

Review of: "Experimental Bioethics: Integrating Experimental Philosophy, Moral Intuitions, and Cognitive Psychology within Ethical Inquiry"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

After a brief introduction, the paper introduces its main thesis: that experimental bioethics has greatly advanced in the last 20 years due to the rise of MRI scans and experimental data showing the internal workings (so to speak) of our ethical decisions. It suggests empirical investigation of issues such as intuitions in general and moral intuitions in particular (p. 3), as opposed to emotions (p. 4). It argues that experiments about moral intuitions can enrich the rule-dominated moral discourse (p. 5) and thus lead to richer and more accurate practical moral judgment. In particular, while accepting that intuitions are important for our moral reasoning, the article suggests that experimental philosophy be used to distinguish intuitions about thought experiments (such as the trolley problem) that are stable and durable (p. 6) from those that are not, thus distinguishing intuitions that are more likely to point to moral norms from those which are not.

There is nothing wrong with the author's suggestion, as such. The issue, as I see it, is that there is little originality in the article.

First, the problems with the unreliability (and cultural dependence) of our intuitions about thought experiments are well known to ethicists, and no serious ethicist considers relying on thought experiments *per se*. Generally speaking, they are not used as an infallible guide to the right action but as tools to help develop and revise ethical theory. Experimental philosophy may, but certainly is not necessarily, turn out to be an important tool in the philosophical investigation of thought experiments.

Second, the idea to use experimental philosophy to determine the reliability of our intuitions and distinguish which are culturally dependent or otherwise non-universal and which *are* universal is well known. In fact, these are the so-called "negative programs" and "positive programs" of experimental philosophy that are two major reasons for its development in the first place. This is so in bioethics as well as in ethics in general.

Also, the use of MRIs as a tool in experimental philosophy is (as the author notes) not new, and incidentally, there is significant skepticism as to its actual usefulness in evaluating normative decisions.

So while there is nothing wrong with the author's suggestions, the article's thesis amounts to giving (good and detailed) reasons as to why experimental philosophers should continue to do what they already are doing, in experimental philosophy as a field in general, and in the field of experimental bioethics in particular. This is certainly true, but not novel.

