perhaps the difference between the argument for Premise 4 and arguments from disjunction is relevant: In the latter case, we begin with a set of mutually inconsistent views, one of which must be true; in the former case, with a set of mutually inconsistent views, all of which could be false. In the latter case, we then lack the type of justification we have when we put forward an argument from disjunction. But we are justified all the same, although our justification is now inductive: Each leading view is a plausible contender (or a variant thereof) for getting it right about peer disagreement,
and one of them is likely to be right; it is thus likely that Premise 4 of Dogmatism is right, which gives us license for accepting it.

Hughes seems to deny that the major epistemological views about peer disagreement support Premise 4 of Dogmatism, and he cites Hawthorne and Srinivasan (2013). People are bound to disagree about which philosophical articles count as a major contribution, and perhaps Hawthorne and Srinivasan (2013) does count as a major contribution to the epistemology of peer disagreement in some respects. Although it is sometimes considered crass to mention citation counts, particularly among philosophers, surely they say something about how influential and how frequently discussed a paper is. Hawthorne and Srinivasan (2013) does not fare too poorly by this measure: In philosophy, 43 citations (as of 13 June 2019) isn’t a figure to be ashamed of, but this number pales in comparison to those of the classics in this area of philosophy, which have articulated what I took (and still take) to be the major views about peer disagreement: Elga (2007) has been cited 659 times; Kelly (2010), 431 times, etc. In any case, pace Hughes, Hawthorne and Srinivasan (2013) also seem to support Premise 4 of Dogmatism. It is crucial to Hughes’s argument that some people be knowledgeable about the facts of the matter concerning the situations described by philosophical cases (e.g. whether twater is water or whether the agent in a Frankfurt case is free and responsible). To preempt the objection that the experimental-philosophy data show that philosophers aren’t reliable, hence not knowledgeable, Hughes writes (this issue, emphasis in the original):

It may seem that the empirical data showing people to be generally unreliable in their judgments about cases with disturbing features undercuts the possibility of their making knowledgeable judgments about such cases. But that is not true. What the data show is that collectively, people are unreliable about cases. It does not follow that individuals are unreliable – some people may be exceptions to the general trend. (NH7)

Hughes is undoubtedly right that some people may be exceptions, but this mere possibility is irrelevant. The experimental-philosophy evidence gives us an inductive reason to question the reliability of the judgments about cases made by every philosopher even if it is consistent with such evidence that some philosophers are indeed reliable. Similarly, evidence that psychologists’ statistical judgments (e.g. about power or replicability) are, on the aggregate, unreliable gives us an inductive reason to question the reliability of the statistical judgments made by every psychologist (and thus recommend all of them replace these judgments by formal, quantitative analyses), even if it is consistent with such evidence that some psychologists are indeed reliable. The mere possibility of an exception does not undercut such inductive reason.

Finally, I would like to gesture toward a second strategy for defending Premise 4 (and similar premises of Unreliability, Dogmatism, and Parochialism). Premise 4 need not be understood as making a modally
immodest claim that must be supported by the method of cases. It could be a normative proposal, justified on, e.g. practical grounds (in line with the pragmatism about conceptual engineering defended in Chapter 7 of *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds*) or a recommendation, expressing my own normative commitment and my expectation that readers follow it (e.g. Gibbard 1990). I am not proposing to understand Premise 4 of Dogmatism in these ways; the point is rather that the method of cases need not play any role in supporting Premise 4 since cases do not appear necessary if Premise 4 is understood as a normative proposal or as expressing my own commitments.

6. The Role of Experimentation in the Method of Cases 2.0

In the last chapter of *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds* I defend a revised form of conceptual analysis, naturalized conceptual analysis, and a revised method of cases, which I call ‘the method of cases 2.0.’ The goal of the method of cases 2.0 is to describe and revise concepts, particularly those concepts of philosophical interest, where concepts are understood psychologically along the lines defended in my previous work (Machery 2009, 2015). The method of cases 2.0 involves examining people’s judgments empirically, and experiments are an important tool for this purpose.

Akagi suggests broadening naturalized conceptual analysis in various directions. First, he rightly notes that, as I describe it, naturalized conceptual analysis is predicated on a particular, controversial theory of concepts, according to which concepts are bodies of information retrieved by default when we think about their extension. I agree that depending on how one conceives of concepts, conceptual analysis will look different, and I am open to the possibility that there might be several worthwhile notions of concepts and, relatedly, several forms of conceptual analysis. That said, any account of conceptual analysis must be built upon a clear characterization of what concepts are, and any acceptable characterization of concepts must also solve the delineation problem (Machery 2019): It must draw a line between what is constitutive of a concept and what is not. I am skeptical of semantic and epistemological answers to the delineation problem (2017, 212); as a result, I reject the identification of concepts with senses or meanings. The psychological notion of concept embraced in Chapter 7 of *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds* is a clear and, by my lights, empirically adequate notion of concepts that provides a non-semantic and non-epistemological answer to the delineation problem.

Second, Akagi highlights alternatives to experimental methods to describe people’s concepts, including literature review and philosophical fieldwork. While I emphasized experimental methods in Chapter 7 of *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds*, I agree with Akagi that they are only one tool in the toolbox available to the philosopher interested in
describing concepts of philosophical interest (see also Cheon and Machery 2016): As I put it (2017, 240), ‘While the method of cases 2.0 overcomes the limitations of the method of cases 1.0 and has many advantages, it is not the only empirical method available to the naturalistic conceptual analyst. Historical, anthropological, or sociological linguistics can provide important evidence relevant to describing concepts of philosophical interest. Historians of science have often relied on this type of evidence to study past scientific concepts.’

Admittedly, the experimental method has its limitations: For instance, the tasks participants are given are always somewhat artificial. But it has its strengths such as: (1) in contrast to corpus studies (including literature review) it can systematically elicit uses of a concept instead of depending on spontaneous, unsystematic uses (a point often made by generative linguists against corpus linguistics); (2) stimuli can be created to examine fine-grained aspects of concepts such as the relative weights of the properties associated with a given concept; (3) because participants are asked to use their concept rather than theorize about what they mean by it, the experimental method examines people’s effective concepts – the concepts they usually deploy – rather than their reflective concepts – the concepts they only deploy when they reflect on their own concepts (Machery et al. Forthcoming).

Akagi is right that some of these properties of the method of cases 2.0 are strengths only for some ways of characterizing concepts. For instance, some theories of concepts do not assume that the features constitutive of concepts are weighted (Akagi refers to Wilson’s or Brandom’s theories of concepts). I have already conceded that in addition to the psychological notion of concepts developed in my work there may be other useful notions of concepts and relatedly other accounts of conceptual analysis. However, to repeat the point made earlier, these accounts must earn their keep: They must provide an answer to the delineation problem, and one must show that they are useful explications or conceptual engineerings of the notion of concept.

7. What Should We Do?

Akagi puts the point in a characteristically direct and challenging manner: ‘[I]f Machery’s critique is cogent, what should we do? … Perhaps, for example, papers that appeal to the method of cases should be rejected during peer review’ (this issue, MA6–7). Akagi leans toward a cautious approach: ‘This does not seem to be the solution that Machery has in mind, and anyway is probably too harsh and ham-fisted a solution. It’s not as if philosophers have precise standards for which arguments are publishable to begin with, and it would be poor precedent to institute a methodological litmus test on this issue, especially while Machery’s arguments remain so controversial within the discipline’ (MA7). He recommends promoting, but not requiring,
the use of experimental methods to check whether particular case judgments are trustworthy. This middle-of-the-road position is reminiscent of Alexander and Weinberg’s (2007) moderate restrictionism, a course of action I reject as timorous in *Philosophy Within Its Proper Bounds*.

I align myself with the critical tradition in philosophy, which insists that philosophers regularly get lost by addressing questions that are beyond their epistemic means. Philosophers in this tradition do not share a single diagnosis about what goes wrong in some quarters of philosophy, but they all insist that the views debated there are deeply misguided and should be abandoned. Hume famously called for much of philosophy and theology books to be burnt (1999, 112; my emphasis):

> If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. **Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.**

Carnap claims to have succeeded where previous antimetaphysical empiricists have failed – at eliminating metaphysics (1996, 11; emphasis in the original):

> Logical analysis yields the negative result **that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless.** Therewith a radical elimination of metaphysics is attained, which was not yet possible from the earlier antimetaphysical standpoints.

Hume, Carnap, and other empiricists were dead serious in their attack on the incriminated areas of philosophy. They do think that these areas of philosophy should be eliminated.

So do I. Concretely, we should discourage graduate students to use the method of cases for argumentative purposes (cases of course can be used for many other purposes), and articles relying on such articles should be rejected (preferably desk-rejected). We should put less emphasis on contemporary classics that rely extensively on the method of cases such as Searle’s attack against AI on the basis of his famous Chinese room thought experiment, Jackson’s attack against physicalism on the basis of the Mary case or Chalmers’ on the basis of zombies, much of the debate about the conditions for free will and responsibility as well as the epistemological tradition that has grown out of Gettier. This is not to say that the philosophical literatures that stemmed from these articles fail to display the virtues we philosophers value so much (and rightly so): clarity, subtlety of argumentation, systematicity, and originality. But it is to say that despite all these qualities little has been learnt from these articles. On a positive note, graduate students should be encouraged to work on issues that do not require acquiring any modally immodest knowledge; as I noted in Chapter 6 of *Philosophy Within Its Proper*
Bounds, many modally immodest philosophical issues have counterparts that are modally modest, and can be fruitfully tackled.

Notes

1. The target content is the content of the case that matters for philosophical purposes, the superficial content the content that doesn’t.
2. Springle also puzzles over the notion of a proper domain. I define it on p. 112: 'let’s call “the proper domain” of a judgment the circumstances in which it is reliable … The proper domain of a judgment (e.g. ascription of knowledge or responsibility) varies with the expertise of the person judging, when the subject matter of the judgment allows for expertise.'

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Hughes, N. this issue. “Disagreement, Dogmatism, and the Bounds of Philosophy.”


