Relativism & Experimental Philosophy

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As the papers in this volume make abundantly clear, the term "relativism" has been applied to a wide range of theories within philosophy and without. The relativist theories that will be our focus here can be roughly characterized by their commitment to four claims.

(R-i) Some phenomenon of philosophical importance varies across individuals, cultures, or other demographic groups like genders, speakers of particular languages, socio-economic groups, or age cohorts. Among the phenomena that have been claimed to exhibit this sort of variation are moral principles, epistemic norms, aesthetic values, important philosophical concepts and entire conceptual schemes. Views of this sort are often labeled "descriptive relativism".

(R-ii) The alternatives that vary across individuals or groups are incompatible or incommensurable; one can't coherently embrace more than one at any given time.

(R-iii) There is no rational, non-question begging way of adjudicating these differences and determining which alternative is better or closer to the truth.

These three claims, by themselves, might lead, and often have led, to skepticism, the view that there is no way of knowing which alternative is better, or to nihilism, the view that notions like rational assessment or truth simply have no purchase in these areas. What relativism adds is a strategy for sidestepping these skeptical and nihilistic consequences. For the relativist, there are rational assessments and/or knowable truths in these contested domains, but …

(R-iv) truth or rational assessment, in these domains, must be relativized to some parameter that is determined by features of the individuals or groups involved.

All four of these claims have been hotly debated.

The term "experimental philosophy" has also been used in a variety of ways.[1] In this chapter, our focus will be on the sort of experimental philosophy that studies intuitions or

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[1] For useful discussion, see Sytsma & Livengood (2016), Chs. 1-3, and O'Neill & Machery (2014).

judgments made about philosophically interesting cases and the factors that influence those judgments. We'll call it "X-Phi". To date, X-Phi has little to contribute to debates over (R-ii), (R-iii) and (R-iv). But it has played an increasingly important role in debates over (R-i), descriptive relativism, and that will be our focus in Sections 1-4. These debates are important because, as a number of authors have noted, claims like (R-i) are "often used as the starting point for philosophical debates on relativism,"[2] and "most common rationales" for claims like (R-ii) and (R-iii) "would be undermined" if (R-i) is not correct.[3] So the question we will be asking in Sections 1-4 is: *How has X-Phi contributed to debates over descriptive relativism?* In Section 5, we'll consider a very different way in which X-Phi and relativism are linked. Our focus will be on the growing literature exploring the extent to which ordinary people are relativists about moral judgments.

In the burgeoning X-Phi literature, there are studies reporting demographic variation in intuitions or judgments about philosophically important matters, including moral issues, knowledge, metaphysical questions, and reference. In Sections 1-4 we'll review that literature and, in each case, ask what philosophically interesting conclusions can be drawn. But there is one contentious issue we want to sidestep. Recent years have seen a growing debate on what philosophical intuitions *are*.[4] Rather than joining this debate, we will simply stipulate that the sorts of intuitions we are concerned with are spontaneous judgments made in response to real or imagined cases, where the judgments are accompanied by little or no awareness of the psychological processes that give rise to them. This stipulation is appropriate, for present purposes, because it characterizes just about all of the intuitions surveyed in the studies we will discuss.

1. X-Phi and Moral Intuitions

Cultural differences in moral judgments have been acknowledged by philosophers since the time of Herodotus, and they have been widely explored in cultural anthropology following the pioneering work of Westermarck (1906) and Sumner (1934).[5] But in philosophical discussions of moral relativism, the focus is on the *moral principles* people accept and internalize, rather than on their judgments about specific cases. People's judgments, it is typically assumed, are inferred (often unconsciously) from their moral principles along with relevant non-moral beliefs. So if people have different non-moral beliefs about the agents involved in a case, the likely consequences of an agent's actions, or about apparently relevant scientific, metaphysical or theological matters, they might have different intuitions or judgments without any disagreement in underlying moral principles. In his book, *Hopi Ethics*, which is sometimes cited as a precursor of contemporary experimental philosophy, Richard Brandt (1954) reports a number of cases where the judgments of his Hopi informants differed from those he assumed would be made by contemporary Americans of European ancestry. Brandt explored an impressive range of

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[2] Baghramian & Carter (2017), §2.
[3] Gowans (2018), §4. Gowans' focus is moral relativism. But his comment is equally true for relativism in most other domains.
[4] For useful overviews of the debate, see Alexander (2012), Ch. 2, Nado (2014), and Machery (2017), Ch. 1.
[5] For a brief, colorful review of some memorable examples, see Prinz (2007), Ch. 5.

potential non-moral disagreements that might account for these moral disagreements, but found none. Inspired by Brandt, and adopting the experimental methods of contemporary social psychology, Peng et al. (n.d.) found that Chinese and American participants differed in their judgements about a case in which an innocent man would have to be framed to prevent a riot in which many people would be injured and killed. Peng and colleagues searched for non-moral disagreements that might explain the moral disagreement, but – like Brandt – they found none. Unfortunately, most of the other recent X-Phi studies reporting cultural differences in moral intuitions have done little to determine whether the differences could be explained by differences in non-moral beliefs.

Trolley cases have loomed large in recent X-Phi work on moral judgment. In a typical trolley case, a runaway trolley is about to kill five innocent people unless

> (i) it is rerouted on to another track, where only one innocent person will be killed (the "switch" case)

or

> (ii) it is stopped by pushing a large person off a footbridge and onto the track, killing the large person (the "footbridge" case).

A number of studies found little cross-cultural difference in judgments about trolley cases: Hauser et al. (2007) report data from participants in the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, Brazil, and India; O'Neill and Petrinovich (1998) report data from Taiwan and the USA; Moore et al. (2011) compared Americans with mainland Chinese. However, there are also a number of studies that *have* found cross-cultural differences in trolley case intuitions, including Ahlenius and Tännsjö (2012) whose participants were American, Russian and Chinese, and Gold et al. (2014) whose participants were English and Chinese. Xiang (2014) reports a particularly striking cross-cultural difference: 83% of Tibetan Buddhist monks and 64% of lay Tibetans judged that it is permissible to push the large person off the bridge to save five others, while less than 15% of American laypeople made that judgment. Abarbanell and Hauser (2010) found that rural and mostly uneducated Tseltal speaking Mayan informants in the Tenejapa region of Chiapas, Mexico, responded to dilemmas modeled on the switch and footbridge cases in much the same way as internet users in large-scale, highly industrialized and educated societies. But, to their surprise, they found that these rural Mayans differed from internet users in not recognizing a moral difference between actions and omissions. The Mayans did not judge actions that caused harm to be morally worse than omissions like failing to warn the victim. However, in a very large unpublished study, Kneer et al. (ms) report finding little evidence of cross-cultural variation in the relative importance of action and omission for moral judgment.

Culture is not the only demographic variable whose effect on moral judgments has been explored experimentally. Friesdorf et al. (2015) report an impressive meta-analysis of forty studies involving 6,100 participants. The studies focused on trolley-style moral dilemmas where a protagonist can cause harm to avoid a greater harm. They found that

gender had a substantial impact, with men more likely to make the "utilitarian" judgment.[6] Other gender effects have been reported by Banerjee et al. (2010),[7] Gau and Tang (2013), and by Gold et al. (2014), who also report an effect of *age* – older participants were more likely to judge that the action was wrong in their version of the switch case. Several studies have also found that participant's scores on tests for psychopathic personality traits and for low levels of empathic concern predict "utilitarian" responses on a variety of trolley-style sacrificial dilemmas (Kahane et al., 2015; Glenn et al., 2010).[8] And in a recently published paper, Hannikainen et al. (2018) report several studies establishing a generational effect on moral judgment: millennials are more likely than people born earlier to find the "utilitarian" option permissible in sacrificial dilemmas such as the footbridge and crying baby cases.

The X-Phi research reviewed in the previous two paragraphs provides ample reason to believe that people in different demographic groups often have significantly different moral intuitions about cases and often make very different moral judgments about them. But in discussions of moral relativism, this has rarely been doubted. What has been challenged is the claim that there are cross-cultural differences in underlying moral principles that combine with a wide range of non-moral beliefs to yield judgments about cases. And the experimental literature currently available does not come close to settling this issue. With the exception of the studies by Brandt and by Peng et al., there has been little systematic effort to determine whether demographic differences in moral intuition can be traced to differences in non-moral beliefs. Moreover, the studies reporting the influence of psychopathy and levels of empathy on moral judgments are just one facet of a vast recent literature that has been investigating the many ways in which the psychological systems responsible for emotion and for a wide range of other processes may interact with underlying moral principles to produce moral judgments. As Young and Saxe (2011) report, "recent evidence … suggests that all moral judgments reflect the complex output of numerous psychological processes [including] controlled cognition and mental-state reasoning [in addition to] emotional responding." For example, studies indicate that "moral judgments are affected by individual differences in cognitive style, and working-memory capacity." And these differences could lead people who have identical underlying moral principles to make quite different moral judgments. Young and Saxe go on to note that:

> moral judgments are affected by individual differences in reasoning about intentions. Recently, we have discovered that individual differences in moral

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[6] Following the widespread practice in the experimental literature, we'll use the term "utilitarian" (in scare quotes) for judgments that morally approve of causing the death of a small number of people to save the lives of a larger number. However, as Kahane et al. (2015) note, in many cases these judgments would not be condoned by philosophers in the Utilitarian tradition.

[7] For discussion of this interpretation of Banerjee et al. (2010), see Machery (2017), 62-3.

[8] A number of other studies, including Bartels & Pizarro (2011) and Gleichgerrcht & Young (2013) have reported that psychopathic personality traits and low empathy correlate with participants' "utilitarian" responses when they are asked *which option they would choose* in these sorts of dilemmas, rather than explicitly asking for a moral judgment.

judgments of accidents (good intent, bad outcome) are correlated with individual differences in the engagement of a cortical region dedicated to mental-state reasoning, the right temporo-parietal junction (RTPJ) (Young & Saxe, 2009). Participants with a high RTPJ response weigh beliefs and intentions more heavily when judging accidental harms, assigning less blame for the unintended bad outcome; participants with a low response blame more on the basis of the outcome alone. Temporarily disrupting RTPJ activity using transcranial magnetic stimulation also resulted in more outcome-based moral judgments (Young, et al. 2010).

These effects could lead people to make different moral judgments even if they share all relevant underlying moral principles.

The take home message, here, is that there are many different ways in which diverging moral judgments about cases might be produced even if the people offering these diverging judgments shared *all* of the same underlying moral principles. So while the X-Phi literature exploring demographic differences in moral intuition and judgment has uncovered a number of intriguing facts, it has not (yet) made a convincing case for the claim that underlying moral principles vary in different demographic groups.

2. X-Phi and Epistemological Intuitions

In one of the earliest and most widely cited X-Phi papers, Weinberg et al. (2001) reported substantial cultural differences in intuitions about familiar epistemological thought experiments. Their most striking finding focused on a Gettier case:

Bob has a friend, Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American car.

After reading the case, participants were asked:

Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it?

The two responses available were:

REALLY KNOWS
 and
ONLY BELIEVES.

The participants were undergraduates at an American university with various cultural backgrounds. 74% of participants whose cultural background was European responded that Bob only believes, but 57% of participants whose cultural background was East Asian, and 61% of participants whose cultural background was South Asian responded that Bob really knows! One reaction to findings like this is to take them as evidence for the

hypothesis that different cultural groups have different concepts of knowledge (Jackson, 1998, 32; Stich and Tobia, 2018; Stich and Mizumoto, 2018). However, the Weinberg et al. study had a number of methodological flaws, most notably quite small sample sizes, and two more recent studies failed to replicate the Weinberg et al. results (Seyedsaymadost, 2015; Kim and Yuan, 2015). Other studies using somewhat different methods and materials also failed to find cultural differences in Gettier intuitions (Nagel et al., 2013; Turri, 2013).

Recently, two much larger, more systematic, and more methodologically sophisticated studies found evidence that a substantial majority of participants in a wide range of cultures have the intuition that protagonists in Gettier cases do not have knowledge (Machery et al., 2017a; Machery et al., 2017b). The Machery et al. (2017b) study, which included over 2000 participants in 23 countries, speaking 17 languages, also found no gender difference in Gettier intuitions.

Could it be that the concept of knowledge is innate, as the linguist Anna Wierzbicka (2018) has argued? In the wake of the findings reported in Machery et al. (2017a), we cautiously hypothesized that there may indeed be an innate core folk epistemology. But we now think that conclusion was premature, since there has been very little cross-cultural exploration of epistemic intuitions in response to other sorts of hypothetical cases. Moreover, in one recently published study, Waterman et al. (2018) found that knowledge judgments of Americans and Chinese are notably more sensitive than those of Indians to a salient possibility of error in "skeptical pressure" cases. Focusing on very different demographic categories, Starmans and Friedman (2014) have found that there are striking differences in intuitions about Gettier cases between philosophers and academics in other disciplines, and Machery at al. (2017b) found that a number of personality traits, including conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience have a substantial effect on Gettier intuitions. All of these findings appear to pose a challenge to the innate core folk epistemology hypothesis. However, Machery et al. (2017b) also reported that reflectiveness, as measured by the Cognitive Reflection Task (Frederick, 2005), correlated with the intuition that protagonists in Gettier cases do not have knowledge. This might be interpreted as evidence that people who report that Gettier cases *are* cases of knowledge are making a performance error – a judgment that does not reflect their own underlying concept of knowledge.

The bottom line is that there is still a great deal we do not know about cultural and other sorts of demographic variation in epistemic intuitions. The epistemic relativist who contends that the concept of knowledge varies across demographic groups will get at best very limited support from recent work in X-Phi.

3. X-Phi and Metaphysical Intuitions

Though a number of philosophers, anthropologists and linguists have maintained that people in different cultures have fundamentally different metaphysical concepts (Foucault, 1972; Lévy-Bruhl, 1923; Whorf, 1956), there has been very little work in this

area by experimental philosophers. The single exception is a study by Rose et al. (in press) that focused on the concept of artifact persistence, using an updated version of the classic "Ship of Theseus" puzzle (Rose, 2015):

> John is an accomplished woodworker and sailor, whose lifelong hobby is building rowboats by hand. He built his first rowboat—which he named "Drifter"—thirty years ago. Over the years there has been wear and tear, and every single one of the original planks in that rowboat has been replaced.

> John—never one to throw anything out—has stored all of the original planks in his shed over the years. Last month John—realizing that he had accumulated enough old planks for a whole rowboat—took out his old plans for Drifter and assembled these old planks exactly according to his old plans. John now has two rowboats of the same design: the rowboat that resulted from gradually replacing the original planks used to build a boat thirty years ago and that now has none of its original planks, and the rowboat just built one month ago with all and only the original planks that were used thirty years ago.

> John has promised two of his friends—Suzy and Andy—that they can borrow Drifter for an outing. But Suzy and Andy disagree on which of the two rowboats is actually Drifter. Andy thinks that the rowboat just built a month ago is actually Drifter since it has exactly the same planks, arranged in exactly the same way as Drifter originally had. But Suzy thinks that the rowboat that resulted from gradually replacing the original planks used to build a boat thirty years ago is actually Drifter since, even though it has all new parts, this was just the result of normal maintenance.

Participants were asked whether they agreed with Suzy or Andy, and offered two options:

> (1) I agree with Suzy that Drifter is the rowboat that resulted from gradually replacing the original planks used to build a boat thirty years ago and that now has none of its original planks.

> (2) I agree with Andy that Drifter is the rowboat built a month ago with the planks and plans that were used thirty years ago.

Data were collected from over 2700 participants in 23 countries, speaking 18 languages. In some cultures, including the USA, Italy and China, a substantial majority of participants chose the first option. In other cultures, including Spain, Mongolia and Indonesia, about half the participants chose the first option and about half chose the second. And in the two small scale societies included in the sample, the Nasa people in a remote area of Colombia, and Bedouin in Israel, a majority of participants chose the second option. This is an intriguing finding. Though it is only one study, it suggests that there may indeed be dramatic differences in the concept of artifact persistence both between and within cultures.

The disagreement between compatibilists, who insist that free will and moral responsibility can exist even in a deterministic universe, and incompatibilists, who deny this, has been a staple of philosophical debate from Hobbes and Hume onward, and there is now a substantial X-Phi literature exploring people's intuitions about a wide variety of cases.[9] In a cross-cultural study, Sarkissian et al. (2010) found that a majority of participants in four very different cultures – Colombia, Hong Kong, India and the USA – agree that "it is possible for a person to be fully moral and responsible for their actions" in a deterministic universe. But on a very different demographic dimension, Feltz and Cokely (2009) found that judgments about free will and moral responsibility are influenced by personality. Extroverts are more likely than introverts to give compatibilist responses. Though we know of no philosophical relativists who have focused on personality differences, we are inclined to think this may be a fruitful area for relativists to explore.[10] Finally, Hannikainen et al. (ms) report a systematic cross-cultural difference in the role of sourcehood (being the ultimate source of one's action) in ascription of responsibility and free will: Sourcehood matters much less in Asian countries than in the rest of the world, in line with Asians' tendency to explain actions by appealing to the situations of agents (an explanatory style called "situationism") instead of intrinsic properties of agents.

4. X-Phi and Intuitions About Reference

Appeals to a theory of reference play a surprisingly large role in philosophical arguments in metaethics, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of race, and elsewhere (Bishop and Stich, 1998; Mallon, et al., 2009). Thus a great deal turns on which theory of reference is correct. Since the revolutionary work of Kripke (1972/1980) and Putnam (1975), that is a question that has been hotly debated. Although many different sorts of arguments have been invoked in these debates, hypothetical cases and appeals to intuitions about those cases have unquestionably played an important role. Indeed, Mallon et al. (2009, 338) maintain that "Kripke's masterstroke was to propose a number of cases that elicited widely shared intuitions that were inconsistent with traditional descriptivist theories."[11] But in an early and widely discussed X-Phi paper, Machery et al. (2004) set out to explore whether those intuitions were shared in other cultures. One of the cases they used borrowed both the fanciful story and much of the wording from Kripke (1972/1980):

> Suppose that John has learned in college that Gödel is the man who proved an important mathematical theorem, called the incompleteness of arithmetic. John is quite good at mathematics and he can give an accurate statement of the incompleteness theorem, which he attributes to Gödel as the discoverer. But this is

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[9] For useful overviews see Björnsson and Pereboom (2016) and Chan et al. (2016).

[10] For further discussion, see Hannikainen et al., ms.

[11] Descriptivist theories of reference for names maintain that the referent of a name is the person or object that uniquely or best satisfies a description that speakers associate with the name. By contrast, causal-historical theories, of the sort proposed by Kripke, maintain that the referent of a name is the person or object that plays an appropriate role in the causal explanation of the speaker's current use of the name. Both theories have been elaborated in a variety of ways. For a useful overview, see Cummings (2016).

the only thing that he has heard about Gödel. Now suppose that Gödel was not the author of this theorem. A man called "Schmidt", whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work, which was thereafter attributed to Gödel. Thus, he has been known as the man who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. Most people who have heard the name 'Gödel' are like John; the claim that Gödel discovered the incompleteness theorem is the only thing they have ever heard about Gödel. When John uses the name "Gödel," is he talking about:

(A) the person who really discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic? Or

(B) the person who got hold of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work?

The participants in this experiment were students at an American university with European cultural background, and English-speaking Chinese students at a university in Hong Kong. A majority of the American participants chose (B), which Machery and colleagues took to be the appropriate response if a Kripke-style causal-historical account of reference is correct for proper names, but a majority of the Chinese participants chose (A), the response that would be appropriate according to a description theory of reference for names. In both cultural groups, there was also a substantial minority who made the opposite choice. Sytsma et al. (2015) report similar results in a study that compared the reference intuitions of American and Japanese participants, and in his 2017 book, Machery assembles a list twelve studies using a variety of vignettes and response options, *all* of which report an Asian/Western difference in intuitions about the reference of proper names, with Westerners always being more likely than Asians to choose the causal-historical response.[12]

The Machery et al. (2005) study provoked a firestorm of controversy, with some critics arguing that the question asked in the study was ambiguous (Ludwig, 2007; Deutsch, 2009; Sytsma and Livengood, 2011), some arguing that the study elicited the wrong intuitions (Martí, 2009; 2014), some arguing that the experiment had targeted the wrong participants (Devitt, 2011a; 2011b), and some proposing and conducting experiments with different designs (Devitt, 2015; Devitt & Porot, 2018). Machery and colleagues have responded to just about all of these arguments (Machery, 2011; Machery and Stich, 2012; Machery et al. 2013; Machery, 2014; Machery et al., 2015).

Space does not permit discussing any of these debates in detail. But we will offer a few admittedly partisan observations. The first is that it is now very clear that there are both cross-cultural and within-culture differences in the sorts of semantic intuitions that have often been appealed to in debates between advocates of causal-historical theories of reference and advocates of descriptivist theories. That leaves philosophers concerned with reference with a pair of uncomfortable options. The first is to develop and defend some way of deciding which theory of reference is correct without appealing to these culturally

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[12] See Cova et al. (in press) for one failed replication.

variable intuitions. While a few authors, most notably Devitt and Porot (2018) have made some progress in this direction, there is a long way to go.[13] The second is to acknowledge that the sort of semantic intuitions that must be used as evidence for a theory of reference do indeed vary both between and within cultures. This would, of course, lend support to the contention that reference works in different ways in different cultures, which is a version of (R-i), the descriptive relativist contention that has been our focus in this paper.

It might be thought that relativism about reference is an anodyne view, quite unlike relativism about moral principles, or knowledge, or basic ontological categories. Students learning French are warned about *faux amis* – words like "bras" and "location" that have very different meanings in English and French. There is nothing philosophically problematic about these cases. So one might think that differences across cultures or individuals in how the reference of terms is determined would be philosophically unproblematic. But Mallon et al. (2009) argue that this would be a mistake. Central to their argument is the observation that if intuitions about bizarre hypothetical cases (like Kripke's Gödel case) are crucial evidence about the contours of a speaker's reference relation, then reference differences, between individuals or between cultures, are typically covert and very difficult to discover. Thus it is very difficult to determine whether a pair of philosophers who seem to disagree on an ontological question actually do disagree; and it is equally difficult to determine whether philosophers who seem to agree on an ontological question are actually talking past one another.

5. Are the Folk Moral Relativists or Relativists or Objectivists?

Our previous four sections have been concerned with the contributions X-Phi might make to assessing the claims of descriptive relativism. In this section we consider the role X-Phi can play in determining whether ordinary people ("the folk") are moral relativists or moral objectivists. Why should philosophers care about this? For many philosophers, the folk view provides an important constraint on metaethical theorizing. If the folk are objectivists about morality, then a metaethical theory that seeks to give an account of the nature of morality should also be objectivist, or, if it is not, it owes us an explanation of how the folk came to be mistaken about the nature of morality. Michael Smith provides a straightforward statement of this view.

> [W]e seem to think that moral questions have correct answers; that the correct answers are made correct by objective moral facts; that moral facts are wholly determined by circumstances and that, by engaging in moral conversation and argument, we can discover what these objective moral facts determined by the circumstances are."

"The philosopher's task," Smith tells us, "is to make sense of a practice having these features" (Smith, 1994, pp. 6 & 5). These passages are quoted in Sarkissian (2016) who

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[13] For an argument for this conclusion, relying on Devitt's attempt to provide a detailed theory of reference in his 1981 book, *Designation*, see Machery et al. (2013), p. 624 ff.

also quotes passages from Frank Jackson, Stephen Darwall, Simon Blackburn and Richard Joyce, all of whom agree that commonsense morality is objective. Other philosophers have been more than a bit skeptical about the alleged anti-relativism of folk morality. In response to Jackson's claim that the folk are committed to moral objectivism, Stich and Weinberg (2001) couldn't help "wondering whether Jackson ever talks to undergraduates," since many of *their* undergraduates claimed to be moral relativists.

Smith also provided an idea that experimental philosophers have adopted in their attempts to test the claim that folk morality is objectivist, not relativist.

> It is a platitude that our moral judgments at least purport to be objective…. Thus if A says "It is right to Ø in circumstances C" and B says "It is not right to Ø in circumstances C" then we take it that A and B disagree: that at least one of their judgments is true. (Smith, 1994, 86)

Do the folk agree? Two early experimental explorations of the question, by Nichols (2004) and by Goodwin and Darley (2008), concluded that the answer was yes. But a closer look at the Goodwin and Darley study suggests a more complicated picture. Their participants gave very different answers about different moral issues. Beebe and Sackris (2016) and others have reported similar findings. The picture became even more complex when a study by Sarkissian et al. (2012) showed that objectivist responses declined if the disagreeing parties were said to be from different cultures or from different planets. Providing some experimental backing for Stich and Weinberg's quip, Beebe and Sackris also found that relativist responses were strongly correlated with age; moral objectivism is at its lowest during the late teenage years and early adulthood. "At first glance," Beebe (2015) writes in an article reviewing these and other findings, "these data appear to be bad news for the dominant view in analytic philosophy that ordinary individuals are moral objectivists." But he goes on to argue that there are significant methodological problems in all of these studies. The bottom line, we think, is that experimental work, to date, has certainly not shown that the folk are moral relativists, but it offers little encouragement for the many philosophers who insist that the folk are moral objectivists.

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