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THE METHOD OF CASES
A CASE STUDY

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to propose an alternative interpretation of the method of cases, analyze two of its particular implementations in the theory of knowledge, and argue that the method of cases, according to this interpretation, is not prone to challenges posed by its recent critics, such as Edouard Machery (2017). The core of the proposed interpretation is that the method of cases consists of two steps (the case description and the target argument) and that the case description does not *elicit* judgments about the applicability of the concepts in question. In fact, case descriptions do not elicit anything at all; rather, they *show* some facts, usually some factual distinctions among relevant situations. Specifically, the Gettier cases and the Fake Barn cases show a certain differentiation in the ways of holding beliefs. How to adjust the concept of knowledge to such differentiation — if at all — belongs to the argumentative step.

Keywords: method of cases, Gettier cases, Fake Barn, Edouard Machery, methodology, metaphilosophy, theory of knowledge

In the classical predicate calculus, formula $\forall x(Px \vee Qx) \rightarrow [\forall x(Px) \vee \forall x(Qx)]$ is not logically valid. Students attending courses of elementary logic are taught that this formula is not logically valid because for a certain domain (e.g., natural numbers) and for some properties P and Q (e.g., being even and being odd), it is the case that all objects in this domain have either P or Q, while it is not the case that either all objects have P or all objects have Q. Thus, in this domain, under this interpretation of the predicates, the antecedent of the formula is true while the consequent is false, which makes the whole formula false. Consequently, since it is false in a certain domain, it is not logically valid.

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It is worthwhile to consider the dialectics of this lesson. Two steps can be distinguished here. First, students are given a description of a situation in which the formula under consideration is false. Second, they are (tacitly) reminded of a standard definition of logical validity and presented with a simple, one-step argument saying that formulas false in some domains are not logically valid under this definition. Note that no part of this lesson serves the purpose of "eliciting" students' intuitions or judgments about what it takes for a formula to be logically valid. Rather, the description of the situation imposes something on the students. It *shows a certain fact* — namely, that for some domain and for some properties, the antecedent of the formula is true while the consequent is false. The argument part does not elicit anything either. Drawing on the fact shown by the description and on the tacitly assumed definition of logical validity, the argument *shows* that the formula under consideration is not logically valid.

However, while the fact (that for some domain and some properties P and Q it is the case that all objects in this domain have either P or Q, while it is not the case that either all objects have P or all objects have Q) is undeniable — that is, whoever fails to acknowledge this fact commits a mistake — the conclusion of the argument (that the formula under consideration is not logically valid) is not thus undeniable, since it rests on a tacitly assumed definition of logical validity. One can avoid this conclusion by challenging and changing the definition. It is possible, although improbable, that the community of logicians comes to the resolution that by "logical validity" they will understand, say, the well-formedness of formulas of a certain calculus. This would change a whole lot in logical terminology, but it would not change logical facts: there are still formulas that are true in all domains under all interpretations of predicates, and there are formulas that are false in some. We can coin new names for these categories, but it would hardly affect the core of the matter.

The main aim of this paper is to propose a new interpretation of the method of cases used in philosophy, inspired by the logical validity case discussed above. Since this construal would not appeal to eliciting intuitions or judgments, let us dub it intuition-free interpretation of the method of cases (IFMC). The secondary aim is to show that, according to the IFMC, the method of cases is not prone to challenges posed by its recent critics, such as Edouard Machery (2017) or Avner Baz (2017). In section one, a general model of the method according to the IFMC is sketched, while section two analyzes two particular implementations of this model in the theory of knowledge, showing that important actual uses of the method of cases can be recapitulated in terms of this model. Finally, a rejoinder to Machery's critique is offered in section three.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE METHOD OF CASES

According to the IFMC, the method of cases consists of two steps. Step one is the case description. The case description does not "elicit" intuitions or judgments, or opinions, about anything. It shows a certain fact (the Fact). The Fact often consists in some difference between two types of lower-level facts and is framed as a difference in situations in which these facts obtain. Thus, on many occasions, we might say that case descriptions show some factual distinction, such as the distinction between "All *x*-s are P or Q" and "All *x*-s are P or all *x*-s are Q." The case description aims at *making* the hearers or the readers aware of the distinction regardless of their background (intuitions, judgments, opinions) so far.

Step two is the target argument. It is an argument that goes from the Fact to the claim under consideration (the Claim). It can have explicit and implicit premises. One of the explicit premises is the (statement of the) Fact. In the validity case, the target argument is relatively simple and says: "Consequently, since the formula is false in a certain domain (= the Fact), it is not logically valid (= the Claim)." The Fact is the only explicit premise here, while the definition of logical validity is an implicit one (and theoretically possible to withdraw at the cost of terminological reforms). Arguably, the target arguments in most philosophically interesting applications of the method of cases tend to be more complex — examples will be given below.

Ideally, the case description should not depend on any special conceptual competence, whether "common" or "expert," apart from the usual linguistic competence required for understanding the description. In practice, things get a bit more complicated. Consider again the validity case. On the one hand, although some knowledge about even and odd natural numbers is obviously required in the present formulation, such knowledge is not essential in general, because an analogous case can be made up with colored toys in a sandbox: "Look, all your toys are either red or blue, for there is no other color in your sandbox, yet it is not so that all are red, because some of them are blue, and it is not so that all are blue, for some are red."[1]

On the other hand, a case like the one presented in the introduction, showing that the implication under consideration is false in a given domain, requires some familiarity with the semantic notions of truth and falsity of

[1] It might be an interesting empirical fact to establish for developmental psychology — provided it has not been established already, of which I am simply unaware — what percentage of children at what age successfully grasp the difference in situations correctly described by "all items are P or Q" and "all items are P or all items are Q" respectively.

formulas in a model and with the syntactic notions of antecedent and consequent (and the truth tables for implication). This is something beyond elementary expertise, and it might influence further arguments based upon the case: someone might challenge classical logic or the model-theoretic notion of truth. Thus, in general, it is probably a wise thing to distinguish a bare case description from an enhanced case description. The former requires only a minimal conceptual competence to grasp the described situation, while the latter requires some familiarity with a conceptual frame and gives in return, as its output, some theory-laden facts, such as facts about the truth conditions of certain statements. Alternatively, one might acknowledge that the borderline between the case description and the target argument is somewhat vague, and that there might be some parts of the cases that some analysts include into the case description, while some other analysts would keep them on the side of the target argument (and discuss together with more sophisticated and less obvious parts of the argument). I will ignore this complication in further analyses and consider enhanced case descriptions as step one of the method.

2. THE METHOD OF CASES IN THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In this part of the paper, I will concentrate on the method of cases as used in the debates on knowledge ascriptions, particularly the Gettier cases and the Fake Barn cases. It is commonly said today that the Gettier cases and the Fake Barn cases "elicit judgments" as to whether the protagonists of the scenarios used in these cases know things they believe (see, e.g., Turri 2016, Machery 2017). The IFMC, however, casts entirely different light on these cases.

2.1. GETTIER CASES

Edmund Gettier (1963) presented two cases; let us focus on Case II: *Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona*. According to the case description, Smith believes this disjunction because he believes — and is justified in this belief — the first argument of this disjunction. He does not believe the second argument of this disjunction taken separately. However, it turns out that the first disjunct is false, albeit justified, while it is the second disjunct that — by sheer coincidence — makes the whole disjunction true. This is the Fact shown by the case.[2] It elicits nothing. It shows that there are true dis-

[2] Gettier notices that we need here an additional premise that "it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false" (Gettier 1963: 121). The case

junctive beliefs such that one of the disjuncts is justified but false, while the other is true but unjustified.[3] Note that the Fact does not depend in any way on anything like the concept of knowledge or the meaning of the word "know" (and even less on anyone's judgment about these matters).

Step two: target argument. The target argument, as we saw, is an argument supporting the Claim and taking the Fact as one of its explicit premises. The Claim here is that Alfred Ayer's and Roderick Chisholm's definition of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) is inadequate, for there are justified true beliefs that are not knowledge. Yet to get to the Claim from the Fact, a handful of additional premises is needed. First, we need to establish whether disjunctive beliefs, such as those featuring in the Fact, are justified beliefs. Certainly, they are true. This stems from the stipulation that one of the disjuncts is true and from the truth table for disjunction in classical logic. But are they justified? We need another premise here, saying that "for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q" (Gettier 1963: 121). Let us call it the entailed justification principle. It is a fairly natural principle, yet it is not a law of logic; theoretically, it might be chosen to be sacrificed in order to save the JTB theory of knowledge. In other words, one may consider the Fact as a counterexample to this principle rather than to the JTB theory. Only together with the entailed justification principle does the Fact yield the claim that there are justified true beliefs such that their justification and their truth are not related: the justification is mistaken while the truth is unjustified.

Thus far, the case involves a conceptually enhanced observation. Namely, given the entailed justification principle, classical logic, and the notion of justification allowing for justified but false statements, on the grounds of the case description, it is simply a fact that within the class of justified true beliefs (JTBs) there is a distinction: there are JTBs such that their justification is relevant to their truth (JTB-R), as it is in typical cases of knowledge, which are tacitly assumed from the background, and there are JTBs that lack this property, as shown explicitly in the case description (JTB-IRR). No one can rationally deny this distinction, unless one challenges one of the premises (the entailed justification principle, classical logic, or the notion of justification).

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description here gives us the Fact only within a certain conceptual frame, in which "justification" is coherent with "falsity." Thus it might be considered as an enhanced case description — see the previous section.

[3] Actually, the other disjunct, taken separately, simply is not a belief; it is not endorsed at all by the subject, whether with a justification or without one. The subject endorses the whole disjunction and the false disjunct — but not the true one.

Still, anyone can consider how — if at all — this distinction should be reflected in terminological conventions regarding the term "knowledge." Should one say that whoever holds a JTB-IRR that *p* does not really know that *p*? This depends on the purpose the concept of knowledge is supposed to have in a given conceptual frame. There is a variety of reasons for calling some kind of belief "knowledge." One might call "knowledge" beliefs firmly held as opposed to tentative ones. One might call "knowledge" beliefs somehow justified as opposed to mere guesses. One might call "knowledge" beliefs broadly shared as opposed to personal idiosyncrasies. One might call "knowledge" beliefs not necessarily true but justified according to the best available standards (as in saying that "it was common knowledge in the Middle Ages that the Sun revolves around the Earth"). One might call "knowledge" all JTBs or just JTB-Rs. One might call "knowledge" only indubitable truths justified according to absolutely infallible standards. And so on and so forth. I guess (or perhaps even know it in one of the senses) that in different contexts or in different cultures or in different social strata the concept of knowledge has been applied in all or at least in many of the abovementioned understandings (and perhaps in many more). Because "knowledge matters" in our social life (Turri 2016: 337), it is an interesting point for sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, anthropology, history, etc., to find out empirically which shades of "knowledge" are applied in which circumstances. At the same time, philosophers are justified in narrowing their usage of "knowledge" in some professional contexts, and in focusing — in these contexts — on a certain subset of ways of holding beliefs, highlighted for theoretical reasons. Namely, philosophers are entitled to focus on the class of true beliefs that are justified according to the best standards available for justification of a given sort of belief. Let us call it "the general framework definition of knowledge."

The general framework definition of knowledge has some normative dimension — through the appeal to "the best standards." It remains quite tricky to specify how exactly the standards should be evaluated. That is what epistemologists are trying to grasp. One can gesture towards the predictive or explanatory power, or several other epistemic properties, in order to justify a given evaluation of different ways of holding beliefs, yet there might be substantial disagreement even among specialists, depending on their broader philosophical views. Whatever the details may be, to argue that justification relevant to truth is better than justification that is irrelevant is part of this framework. And this statement, together with the Fact, on the grounds of the entailed justification principle and the general framework definition of knowledge, leads to the conclusion that Smith does not know what he believes (the Claim).

Importantly, I am not claiming that all or most philosophers endorse the general framework definition of knowledge. There is a fairly plausible terminological alternative according to which "knowledge" is taken to refer to "beliefs justified according to reasonably high standards (even if they are not necessarily true)." In this sense we can speak of "scientific knowledge" and apply the term to the grand theories of the past (and to our contemporary theories, which are, given the fallibility of scientific paradigms, almost certainly false, literally). This terminological convention invites us to distinguish different kinds of knowledge, such as "bare knowledge," "failable knowledge" (Turri's term), "very failable knowledge," etc., discussed by John Turri (2012: 250). It is the general framework definition of knowledge, however, that is more or less explicitly endorsed by Ayer and Chisholm, and it is Ayer's and Chisholm's theory that is explicitly assumed by Gettier as a background for his analyses.[4]

2.2. FAKE BARN CASES

The Fake Barn cases — modelled after Alvin Goldman (1976) — show some further differentiation among justified true beliefs with justification relevant to truth (JTB-Rs). According to the case description, Henry the protagonist believes that he is looking at a real barn, it is true that he is looking at a real barn, and his justification for it — a visual sensation he has — is relevant for the truth of this belief (for he can properly see a real barn). But this is, again, a sheer coincidence, since there are fake barns in abundance in that area, the one picked by Henry happens to be the only real one. "By assumption" (Goldman 1976: 774), the actual state of affairs in which Henry is looking at a real barn is indistinguishable for him from a state of affairs in which he would

[4] It should be clear by now that accusing Gettier of "manipulating his audience" by "inserting his own verdict into the description of the case" — as in (Turri 2016: 339) — goes too far. Gettier cannot be accused of distorting his thought experiment, because his case is not an experiment. It is an observation of a certain logical fact — and an argumentation, based upon this observation, formulated within explicitly acknowledged framework of Ayer's and Chisholm's epistemology. Admittedly, Gettier did not elaborate the part of this framework relevant for his purposes and did not mention explicitly all the premises. He just said that "if these two conditions hold [that "Jones owns a Ford" is justified for Smith but false and that "Brown is in Barcelona" is unknown to Smith], then Smith does not KNOW that (h) ["Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona"] is true" (Gettier 1963: 123). It is a shortcut, but he does not insert his verdict into the description of the case: the lack of knowledge is a partial conclusion, not a premise here. Gettier did not commit *petitio principii*, he just established his argumentative starting point beyond which he would rather not step in a three-page-long article. More on argumentative starting points in (Deutsch 2015: 124).

be looking at a fake barn. The latter state of affairs is counterfactual but highly probable, thus relevant.

The case shows that justification that is relevant to truth may nevertheless be obtained purely by chance. The Fact is that within the category of JTB-R there are still (at least) two distinct ways of holding beliefs: (1) beliefs with relevant justification enabling us to distinguish the actual state of affairs in which a given belief is true from a relevant possible state of affairs in which this belief would be false (JTB-R-D) and (2) beliefs with relevant justification failing to enable such a distinction (JTB-R-FD). This fact, again, does not depend on anybody's intuitions, judgments, opinions, or — for that matter — on the cultural background or the content of the concept of "knowledge" one happens to possess. This is a part of the reality of human cognitive abilities; a fact that one cannot circumvent by moving to Hong Kong.

Now, again, that JTB-R-FD is not knowledge is not a point of the case description. The Claim that Henry does not know that he is looking at a real barn is a *conclusion* that can be reached through the target argument; it is not a premise. In Goldman's case, this argument is substantially more complex than in Gettier's. In particular, Goldman explicitly invokes a definition of knowledge, a rather unusual meaning of the verb "know" he intends to use, labelled by the Oxford English Dictionary as "early" sense of the word, according to which "to know" means "to distinguish (one thing) from (another)." Inspired by this old and half-forgotten tradition, Goldman explicitly proposes his technical terminology for philosophical use and stipulates that — philosophically — a person is to be said to know that *p* "just in case he *distinguishes* or *discriminates* the truth of *p* from relevant alternatives" (Goldman 1976: 772). Subsequently, Goldman begins a detailed argument clarifying what "relevant alternatives for *p*" are meant to be. He also contrasts his proposal with relevant alternatives to his theory in the literature — notably, the non-accidentality analysis (Unger 1968) and the indefeasibility approach (Lehrer, Paxson 1969, Klein 1971). In the course of the argument, Goldman gestures sometimes towards the broadly understood purpose of introducing a new definition, like when he accuses the indefeasibility approach of being "too strong" (in the sense of excluding too many instances of holding beliefs from the scope of the term "knowledge"). The premise of this part of the argument is a tacit assumption that the definition of knowledge would be of little use if nothing or almost nothing counted as knowledge under this definition. But even that is far from drawing on the "common" concept of knowledge; it is rather just a common-sense methodological requirement, of which we are often reminded in logic textbooks, that if one is going to introduce a new synthetic definition, she is required to demonstrate that this definition would capture some interesting category of objects or phenomena.

Admittedly, Goldman somewhat incautiously used phrases like "most of us would have little hesitation in saying [that Henry knows]" or "we would be strongly inclined to withdraw the claim that Henry knows" (Goldman 1976: 772-773). However, these excursions into the field of psycho-sociology of beliefs have no bearing on the logical structure of his reasoning. We can delete them, and the upshot remains untouched. Nothing in Goldman's argumentation depends on whether he is right or wrong about "our" conceptual preferences. Accordingly, a critique along the line that Goldman's cases are unreliable because Goldman's views about what we would say are unwarranted would be mistaken.[5]

To sum up, according to the IFMC, the Gettier cases or the Fake Barn cases do not elicit judgments about knowledge. They elicit nothing. Nowhere do they depend on any kind of intuition or conceptual competence regarding the term "knowledge" or its counterparts in different languages or on the broadly psychological concept of knowledge. They show a certain factual differentiation among the ways of holding beliefs and present arguments for how this differentiation should be acknowledged within a certain conceptual frame, based upon certain premises.

What people mean by "knowledge" is perhaps an interesting piece of knowledge about people, but not about knowledge. That is why it might be useful to check on this meaning when doing social sciences, psychology, or anthropology; but it is not very useful in philosophy. While Turri's claim that "one main goal of philosophy is to help understand knowledge" (Turri 2016: 337) is certainly right, it is not the main goal of philosophy to decide which terminological convention is best suited for discussions about knowledge. To understand knowledge is to see relevant subtleties in the ways of holding beliefs, not to fuss about how to name them.

3. PHILOSOPHY UNBOUND

I have provided an IFMC-based recapitulation for two related cases. On the one hand, it is just a small part of the field in which the method of cases has been exercised; on the other, it is a paradigmatic and highlighted part. This grants some credibility to the hypothesis that the method of cases applied in some other areas of philosophy would conform to the IFMC as well.[6]

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[5] As it happens, Goldman was not exactly right in his imagining who would say what and when. Common reactions to fake barn cases turned out to be more diverse and complicated than he thought. For details, see (Machery 2017) and empirical research discussed there.

[6] In the first place, this applies to cases that indeed show some distinction, for a dis-

This is a conjecture that needs to be tested by a series of other case studies of the use of the method of cases in philosophy; yet it is plausible at first sight. Under this hypothesis, a serious counter-challenge is posed to recent challenges to philosophical methodology from the perspective of experimental philosophy, such as (Machery 2017).

In his inspiring book, Machery goes through many characterizations of the method of cases, weighing their relative strengths and weaknesses; but even the minimalist account, which he finally endorses, assumes that cases elicit judgments about philosophical concepts or theories. And yet there is an account of the method of cases, namely the IFMC, according to which cases do not elicit anything — they just show facts. None of the possible interpretations of the method of cases Machery discusses (and discards) comes close to the model described in the present paper.

I would agree with much — indeed, almost all — of Machery's argumentation. In particular, I am very sympathetic towards Machery's balanced mixture of exceptionalism and anti-exceptionalism according to the use of the method of cases in philosophy. I can echo his claim that "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" (Machery 2019b: 609). The difference, however, is that I do not think this activity consists in producing judgments about target claims.[7] What we do in response to cases is try to accommodate facts shown in the case de-

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tinction in truth conditions is a logical fact. Strict identity in truth conditions is also a logical fact (namely, logical equivalence). There are cases, however, which aim at showing a certain analogy instead, such as the violinist case (Thomson 1971). Analogy is not identity though. In fact, it is more like a distinction — a distinction that is regarded as irrelevant from a certain perspective. We might say that analogy is a distinction-*cum*-interpretation. This might be an obstacle to the IFMC concerning such cases, since it is important for the IFMC to separate two steps: step one, in which a certain fact is demonstrated, and step two, in which the target argumentation takes place. In analogy cases, step one contains a great deal of argumentation concerning alleged irrelevance of factual differences. This is not to say, however, that analogy cases conform to the picture sketched in (Machery 2017). I would rather contend that some refinement of the IFMC would capture relevant details here. Perhaps a detailed analysis of the analogy in each case would be needed, which would result in splitting the analogy into a series of logical equivalences joined by argumentative parts — to the effect that Facts and Claims would come alternately in the course of a reasoning. The processing of such a mixture would require even more logical scrutiny and professional training; and folk opinions would be even less valuable for getting towards the ultimate Claim than one might expect in regular single-distinction cases.

[7] That is why I cannot simply echo an earlier formulation of Machery's claim, saying that "philosophical cases elicit judgments that do not differ in kind from the judgments we make about the same topics . . . in everyday circumstances" (Machery 2017: 43).

scriptions, provided we have grasped them successfully, to our picture of the world, and to rearrange our conceptual framework according to the changes in this picture. While these activities in philosophy and in everyday life belong plausibly to the same genus, they are quite different in specific details, because — here I fully agree with Machery again — philosophical cases, unlike everyday cases, are "disturbing" in the sense introduced in chapter 3.5 of his book (Machery 2017: 111-120). In particular, they are unusual (like forming disjunctive beliefs in the form of "Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona" on the basis of one's belief in just one of the disjuncts),[8] and they pull apart what usually goes together (like justification and truthmaking). Thus, I follow Machery in claiming both that (1) philosophical use of cases is not exceptional, in a sense, because neither the intellectual resources needed nor the type of output obtained differ importantly in philosophical use and in "lay" use,[9] and that (2) in a sense it is exceptional, since philosophical uses of cases have some disturbing characteristics, which lay uses lack.[10]

Furthermore, I agree that, because of these disturbing characteristics of philosophical cases, philosophers cannot rely on their own (or anyone else's) conceptual competence in classifying facts described in the cases. Thus, while the immediate reaction to a case in philosophy remains of the same type as in everyday life, the reflective part aiming at accommodating the fact shown by the case description to some broader theoretical frame requires the deployment of quite different resources. For, while in everyday life one can rely just on a received conceptual framework encoded in regular meanings of the words of one's spoken language and brought to the fore by one's linguistic competence, such resources — as Machery rightly points out — are unreliable in philosophical cases, stretched far beyond the regular use of everyday con-

[8] As Turri has rightly noticed, protagonist's beliefs in Gettier cases are "weird," "for no stated reason," and "very unnatural" (Turri 2016: 338).

[9] In this I also agree with (Williamson 2007).

[10] In this I also agree with (Cappelen 2012). Perhaps such a balanced attitude triggered some misunderstanding between Machery and Alison Springle over Machery's alleged (anti-)exceptionalism (Springle 2019, Machery 2019b). Springle seems to confuse Machery's notion of "proper domain" of a concept with her notion of "domain of relevance" (Springle 2019: 599). The domain of relevance of a concept is the domain in which the concept can be applied without committing a categorial mistake (thus, for instance, leaves do not belong to the domain of relevance of the concept of justice). In contrast, the proper domain of a concept is the domain in which concepts are applied in everyday life and which is governed by common conceptual competence (thus their application is *reliable* in this domain). Philosophical cases fall within the same domain of relevance of concepts as everyday cases (in this respect philosophy is not exceptional), but they fall outside the proper domain of these concepts (thus in this respect philosophy is exceptional — namely, exceptionally unreliable, according to Machery).

cepts, where common linguistic competence simply collapses. The experimental work reported in chapter 2 of (Machery 2017) shows that people's opinions on Claims are in many ways distorted.[11] People, including philosophers, initially just do not know what to say about philosophical cases. But it is philosophers' job, not lay persons', to figure it out eventually.

What philosophers do with cases, according to the IFMC, is a sort of "conceptual synthesis" or "conceptual engineering" rather than applying received concepts to situations to which they certainly do not fit. For, according to the IFMC, the cases do not elicit judgments about Claims. They show Facts. Most emphatically, these Facts are not "facts" about alleged common ground among people in general or philosophers in particular. They are facts about certain distinctions "out in the world," which hold irrespectively of anyone's views about them. This is the core point of the IFMC, not just that the method of cases comes in two steps. A twofold structure is not a novelty, the role of arguments in reflection about cases has been highlighted, for instance, in (Deutsch 2015), (Cappelen 2012), and also — in discussion with Machery — in (Levin 2019). Machery is right that mere differentiation of two steps would not save the method of cases, for "the process of reaching a reflective equilibrium depends on its starting point. If the judgments elicited by philosophical cases . . . are suspicious, then the result of this process should also be suspicious" (Machery 2019a: 251). But the IFMC does not claim that "when considering philosophical cases, philosophers simply make judgments about the situations they describe, and take it for granted that some facts hold or would hold in these situations" (Machery 2017: 178). The core of the IFMC is that the first step, the case description, does not elicit judgments at all. That is why Machery's critique of Herman Cappelen's and Max Deutsch's interpretations would not affect the IFMC.

Common ground is a rare bird. What is common among philosophers is rather a disagreement about the moral of a given case. And understandably so. The Claims are to be reached from the Facts through arguments, drawing on many additional assumptions, often tacit. These assumptions may vary according to a broader philosophical perspective and theoretical goals. When it comes to the common opinion of lay people, still further variables come into play. A particular context, social status, cultural background, etc. influence the relative power of different arguments and counter-arguments in the eyes of the informants. The overall judgment about the Claim may also be relative

[11] Many of the original findings of experimental philosophy turned out to be in need of some correction, due to insufficiently scrutinized methodology behind them or because of replication failures. Illuminating analyses can be found in Adrian Ziółkowski's works (2017, 2021a, 2021b), one of them in this volume.

to the salience of different aspects and thus, in experimental settings, it may reveal susceptibility to such elements of these settings as, say, order of presentation (priming effect, contrast principle, etc.). There is nothing unusual or surprising about that. This does not by itself undermine the reliability of the method of cases, because the goal of the method, according to the IFMC, is not to discover and reflect people's views about philosophically interesting matters.

Whether people's views matter at all in philosophy is, incidentally, an interesting philosophical question. They have certainly nothing to do with the Facts shown in case descriptions. But they may have some relevance for the target arguments. As Deutsch (2015: 160) rightly noticed, "Data about people's philosophical beliefs and intuitions are relevant to philosophy in a broadly *ethical* way; that is, such data are relevant to how . . . we should understand the social practices of different groups of people." We might find a deep respect for common conceptual knowledge in certain strands of philosophy — for instance, in the works of John Austin or Peter F. Strawson. But even there the limits of this common knowledge are acknowledged: "The analytical philosopher uses words which belong to common discourse in senses rather different from, and wider than, those that they ordinarily possess" (Strawson 1992: 23). And even if we honestly want to get informed by common conceptual knowledge as it stands (which does not belong to the basic toolkit in many fields of philosophy), it must say something informative to us. While it is a wise thing to do for philosophers to synthesize their conceptual framework at least roughly in accordance with uniform, prevailing, unanimous verdicts of the folk, the collapsing competence that generates confused and varied verdicts can hardly constrain philosophical engineering. Other criteria must be brought to the fore there.[12]

It would go far beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate the notions of conceptual synthesis and conceptual engineering any further. Some details are given in my (Tałasiewicz 2020). The idea of conceptual synthesis in philosophy was overtly discussed as early as in (Łukasiewicz 1906), a very influential paper in the Lvov–Warsaw School. English translation of this paper is going to appear for the first time in (Jadacki, Simons forthcoming). Elabora-

[12] In this respect I find myself puzzled by the attitude of some of the defenders of the method of cases who would take philosophical "intuitions" as problematic in cases where common opinion is varied and unstable (Sosa 2007: 102). To me, these are exactly the cases in which linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, or cognitive scientists have to step back, since their empirical grounds are shaky, and it is philosophers who are called to the forefront of the battle for understanding — precisely because they do not rely on common conceptual competence in their work.

tion of Łukasiewicz's metaphilosophy can be found in (Będkowski 2020). Independent (and rather not convergent, as far as I can tell) ideas of conceptual engineering recently appeared in (Cappelen 2018). Machery himself seems to embrace some idea of conceptual synthesis — or "prescriptive conceptual analysis," as he would call it — modelled after Carnapian explication of lay concepts (Machery 2017: 213-220). While he is right that this sort of conceptual re-engineering of old concepts requires previous description of these concepts in their actual use, which is arguably an empirical enterprise, conceptual synthesis under the IFMC is not restricted to reforming old concepts. It is rather designed for introducing new concepts, constrained by factual distinctions in the world rather than actual use of language.[13]

CONCLUSION

To sum up, I agree with Machery that the method of cases would be unreliable if it were to be construed in his way. But his presentation does not account for an important feature of the method of cases, described in the present paper. Admittedly, many philosophers who use the method of cases in their philosophy and many defenders of this method in metaphilosophy — some of them cited in (Machery 2017) — characterize this method in a way that makes it susceptible to Machery's critique. The talk of "eliciting judgments" is not at all Machery's figment of imagination, it is rather a common way of speaking nowadays. However, the dialectic of my argument is such that a mere example of the IFMC shows that Machery's critique ultimately misses its target. For his arguments against the method of cases do not work against this version of it; they only undermine the "eliciting judgments" type of talk. Anyone who acknowledges Machery's charges against the method of cases, but still wishes to retain the results obtained through this method, is free to abandon this unfortunate way of speaking and to keep the method in the IFMC version.

Machery is right that popular philosophical practices should be modified and, indeed, "modestified" — not in the core of their methods though, but in

[13] That is why also Baz's criticisms would not affect the IFMC. According to Baz, the method of cases involves considering whether a case described falls within the extension of the concept under investigation; a problem arises if the meaning ot the concept is heavily context-laden, as contextualists maintain (Baz 2017). The IFMC would not accept such a characterization of this method and is not vulnerable to challenges from the contextualist standpoint. For, according to the IFMC, it is not the concepts and their use that we are investigating through this method.

the phraseology and "folk metaphilosophy" employed there. He is right, too, that if the method of cases consisted in eliciting judgments about philosophical matters, it would be unreliable. However, according to the IFMC, it does not consist in eliciting judgments. It consists in showing subtle distinctions and accommodating them to a theoretical conceptual frame. And even if philosophers notoriously cannot come to agreement about their preferred framework and target conclusions, philosophy witnesses a continuous cumulative growth of discovered distinctions.[14] An infinite number of them has characterized every philosophical debate.

Not all philosophical distinctions are equally easy to grasp: one can go from relatively obvious facts like the difference between using and mentioning, through the difference between homonymy and context-sensitivity or between referential use of descriptions and attributive use of descriptions, to subtle distinctions like the difference between truth-*in*-a-world and truth-*at*-a-world (in possible worlds semantics) or the difference between truth-conditions scheme for thoughts according to Two-Dimensional Relational Descriptivism and according to Mental File Singularism.[15] It is likely that — in the course of studying philosophy — some students at some point find themselves unable to grasp some of those subtleties. Some may decide to quit the business, some might just persuade themselves that there must be some difference if their teachers say so, without really grasping it in detail. None of these sociological and psychological facts about studying philosophy have any bearing on the distinctions as such. They simply *are* out there. Even if only very few people can grasp them, they remain real. Psychological difficulties may inspire a search for a better way to present these distinctions to other people. And that is what skillfully composed case descriptions are for: to help people see subtle distinctions.

Thus, Machery ultimately is not right when he proposes "desk rejection" of the articles relying upon argumentative uses of the method of cases in philosophical journals (Machery 2019b: 620). Each use of the method of cases deserves a competent reviewer to decide whether it shows something interesting and how the fact shown is used in argumentation. Let philosophy be philosophy.

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[14] It seems that "hair-splitting" is perhaps not the least accurate metaphor of philosophical inquiry.

[15] Cf. Recanati 2012: a whole chapter of this book is devoted to making this difference intelligible for professional philosophers.

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