Introduction

Experimental philosophy is a way of doing philosophy. The basic idea is to use empirical methods and techniques typically associated with the sciences to help investigate philosophical questions. This is a very broad and inclusive definition of experimental philosophy. While it has been defined in various ways, often more narrow in scope, the guiding notion behind experimental philosophy is that observation and experimentation are tools that can be used to conduct philosophical inquiry. The purpose of this volume is to introduce you to the empirical approaches being used in philosophy and the ways that these approaches benefit philosophical inquiry.

The idea that philosophy can benefit from empirical inquiry is not new. As far back as Ancient Greece, philosophers called on empirical observations to inform their philosophical accounts. One clear example is Aristotle's systematic investigations of animals in *History of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*. One goal Aristotle had in these works was to understand what is distinct about human beings by comparing and contrasting their biological features to those of non-human animals. Aristotle also thought that empirical observations were relevant to philosophy in another way. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, he claimed that the best approach to philosophy was to find a balance between different views about a philosophical topic "in the light not only of our conclusion and our premises, but also of what is commonly said about it" (1098b, 9–10). Of course, the best way to learn what is commonly said about a topic is also by making observations, and by listening to views that don't just come from one particular person or group.

Other philosophers, like David Hume, focused on the use of empirical methods in the study of human nature. Hume wrote in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that "we can hope for success in our philosophical researches" by studying "all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life." Hume thought we could begin to understand philosophical phenomena, like morality, perception, or causation, by first studying our own minds. When it comes to studying the human mind, Hume claimed that it was "impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities

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otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations" (Book I, 6–8).

These examples illustrate two ways in which empirical methods can be used to inform philosophical inquiries. They can be used to directly investigate philosophical phenomena. They can also be used to understand how we think and talk about those phenomena. Both of these approaches are well represented in the history of philosophy. To give but a few more examples, René Descartes' dissections of ox eyes informed his theory of visual perception, while Isaac Newton's theory of colors was informed by his observations of the reflections, refractions, and inflections of light through a prism. These philosophers each employed empirical methods even though they are often associated with very different philosophical traditions.

Contemporary experimental philosophers return to these ways of doing philosophy. They conduct controlled experiments, and empirical studies more generally, to explore both phenomena of philosophical interest and how we think about those phenomena. In doing so, they use a wide range of techniques that were unavailable to philosophers such as Aristotle, Descartes, Newton, and Hume. These techniques borrow from approaches to empirical study developed in psychology, cognitive neuroscience, linguistics, behavioral economics, and computer science, among other fields. These approaches have utilized both basic techniques of science as well as the latest technological developments such as brain imaging, big-data searches, advanced statistics, and causal modeling. Today experimental philosophers continue to find new and exciting ways of combining questions and techniques from both the sciences and philosophy. This work helps us to understand our reality, who we are as people, and the choices we make about important philosophical matters that shape our lives. Experimental philosophers also argue that these kinds of studies can provide insight into philosophical phenomena themselves, though the details vary from one philosophical issue to another.

This volume provides a handbook to these developments in experimental philosophy. It is separated into two parts. The first part situates experimental philosophy within Western philosophy, both currently and historically, and explores the various motivations for and impact of the experimental turn in philosophy. Though there is a long historical precedent for experimental philosophy, some philosophers have objected to the application of empirical methods in philosophical inquiry. This section includes some of the leading proponents as well as prominent critics of experimental philosophy. They discuss different conceptions of experimental philosophy and, more generally, the impact the practice has for philosophical methodology. Together we hope that these chapters will give the reader a sense of different perspectives on and approaches to experimental philosophy that are found within the discipline today.

The second part of the volume surveys some of the most important work that has been done by contemporary experimental philosophers. These chapters detail the application of empirical methods to questions from nearly every major sub-discipline of academic philosophy. Research areas include central topics in the philosophy of action, moral and political philosophy, philosophy of mind, epistemology, philosophy of language, metaphysics, logic, and metaphilosophy. These chapters not only review the empirical research that has been conducted surrounding a particular philosophical question but also describe several ways in which future empirical research might contribute to philosophical inquiry. It is our hope that these chapters will serve as both an introduction to this research and a research tool that will help guide future experimental study in philosophy.

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