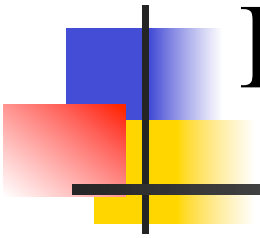


Philosophy as Interdisciplinary Research.



Olav Gjelsvik
CSMN, Oslo



Philosophy of Philosophy

- We have recently seen a development towards a philosophy of philosophy modelled on philosophy of biology, psychology and so forth. It is fair to say that philosophy of science has not contributed much to this development; it is rather a development by methodology conscious philosophers.
- There is, however, in this turn itself an acknowledgement of wanting to learn from the way philosophy of science has fruitfully approached various disciplines when turning to the discipline of philosophy.



Evidence in philosophy

- One major aspect of that discussion concerns the evidential basis for philosophical insight.
- Disagreements on that point reflect substantive disagreement as to whether philosophy as a discipline is set apart from other disciplines, by for instance basing itself on *intuitions* and having conceptual insights as its aim, or whether there is no such philosophical separateness, and no such aim as pure conceptual insight.
- Alvin Goldman represents the first line and writes: “One thing that distinguishes philosophical methodology from the methodology of the sciences is its extensive and avowed reliance on intuition.”



Intuitions?

- If we take Goldman's view literally, we tend to see philosophy as very different from any empirical science, in that the evidential base is largely made up of intuitions. Such a view raises a number of issues, not least issues about what intuitions are, and how we know them.
- A different view would maintain that intuitions simply are theoretical judgements that can always be revised in the light of further theoretical development. In that case, they have no special evidential role.



Are there analytical truths?

- Philosophical intuitions, however, seem very close to judgements about 'conceptual content'. Goldman's view is vulnerable to a trashing of the distinction between conceptual truths and empirical truths.
- Timothy Williamson has argued both against the metaphysical version of such view, the view that meanings or conceptual content make the analytical truths true, and against the epistemological version, the thesis that possessing or mastering a concept brings with it knowledge which is knowledge of analytical truths concerning the correct application conditions of that very concept.



No significant distinction

- If there is no substantive or interesting distinction between the analytic and the non-analytic, then the picture of the core of philosophy as devoted to the exploration of conceptual truths as something sharply different from empirical truths, cannot be upheld.
- If so, there is little attraction in the view that the evidential ground on which philosophical knowledge rests is something special and very different from the ground of other kinds of knowledge.
- Philosophical insight is, in that case, typically made up of correct high level theoretical judgements.



Herman Cappelen: Philosophy without Intuitions

- Cappelen's work complements Williamson's work.
- A main part of it consists in a careful and very valuable investigation into the question of whether philosophers do rely extensively on intuition (in some special sense) even when they claim they do.
- Result: they do not; they do not rely on intuition in their work in any other sense than that of appealing to theoretical judgements. There is thus a mismatch between what many philosophers do, and their own understanding of how they go about it.



Morale from this?

- Williamson's basic message is that many philosophers' conception of their own activity is faulty: In fact it is impossible to achieve insight into the conceptual side of a terrain marked by a sharp distinction between the conceptual and the empirical.
- Cappelen's basic message is that philosophers don't do what Goldman claims they do or what they often claim themselves to be doing; they do not in fact rely on *intuitions* in their arguments.
- What are the implications for how to actually do philosophy? Remove misconceptions and go on as before? Or should philosophy change in some way?



Ought philosophy to go about things differently ?

- It is important that there is no special evidential ground for philosophy.
- Philosophy should simply find the best ways of making progress in philosophical questions. More interdisciplinarity might be one such way.
- I shall discuss one example of interdisciplinary work, interdisciplinary inside and outside philosophy, and argue that this kind of work clearly serves progress in philosophy. How big a place such work should have I will not discuss.
- The example is addiction.



Addiction's significance

- Involves two clusters of issues in the philosophy of action:
 - A. Freedom of the will and responsibility.
 - B. The concept of intentional action and issues around weak will/acrasia.
- The first cluster concerns among other things how to understand (possible) impairment in freedom, something which is a great challenge for views on freedom and responsibility.
- The second cluster concerns how to account for agency itself, what intentions are, the relationship between rational intentions and judgements etc.



Further aspects of addiction

- Same phenomenon studied by fundamentally different disciplines, i.e. decision science and neurophysiology
- These disciplines employ very different explanatory mechanisms, from hyperbolic discounting to specific neural mechanisms.
- Little interaction between these disciplines, little discussion of how the various explanatory mechanisms explain in the light of how the mechanisms in the other disciplines explain. Do they compete, or do they complement each other? How do the explananda relate?
- The way towards a unified approach to the phenomenon is long and tortuous.



An important finding in addiction research

- Berridge and Robinson: Motivation in mammals is seen as two systems that normally work together.
- “Likings” are stable and cognitively informed.
- “Wantings” fluctuate much more, even if they typically are in some harmony with “likings”.
- In addictions ‘wantings’ and ‘likings’ come apart: we can get cases where we do not “want” what we “like”, or do not “like” what we “want”. We desperately “want” a cigarette without “liking” smoking it.



How philosophical work here matters to science

- The basic issue of whether the general approach to motivation should be 'monist' or not, is an old one in philosophy. Philosophy can in this area be an important contributor to generate hypotheses that can be empirically tested in ways not conceived of in earlier days.
- Philosophy and philosophy of science can contribute in a number of ways in clarifying and resolving some of the issues around very different disciplines trying to address and explain what looks like the same phenomenon. On this background philosophy can contribute to scientific integration and progress.



More about how philosophy matters

- There is here a three-way meeting point between neuroscience, behavioural science and philosophy, and philosophy has specific tasks in the division of labour:
- Philosophy, and the philosophy of science as well, can thus contribute towards seeing and working out the significance of some of the findings. The particular benefit might be a new and empirically informed conception of agency with a resolved approach to impaired agency, and to how such a conception matters for a range of issues. (That is now in the process of being done by Richard Holton and Kent Berridge in a joint work Holton will present in Oslo in early November 2011.)



How it matters for philosophy

- The possibility of a ‘dual’ system approach to motivation (grounded in neurophysiology) can be of great help when trying to make progress on some very deep issues in philosophy. Here are some examples:
- The huge debate in meta ethics about whether normative or moral judgements are intrinsically motivating (internalism/ externalism issues) ought to be informed by such findings.
- How to conceive of acrasia or weakness of the will have to be discussed all over again. Many of the arguments against its possibility from ancient time will have to be reconsidered, partly because they often rely on contentious conceptions of normative judgement we cannot obviously uphold in the light of the present findings.



Further significance in philosophy

- We also have to reconsider philosophical views of compulsion that seem to block conceiving of compulsion as intentional action with some, albeit limited, sort of freedom.
- Another huge area in philosophy that can benefit much from this new knowledge is all the work around the mind-body problem. The various types of dynamic interaction between the neurophysiological level and the intentional level in addictive behaviours make up a rich source for new and more concrete ways of thinking about this age old problem.
- Another not purely philosophical area has to do with developing informed views on addiction which can ground both ethical and legal decisions involving the addiction, responsibility of addicts etc. Can heroin addicts give informed consent to be given free heroin in experimental treatment?



Even further significance

- Finally, the background outlined seems to me to make possible new and constructive interactions between work in more general philosophy and more specialized work in the philosophy of science, to mutual benefit of both. The focus on phenomena that are being studied from different disciplines and where the findings can have major implications for philosophy itself seems to be the exactly right focus to bring about new and interesting interactions between philosophy of science and other parts of philosophy. To my mind that interaction has suffered somewhat lately; here is one way forward with benefits to all.



Conclusion

- I set out to provide reasons for a change in the way philosophy is done towards interdisciplinarity inside and outside philosophy. I have looked at the grounds for this in the work done under the heading philosophy of philosophy, and this work I basically see as ground clearing, not directly suggestive for how to go about things.
- I have then provided substantive grounds for thinking interdisciplinarity very beneficial by looking at the one case of addiction. I believe there are many cases that support the same general type of conclusion, there are are very good cases at this conference, but here I limit myself to this one.



Last words

- I have not discussed how much there should be of this kind of interdisciplinary work. There is always a question of balance here
- As the size of philosophy grows, the various disciplines in philosophy become more and more self-sufficient with little interaction with other disciplines within philosophy. We all, including philosophers of science, need to address whether there is reason to modify this development in some ways.