

Against the Use of Intuitions in Investigating Where
There's Consciousness

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1 Introduction

Intuitions are widely used in the investigation of consciousness,¹ as well as across philosophy. For instance, many people will assert their complete confidence that their cat has phenomenal experience. However, this confidence isn't the result of any careful study or reasoning but rather an intuition or "gut feeling".

In this paper, I argue that intuition is not a useful tool in these investigations. This has two major consequences: First, we should not take intuitive judgements of where consciousness is to be good evidence. Second, we should severely restrain our use of thought examples. To make the argument, first I will draw out several uses of intuitions in the current discourse. These will give us a target. Then, I will elaborate on what intuitions are. There is a live debate on this, but because my argument is against the use of the thing I'm calling "intuitions" rather than about the proper use of the term, I don't need to take a substantive position. Rather, the section will serve only to fix what we are talking about here. Following this, I will turn to how a collection of stories show how unreliable our intuitions are. Finally, I will offer some options to avoid the use of intuitions.

2 The Current Role of Intuitions

We should consider first the prevalence of the use of intuitions in the consciousness literature. In this section I will leave the term loosely defined with the promise to tighten the definition once this section's examples are articulated. Intuition's use comes at several stages of investigation. For instance, Schwitzgebel defines consciousness by example, using intuition to grasp the important resemblance among the examples. Moreover, he argues that the modes of definition that don't lean so strongly on intuition, i.e. analytic or functional, don't work for consciousness since the concept is simple (rather than composite) and there's no agreed-upon functional role

1. By "consciousness" in this paper I refer specifically to phenomenal consciousness. This is often articulated as the "what-it's-like"-ness of a certain entity, but see further in this paper for a brief discussion of the debate over the details.

of consciousness.² This is a rather fundamental role for intuitions as it lets them set the entire frame of discussion. This does in fact seem to be the way “consciousness” is generally defined: some collection of entities are identified as a group, and the label is applied to the salient thing in common. Usually an appeal to what-it’s-like-ness is then made, but these are two different ways of defining “consciousness” and they’re taken to be the same only because the first group is (intuitively) considered to be the same as the group picked out by “things that there’s something that it’s like to be.”

Strawson lambastes another rather basic use of intuitions in going after deniers of conscious experiences’ commitment to “the fundamental intuition of dualism, the intuition that the experiential and the physical are utterly and irreconcilably different.”³ Similarly, but in more depth, the popular Integrated Information Theory at its foundation relies on intuitions. Oizumi, et al, refer to their basic intuitions as “axioms”. If we take their descriptions of the axioms as “self-evident truths about consciousness” that “cannot be doubted”⁴ to be correct, then they might not fall into the same realm as the intuitions under discussion here. However, they aren’t quite so obvious. That consciousness exists, is compositional, is informative, is integrated, and is exclusive have all been seriously doubted. What they have, then, is a collection of strong intuitions at the foundation of IIT.

The other main area we find intuitions being used for investigations of consciousness is in the use of thought experiments and science fiction examples. For instance, Block has us consider a creature that is functionally the same as us but physically different, though at least he can escape to real, though complex, creatures.⁵ In arguing for the conditional that if materialism is true then the United States is probably conscious, Schwitzgebel uses examples of creatures that can be conscious at a distance and creatures with brains made of ants to argue for consciousness that isn’t spatially contiguous and group consciousness. On the other hand, he uses these to

2. Eric Schwitzgebel, *Perplexities of Consciousness* (Bradford, 2011), 92–94.

3. Galen Strawson, “Realistic Monism - Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 13, nos. 10-11 (2006): 5.

4. Masafumi Oizumi, Larissa Albantakis, and Giulio Tononi, “From the Phenomenology to the Mechanisms of Consciousness: Integrated Information Theory 3.0,” *PLoS Computational Biology* 10, no. 5 (2014): 2–3.

5. Ned Block, “The Harder Problem of Consciousness,” in *Consciousness, Function, and Representation* (MIT, 2002/2007), 404–405.

challenge our intuitions against such things,⁶ so the work of the argument is pitting intuitions against intuitions. He has to contend with the bizarreness of the US being conscious.⁷ Of course, that the US is conscious seems bizarre is just an intuition against it, so if we take this solution, then there's simply nothing to balance. This is how these stories usually operate: There's a prima facie intuition, then a story is used to draw out some opposing intuition, and we're supposed to then drop the prima facie intuition. If we just drop the intuitions altogether, then there's no prima facie intuition left to oppose, and we can't trust the intuitions drawn out by the story over agnosticism. There are some thought experiments where the results of the experiments are themselves the philosophically interesting data, but for investigations of consciousness, we more often find the stories operating as intuition pumps.

3 What “Intuition” Means

As promised, we need a clearer notion of what qualifies as an intuition. Being an intuition in the important sense here initially seems to involve some sort of history of the belief or judgement. An intuition may be an answer, belief, or judgement gravitated towards prior to reflection. This initial definition is insufficient since an intuition may remain an intuition after reflection. Many philosophical arguments pit two intuitions against each other. For instance, an argument operating via modus ponens ultimately asks the reader to find the conclusion more plausible than the falsity of the premises. Otherwise the argument can be flipped into a modus tollens for the opposite side.⁸ Many of these arguments pit intuitions against each other. If any reflection turned intuitions into something else, then there would be no possibilities by the end of the argument. However, we can't just say that once a belief is an intuition it remains an intuition since sometimes reflection (or other evidence) makes a belief no longer an intuition. For instance, I may have had an intuition that no largest prime can be found, but once I saw a proof of it, my belief stopped being an intuition. Or at least it stopped being *merely* an intuition.

6. Eric Schwitzgebel, “If Materialism is True, the United States is Probably Conscious,” *Philosophical Studies* 172, no. 7 (2015): 1699–1702.

7. *Ibid.*, 1698.

8. Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Ed. Anscombe and von Wright) (Harper Torchbooks, 1969).

Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich similarly say that an intuition⁹ is “simply a spontaneous judgment about the epistemic properties of some specific case—a judgment for which the person making the judgment may be able to offer no plausible justification.”¹⁰ This definition focuses on intuitions as judgments, and highlights how they tend to be foundational.

Bengson argues instead that intuitions are unlike beliefs, judgments, desires, imaginings, seemings, and so on, and that instead they are more similar to perceptions. They are presentations, rather than representations; and they’re fundamentally non-voluntary and baseless, among other similarities.¹¹ For instance, IIT’s axioms would count as intuitions with Bengson’s idea of intuitions even if they are self-evident truths. So while he disagrees with the positions thus forth regarding what kind of thing an intuition is, he does at least agree that intuitions are baseless. While he then goes on to argue that we still ought to trust intuitions, that argument is outside the scope of this paper. One could consider, too, Sosa’s claim that “to intuit that p is to be attracted to assent simply through entertaining that representational content.”¹² Nagel argues, like Bengson, that intuitions are rather like perceptions.¹³¹⁴ What’s important is that intuitions are essentially baseless but often taken to be a reliable source of information or a worthwhile investigative tool. There are further possibilities, though they either fit the picture here or else just add principles to exclude certain beliefs from qualifying as intuitions, such as conceptual competence. If intuition is defined in part by exclusion, then if the exclusions are irrelevant to the point at hand, then it’s easy enough to expand any criticism of intuition to the similar states.¹⁵

Our purposes thus far have been concerned less with intuition qua belief, attitude, judgement,

9. They use the term “epistemic intuition”, but since that’s the only relevant kind here, I simply use “intuition”.

10. Jonathan M. Weinberg, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, “Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions,” *Philosophical Topics*, 29, nos. 1-2 (2001): 432.

11. John Bengson, “The Intellectual Given,” *Mind* 124, no. 495 (2015): 707–760.

12. Ernest Sosa, “Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Intuition,” *Philosophical Studies* 132, no. 1 (2007): 99–107.

13. Jennifer Nagel, “Intuitions and Experiments: A Defense of the Case Method in Epistemology,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, no. 3 (2012): 495–527.

14. For another analysis of the possibilities, see Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, “Intuition in Contemporary Philosophy,” in *Rational Intuition*, ed. Lisa M. Osbeck and Barbara S. Held (Cambridge university Press, 2016), 192–210, especially §2.

15. See Herman Cappelen, *Philosophy Without Intuitions* (Oxford University Press UK, 2012), Chapter 1 for a description of some of these possibilities.

or any other similar such mode of being, but rather with the role of intuitions as investigative tools. We can then take the baselessness found in these investigations of intuition and combine them with our basic understanding of intuitions as investigative tools. Thus, an intuition for our purposes is something playing a role in establishing a position (belief, attitude, etc.) that is not explicitly based on anything else.¹⁶ This is of course not to say that they come into existence *ex nihilo*. Indeed, later in this paper I argue that they are unconsciously picked up from the surrounding culture. That many people have a strong gut feeling that cats have phenomenal experience is just the result of having a certain psychology and living in a certain kind of culture.

4 The Problem With Intuition

Let's turn now to the main point of this paper: To illustrate that intuitions are bad tools for investigating consciousness. The problem arises from the fact that many myths, religions, and stories involve a human consciousness ending up in a non-human vessel. Sometimes the human is transformed, and sometimes the consciousness is transferred to an existing object. The end result might be a human mind in an animal's body or an inanimate object. In one classic story, someone is even transformed into a rainbow. I'll refer to any stories like these as "transformation stories". Stories like *Toy Story* that feature sentient inanimate objects without any implication of once being human also do similar work: While they are not transformation stories themselves, they pose basically the same challenge. Stories in which the conscious non-human is an inanimate object, I'll call "inanimate transformation stories".

People tend not to have trouble understanding these stories. They're widely popular across different contexts and appear as a rather common type of myth. However, they are, to our knowledge, impossible. There's no way to take a human mind and place it in a rock, nor is there any way to transform someone into a rock. While a fictional story exiting the bounds of reality is nothing surprising, philosophical investigation frequently tells short stories to gather

16. One may object that an intuition might be used in weaker ways, such as establishing the possibility of something being the case. (I thank Erich Reck for this objection.) However this would still be a position regarding the possibility of something being the case. It may also be used just to explore the conceptual landscape. I take this to be a different purpose and therefore not the kind under discussion here.

our intuitions as a source of evidence. In considering what entities might be conscious, we make analogies, tell stories, and draw on our intuitions directly. When we consider animals as candidates for consciousness, we import a conscious organization somewhat similar to ours. Robots and aliens, too — if you observe a robot and take it to be conscious, then you probably see some features similar to your own and map their features onto yours. A putatively conscious talking computer probably has inner speech, for instance. But inanimate transformation stories offer us examples of us taking radically different objects to be conscious in ways that simply do not make sense in this sort of way. There's no part of a wreath that sees, nor even a part that one would presume thinks. With a human, if you chop the head off, the consciousness ends.¹⁷ With a conscious wreath, would cutting destroy it? Would burning? Could the plastic be melted down and reformed into some other shape? A story could answer yes or no to any of these questions and be just as intuitively understandable.¹⁸ In everyday life, people come across different creatures and intuit whether the creature is conscious. Perhaps dogs seem conscious but worms do not. But, transformation stories give us examples of things that seem conscious but are almost certainly not. With the language refined a bit, we have the following three statements:

1. Inanimate transformation stories are intuitively understandable.
2. Human consciousnesses cannot be in inanimate objects.
3. If a story is intuitively understandable, then its involvements should be assumed possible.

If we combine these with that if something is impossible, then it should not be assumed possible, then these statements entail a contradiction. The first and third statements entail that the involvements of inanimate transformation stories should be assumed possible. Since inanimate transformation stories involve human consciousnesses in inanimate objects (by definition), human consciousnesses being in inanimate objects should be assumed possible. But

17. At least the normal human consciousness ends. If something like panpsychism is right, then perhaps some consciousness we haven't knowingly observed yet continues.

18. Complicating this, there are some reports of certain dissociative experiences akin to those described in transformation stories. Thus not only do we have our imaginations giving us bad intuitions, but self-experience also apparently gives bad intuitions.

since human consciousness cannot be in inanimate objects and if something is impossible then it should not be assumed possible, human consciousnesses being in inanimate objects should not be assumed possible.

Given this contradiction, we should deny at least one of these three statements. Thus, I will next argue for the truth of the first two. I'll first consider the evidence that transformation stories are intuitively understandable. Then, I'll consider denying that human consciousnesses cannot be in inanimate objects. Several interesting metaphysical options must be considered, though an extended judgement between them is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead I leave the option open while identifying naturalists as bound to rejecting this option as well. Finally, I'll consider denying that if a story is intuitively understandable, then its involvements should be assumed possible. This turns out to not be a particularly bold move on its own, though actuality implies possibility, so if we end up not able to even conclude possibility, then we can't conclude actuality. Moreover, we have plenty of reason to strengthen it, as I will examine. While all of the corollaries of the strengthened claim will not be able to be articulated, a significant corollary is that our intuitions about the abundance of consciousness across entities should not be considered to reflect reality.¹⁹

4.1 We Do Have These Intuitions

To save the use of intuitions, one might try to deny that inanimate transformation stories are intuitively understandable. In using “intuitively understandable” I mean that consumers of the stories have an intuition that the story makes sense. The consumer accepts a belief-like attitude towards the story and no objections arise. Another way of putting it that I take to be the same

19. Before I begin, I perhaps should consider objections to the unlisted premises in the deduction of a contradiction. They are, again, the definition of an inanimate transformation story and that if something is not possible then we should not assume that it is possible. I use the term “inanimate transformation story” as with the definition from the beginning of this paper stipulated. Perhaps one might think the label is inappropriate for one reason or another, but nothing hinges on the particular word choice. One might object to the latter premise by providing an example in which we should assume something is possible despite its not being possible. A full analysis of any proposed counterexample would require a plunge into the debate on whether we ever ought to believe falsities. However, the three numbered premises alone do entail that something false ought to be believed. If nothing precluding this will be assented to, then the three premises do not in fact entail contradiction. However, much of the analysis of strengthening the denial of the third premise could easily be adapted to identifying particular areas in which we ought to believe falsities.

is that for a story S to be intuitively understandable to a person A , A must have an intuition that S makes sense. What I mean by “accepts” or “makes sense” is somewhat loose and fuzzy. However, so is the notion of intuitive understandability. Because inanimate transformation stories come out so clearly on the side of being intuitively understandable, we can safely move past the fuzziness here.

Earlier, we said that an intuition for our purposes is something playing a role in establishing a position (belief, attitude, etc.) that is not explicitly based on anything else. Thus an intuitive understanding is an understanding that is an understanding akin to an intuition in that it isn’t explicitly based on anything else. For contrast, we can look to scientific explanations. Some of them are not very intuitive at all. To understand, for instance, that mass isn’t a basic property of matter²⁰ requires going beyond intuitions and into other modes of coming to understand. In our day-to-day affairs, too, we sometimes encounter unintuitive understandings. Someone’s story may seem incredulous until the right details are added to enable understanding. Though, most explanations we encounter are intuitively understandable stories. After all, the point of communicating such a story is to be understood.

With some understanding of intuition established, we should move on to understanding understanding. For our purposes, specifically our understanding of stories. When we consume stories, we suspend disbelief, especially if the story is openly fictional. That we are suspending disbelief implies that there is some disbelief to suspend. Presumably the possibility of a human consciousness being present in²¹ an inanimate object is one of the things we’ll suspend our disbelief about for the sake of a story.

Revealingly, the genre of the story will determine which things we’re willing to suspend disbelief for. The genre of a story (and its other features, but genre especially) sets the bounds of verisimilitude. That is, events in a story will feel right or wrong based on the kind of story being told. For example, in a high fantasy story, someone casting a transformation spell and the target thereafter remaining conscious would not feel out of place. When a boy is turned into a

20. Jim Baggott, “Physics Has Demoted Mass,” 2017,

21. I’m using “in”, though one might prefer “as”, “with”, or some other preposition. I don’t think anything hinges on this.

puppet in “The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Real Puppet”,²² there’s not much room for surprise given the tale is set in a mystical world.²³ In a science-fiction story, a technology that performs the transformation seems plausible as well. Even in religious nonfiction we see transformation. For instance, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, God transforms Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt. If the story involved her remaining conscious, the event wouldn’t seem out of place. But if you were to come across that in a biography from the past century, you would find it wholly unbelievable. And even in fiction, if a realistic historical novel suddenly threw in a magical transformation, then the transformation would seem entirely out of place and the story much less coherent.²⁴

4.2 Thought Experiments

If you want to deny that we have the intuitive understanding, then you might be able to do so by just shifting the genre. The transformation stories are works of fantasy, science-fiction, religion, and other genres that tend to have a pretty substantial suspension of disbelief. In the case of religion, “suspension of disbelief” might be the wrong term since some people do believe the story. Nonetheless, the bounds of verisimilitude are different from stories bound to the mundane and natural. Moreover, someone who believes a religious transformation story is no longer denying the intuition; she’s accepting the possibility, which I address in the next

22. Sonata Arctica, “The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Real Puppet,” *Reckoning Night*.

23. I thank Joseph Gallagher for reminding me of this and the more-famous Pinocchio. Pinocchio is a story of a puppet turning into a boy, so it’s basically the opposite of a transformation story as defined here. One may wonder where the eponymous character’s mental traits come from, but his consciousness seems less confusing since it is more like a light turning on than any features that could have been otherwise. (Unless consciousness is substantively different from one person to another, for instance as suggested in Schwitzgebel, *Perplexities of Consciousness* in the chapter on attention. Schwitzgebel suggests one (perhaps unintuitive) possibility is that some people just have more of their perceptions conscious than other people do. If these contingent properties of consciousness exist, then there are some further questions to ask of Pinocchio.

24. In personal correspondence, Justin Domicillo points out to me that the story of Lot’s wife turning to salt would come with her losing consciousness. He also remarks that I make the religious distinct from the historical, perhaps making it a bit close to fiction. With regard to Lot’s wife, I agree, and if Julian Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Houghton Mifflin, 1976) is correct, then nobody was conscious at that time, anyway. However, a modern reader who hasn’t explored the theology and Biblical exegesis may well read Lot’s wife as remaining conscious without problem. My point here relies only on the fact that that reading is possible because of the story being religious. With regard to my categorization of religious texts as distinct in kind from modern historical texts, yes, they are. While they’re non-fictional because they’re not written as tales to be taken as untrue, they’re different from modern historical texts in that we suspend different varieties of disbelief.

section. So, let's drop religion for now, but return to it in §4.3 as studying it provides a wealth of information about our intuitions. The transformation stories are thus relegated to genres akin to science fiction and fantasy. If we were to excise them from those contexts to plop them into philosophical or scientific works, then we may lose the intuition. If this works, then all we lose is the power of science-fictional and fantastic stories as intuition pumps for philosophical investigation. One might take this to be a costly move, especially given the frequency with which small stories of these kinds do appear in philosophy as thought experiments. Indeed, if we consider transformation stories as thought experiments, then they seem verisimilitudinous within philosophical texts, and the original problem reemerges.

How high is the cost of throwing out philosophical thought experiments that would be out of place in very realistic sorts of stories? Just how realistic remains a tricky preliminary question. One might be able to salvage anything more realistic than a transformation story, though a metric of realism is difficult to establish. For instance, Ibn Sina's Floating Man Argument involves a human coming into being suddenly, already developed, and floating in space without any sensory input. He supposes that the human would still be conscious of her own existence.²⁵ This is clearly unrealistic, so if we're giving up on unrealistic thought experiments, then it must go. Likewise, Dennett's Brainstorm Machine, which transfers experiences between subjects,²⁶ is, as far as we can tell, unrealistic. Perhaps such a machine could be invented in the future, but it's far enough beyond current technology that it would be entirely out of place in a realistic story. Block's China Brain thought experiment, in which the entire nation of China is organized to act like a functionalist's idea of a mind, is a more realistic thought experiment.²⁷ It's technologically realistic, but politically and socially wholly unrealistic. It could happen in a sense of "could" that the Floating Man and Brainstorm Machine could not happen, yet still it's so implausible that any story containing it would exit the realm of realism.

25. Peter S. Goff, *Islamic Philosophy A–Z* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 40.

26. Daniel Dennett, "Quining Qualia," in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, ed. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere (The MIT Press, 1997), 623.

27. Ned Block, "Troubles with Functionalism," in *Readings in Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, ed. Alvin I. Goldman (The MIT Press, 1993), 239–240.

Simulated reality thought experiments, which range from Nozick's Experience Machine²⁸ to René Descartes's Evil Demon, are a bit trickier to place. The whole point of experiments like the Evil Demon is that those conditions are supposed to be observationally identical to reality. If I am in fact being deceived by an evil demon, or if I'm actually a brain in a vat being fed experiences, then everything that I'm thinking of as real (and thereby realistic) already fits in.²⁹ Nonetheless, the point of these thought experiments *as skeptical hypotheses* is that they are not realistic. *The Matrix* qualifies as science fiction because of the simulation involved rather than just the cybergoth outfits. Finally, the Twin Earth thought experiment, involving an entire other Earth with water made of some alternative chemical composition,^{30,31} quite simply goes beyond our chemistry. There's nothing strictly speaking impossible about it, but reality, as we know it, happens on this Earth.

One may object here that there are different varieties of possibility.³² What I'm really after here, one might argue, is specifically natural possibility, and what these stories establish is conceptual possibility. If by "conceptual possibility" all is meant is that people are generally able to think of the alleged possibility can do so without violating some given set of rules, then I of course have no problem, but this tells us little about the world we live in. Chalmers makes a point to distinguish natural and logical possibility. While acknowledging that zombies are probably not naturally possible, he insists that they are logically possible, and even rather obvious. He compares the concept of a mile-high unicycle. Such a description seems coherent, and if someone says that it doesn't, then we don't have much to say besides re-asserting that it does. The burden of proof rather lies with someone claiming that some description is logically impossible. So if someone wants to argue that a mile-high unicycle is impossible, then she has to point out the contradiction in the intensions of "mile-high" and "unicycle". Or, for zombies, what's important is that an open possibility is being described.³³ For his argument, that much

28. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1974/1999), 42–45.

29. See David J. Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics," in *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, ed. Christopher Grau (Oxford University Press, 2005), 132.

30. Hilary Putnam, "Meaning and Reference," *Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (1973): 699–711.

31. Hillary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7 (1975): 131–193.

32. I thank Eric Schwitzgebel for this objection.

33. David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press,

is fine. However, it's crucial that that logical possibility doesn't become thought of a natural possibility or actuality without further work.

From here on, then, when I talk of possibility, I am talking of natural possibility, as it is the relevant notion of possibility to this discussion. To clarify again, in using "natural possibility" I mean that a story is naturally possible if it could happen in the actual world, either now or sometime in the past or future. At least as far as consciousness in the world goes, natural possibility is the kind we want. This may seem to leave open the possibility that fictional tales are just about different worlds that natural possibility has no bearing on. Rather than considering "What if this were actual?" they may be leading us to think "What if a world were similar to ours in every way except this one?".³⁴ Then we could suspend disbelief about one thing and work with conditionals. Then the value of thought experiments would be in establishing conditionals.³⁵ Then we have a genre of stories involving worlds that we don't presently think are actual but either have the epistemic possibility of being actual or else somehow say something about our world despite not being actual. Putnam's Twin Earth may fall into the first category, but that doesn't seem to be its point. Whether it could have value in the second category is unclear. However if all of its work can be done with just our ability to imagine a Twin Earth within the logical rules we've set, then there's no problem here. Nozick's experience machine seems again to fit into either category, though it works well enough in the second category. That the experience machine thought experiment more clearly works may be because it tells us about our values, so that we're really considering a fictional world doesn't affect the point much. Meanwhile anything we might want to know about (actual) consciousness (besides whether we value it) doesn't route through our values. That is, that the experience machine thought experiment works isn't threatened here because all it tracks is our reactions to it. Obviously if we wanted to capture intuitions about what facts are probably true, we could get a lot out of thought experiments, but we're generally less interested in that.

1996), 96–97.

34. See David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (New York, NY: Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) for a general account of possibility claims that operates like this. For our purposes, we would only need this sort of account to apply to the sorts of stories and thought experiments in question, and we needn't be modal realists.

35. I thank Eric Schwitzgebel for suggesting this possibility.

The list of thought experiments that are important in philosophy but are not within the realm of (the genre of) realism could go on, but I think my point is made. Some of them do seem like the sorts of things that might eventually happen. For some thought experiments, that's even the point, just as in a lot of science fiction the interesting bit is speculating about how the future might play out. A thought experiment that gets close enough to reality to actually be real would just become a real possibility.

If indeed giving up thought experiments is too high a cost, then denying the intuition will require denying the intuition even within the quasi-science-fictional or quasi-fantastic philosophical thought experiments. So long as there is a coherence or understandability to the stories, then they must be allowed. One might then just say, "I don't understand what's going on in these transformation stories! The wreath is able to see? I can't even parse this." If someone were unable to understand the story, then the problem never even arises. However, the prevalence of transformation stories in literature strongly suggests that people don't have a problem understanding the stories. The following subsection will go into further depth to show that people understand transformation stories.

4.3 Empirical Evidence Regarding Our Intuitions

Whether people have an intuitive understanding of transformation stories lends itself to empirical investigation. There are some specific points regarding the prevalence of transformation stories and how they fit with how the mind works, but first a few other points should be made. Boyer notes that as we've learned about the human mind, we've learned that it is very much not a blank slate at birth.³⁶ While there are several intuitive explanations for why people have the religious ideas that they do, none of them turn out to be very accurate.³⁷ The explanations he provides are fairly compelling, too, and widespread. However, explanations that try to explain away all religion as just a way to find emotional peace in the face of death or to tell a story about complicated natural phenomena are inadequate. One fairly intuitive thing anthropologists

36. Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (Basic Books, 2001), 3.

37. *Ibid.*, 4-6.

have found is that throughout different places and times, people are satisfied with the idea that things like thoughts and desires, i.e. mental things, have effects on bodies. Only with an unusual training do people come to find that their minds controlling their bodies is puzzling.^{38,39}

Anthropological functionalism is the view that every element of culture exists to serve some function. In the case of religion, that would mean that functionalists explain religion by looking to what function it served its society. While it has its detractors, and while reverse engineering is rarely sufficient for explanation, it is often enough necessary, Boyer argues.⁴⁰ So, he undertakes the process of reverse-engineering our religious concepts. He does, controversially, often take myths literally when arguably that's not the best way to understand their roles in their respective cultures.⁴¹ Still, what's needed for the point here is just that a substantial amount of people have taken the literal interpretations, or at least have had the literal understandings. Metaphorical and other non-literal understandings do not by their existence show the absence of the literal understandings that can cause problems for studying the mind. Nonetheless, to the credit of the intuition-denier, people don't believe just anything, even in the domain of cultural phenomena like religion and stories. Because of how culture operates, cultural phenomena don't vary much.⁴² However, like many cultural workings, religion is not transparent to the mind. That is, when we think about spirits and such, most of the working of our mind is not directly knowable consciously.⁴³ Further complicating the matter, the mind is composed by several inference systems rather than a single explanation system,⁴⁴ so even finding one explanation doesn't ensure much help in finding the others.

Looking at particular beliefs makes it easier to see how only some kinds of beliefs will be

38. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, 15.

39. One may even worry that the worry of this paper is like that: a problem that only emerges in the unusual contexts philosophers and scientists happen to find themselves in. That is, this problem only arises as an object of investigation by the unusual people who will see it as an object of investigation. But this would only even be a problem if we assume that the more common position is somehow superior. Perhaps not asking has some benefits for one's life, but for the purpose of evaluating our intuitions' truth-adherence, actually investigating is almost certainly superior.

40. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, 25–26.

41. I thank Erich Reck for this objection. A deeper investigation of this matter could involve a survey of the relevant part of the anthropology of religion literature.

42. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, 47.

43. *Ibid.*, 49.

44. *Ibid.*, 17.

allowed in religious thought. The bounds of reasonability are not exhaustive. Consider, from Boyer, the possible religious statement: “There is only one God! He is omniscient but powerless. He cannot do anything or have any effect on what goes on in the world.”⁴⁵ This strikes us as an odd thing to believe. None of the concepts involved are any trickier than those in common religions, but the belief has nowhere to come from. That is, there’s no apparent experience that would lead one to infer such a thing. While one might think that it’s just familiarity that makes that sentence weird but “There is one God! He knows everything we do,”⁴⁶ unsurprising, we can find a similar amount of promise as candidates for religious beliefs: “Some people suddenly disappear when they are really thirsty,” “Some ebony trees can recall conversations people hold in their shade,” and “The forest protects us. It gives us game if we sing to it.”⁴⁷ These are unfamiliar, but they are not out-of-place in religious contexts, and they can fit into inference patterns. The impotent God doesn’t figure into any line of reasoning, while the others all clearly have some substantial implications.

In addition to fitting into inferential thinking properly, religious beliefs also tend to fit within intuitive expectations. Fantasies do not easily break free of all constraint.⁴⁸ This is tricky because the intuitive expectations are themselves shaped by the explanations and stories in the culture itself determined by the intuitive expectations. (We should also keep this in mind for fictional stories.) Instead, we have existing archetypes in our mind that can be violated in particular ways. These archetypes work by letting us infer a bunch of information about new species or particulars just from knowing some sort of higher kind it belongs to. When you first learn about cats, you already know some things about animals, and you learn that cats are animals, so then you infer everything about animals is also true of cats. Religious concepts often violate in one particular way. For instance, an omniscient god is a person with special cognitive powers. A ghost is a person with no material body.⁴⁹ A human consciousness in an inanimate object may then be a person with an object body instead of a human body. Alternatively, it may be like Boyer

45. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, 51.

46. *Ibid.*, 52.

47. *Ibid.*, 53.

48. *Ibid.*, 62.

49. *Ibid.*, 63.

describes the concept of a listening statue, as a tool plus cognitive functions,⁵⁰ or consciousness for our purposes. Boyer sums up this fact as follows: “religious concepts invariably include information that is counterintuitive relative to the category activated.”⁵¹ “Counterintuitive,” he notes here, might be better termed “counterontological.”⁵² The important thing is that religious concepts involve some member of a basic ontological category (person, natural object, tool, etc.) with a feature contrary to the features associated with the ontological category.

One intuitive expectation is that species-membership is essential and permanent. Fitting into the pattern of intuition-violating, metamorphoses are common to religious thought. They violate that intuitive expectation by letting a member of one species become a member of another. Certain features, however, are preserved in the metamorphoses. A person who has turned into an animal keeps their own mind. The story would be uninteresting if the person lost their mind and became an ordinary animal.⁵³ Additionally, the metamorphosis stories generally avoid violating intuitive ontological categories too much.

Kelly and Keil further explore the ontological categories, considering instead methods like a dichotomous tree with divisions such as things with spatial location/abstract objects, physical objects/events, animals/plants, and so on.⁵⁴ Looking at Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Grimm’s Fairytales, they found 20% of conscious beings that were transformed in Ovid ended up with forms that were already conscious beings, e.g. another human, and 23% from Grimm. Then 51% and 52% turn to animals, and the rest plants, non-living inanimates, liquids, and events.⁵⁵

50. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, 64.

51. *Ibid.*, 65.

52. *Ibid.*

53. One might be able to concoct such an interesting story, perhaps like the parents-turned-pigs in *Spirited Away*, but these appeal to some other relevance-making factor.

54. Michael H. Kelly and Frank C. Keil, “The More Things Change . . . : Metamorphoses and Conceptual Structure,” *Cognitive Science* 9 (1985): 406.

55. *ibid.*, 408, Table 1, Also note that in one story from Ovid someone was turned into a rainbow. Kelly and Keil didn’t categorize it since there is no obvious choice of category. Additionally, as it turns out, transformations tend to occur between close categories. So, people turn into animals more than plants, into mammals and birds more than insects, and living things more often than inert natural objects. People and animals are rarely turned into artifacts. And the reason for this also comes back to inferences. When the ontological category is nearly preserved, useful inferences can still be made. A human mind in an animal body is still understood easily as having mental states like hoping and believing. An artifact having the same is harder to imagine and less likely to help make useful inferences. See Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, 67–68.

Thus far I have only directed you to a small handful of stories, but the list could go on. In Keats’s “Lamia,” a woman is trapped in the body of a snake—i.e. a snake body has a human consciousness. In the traditional tale “Beauty and the Beast,” a prince is transformed into a beast. In Homer’s *The Odyssey*, men are turned into pigs. In Ovid’s *The Metamorphoses*, a woman is turned into a spider.⁵⁶ These classic stories indicate a general human understanding of these transformations. Typical human consciousness is plainly understood to be present in (or with, etc.) non-humans. While transformation into animals is more common, there are also transformations into inanimate objects. For instance, in his journey through Hell, Dante encounters people who, as a punishment for suicide, have been turned into trees.⁵⁷⁵⁸ More recently, in Ellison’s “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream,” the protagonist Ted is a human who is transformed by a malevolent supercomputer into a conscious blob.⁵⁹ That the story was popular enough to win a major award⁶⁰ again indicates the general understandability of human consciousness inhabiting a wholly non-human form. If we use intuitions, then we use common rather than idiosyncratic intuitions. Thus, we should dismiss someone claiming to not understand as idiosyncratic rather than representative of the general population the statement is about.

4.4 Other Metaphysical Options

Just as the transformation story problem for intuitions about consciousness is only a problem if we have the intuitions, it’s also only a problem if the placement of human consciousness in inanimate objects is impossible. If human consciousness can be moved outside a human body or survive radical shape-shifting, then the intuitions are just correct.

56. Ben Gazur, “Top 10 Metamorphoses in Literature,” 2011, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://listverse.com/2011/10/09/top-10-metamorphoses-in-literature/>.

57. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, ed. Robert M. Durling, vol. 1, The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri (Oxford University Press, 1996), 13:16–151.

58. Joseph Gallagher noted to me that some people, such as himself, take trees to be animate. By “animate” I mean, roughly, “capable of self-movement,” though the same philosophical work would be done if Dante had the suicides turned to pillars of salt (perhaps because tears are salty), so nothing much hinges on whether trees are animate, strictly speaking.

59. Harlan Ellison, “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream,” *IF: Worlds of Science Fiction*, 1967,

60. “1968 Hugo Awards,” accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/1968-hugo-awards/>.

Certain metaphysical views are more amenable to this option than others. A substance dualist could have the “location” of a human soul happen to fall outside of a human body. Some cartoons make use of a (rather literal) cartoon version of substance dualism. For instance, in “The Love-Matic Grampa,” Abe Simpson of *The Simpsons* dies. Upon his death, a ghost that looks like him, but translucent and with wings, flies upwards, gets hit by a plane, and then falls into an electronic machine in a bar that predicts whether a user will achieve romantic success.⁶¹ With this sort of metaphysics, the machine having a human consciousness inside makes no less sense than having a human consciousness inside a human body. The ghost is the conscious entity, so consciousness just is in whatever physical object it happens to inhabit. A more philosophically robust substance dualist could still locate consciousness wherever a mind or soul happens to be while also not restricting the location of minds or souls to human bodies. Given the tendency for transformation stories to consider the mind as an independent substance in the Cartesian sense of independent substance, i.e. something that can exist on its own, this isn’t that surprising.

Likewise, if in fact there is no causal connection between consciousness and physicality, we might have a Leibnizian pre-established harmony that could be made less harmonious at some point in time. While Leibniz’s God presumably only puts human consciousness in human bodies because that’s the most harmonious, a metaphysics that pulls away from Leibniz on how good God is (or how good harmony is) could let human consciousness slip into inanimate objects. Or if our intuitions about harmony are given up, then the transformation stories again enter the realm of the possible. Potentially any metaphysics with a deity free to place human consciousnesses into non-human physical forms works out this way. A theistic idealist could imagine God just giving a consciousness the sort of experiences described in a transformation story. Some of the aforementioned examples of transformation stories, such as *Metamorphoses*, *The Odyssey*, and *Inferno*, rely on supernatural beings to do the transformation work. Just letting the supernatural in opens the door to all sorts of unnatural stuff happening—that’s rather the point.⁶²

61. David S Cohen et al., *The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase*, May 1997.

62. See also George E. Tinker, “The Stones Shall Cry Out: Consciousness, Rocks, and Indians,” *Wicazo Sa*

So supernaturalists and substance dualists don't seem to have much of a problem. Idealists, too, have little problem qua idealism, though they'll run into problems if naturalism is also embraced. I say this given the current state of science—if the naturalist project ends up finding things are radically different than we currently believe, there may be no such problem here.⁶³ Physicalism usually comes with naturalism,⁶⁴ but they can come apart, in which case human-like consciousness might be found outside of human bodies.⁶⁵ However, naturalism is a fairly popular position,⁶⁶ and it doesn't so easily make room for the sort of metaphysics that make this possible, idealist, physicalist, neutral monist, or what have you. A naturalist not committed to the fixity of the laws of nature could imagine the laws radically changing such that the arrangements that enable human consciousness begin to include inanimate objects. This however invokes a sort of radical methodological skepticism about the similarity of the future to the past. This should make us lose some confidence in our intuitions, as a skeptic likely already has. Our intuitions work through regular connections. If some inanimate objects are conscious for no apparent reason, but others are not, and the objects are unable to act, then we have nothing in our experience to track consciousness with. We reach the ground-level of "I (don't) feel this thing is conscious" immediately as no further explanation is possible. (Some stories may include something like an aura to enable others to notice the consciousness, but plenty don't, and we understand them just fine.) At that point we've abandoned naturalism.

Being an anti-realist about consciousness also makes the intuition work. If we take some entity to be conscious just if it's something we describe as "conscious," or take consciousness

Review 19, no. 2 (2004): 105–125; Tinker argues for another conception of consciousness that describes even stones as being conscious, and having the highest form of consciousness. While rather different from the supernatural beliefs I have considered here, the same sorts of arguments apply.

63. I thank Erich Reck for pointing out the need for this caveat.

64. See Daniel Stoljar, "Physicalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2017, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017).

65. Peter van Inwagen, "What is Naturalism? What is Analytical Philosophy?," in *Analytic Philosophy Without Naturalism*, ed. Antonella Corradini, Sergio Galvan, and E. Jonathan Lowe (Routledge, 2006), but also see Peter Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1978): 114–121 for an example of how this might play out.

66. A survey of philosophers was undertaken in 2009, and 49.8% claimed to be naturalists, compared with only 25.9% claiming non-naturalism, the rest answering "other." (David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?," *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014): 465–500). Of course, the quarter of philosophers answering non-naturalism needn't embrace a metaphysics that allows for transformation stories to work out, but naturalism is at least popular enough that spending the rest of this section worrying about it is justified.

to be the property of being treated like a conscious entity, then we can easily have humanly conscious inanimate objects in stories since they are nothing but such a description.

In this subsection we've come across a few more ways out of the problem posed by transformation stories. A supernaturalist or substance dualist metaphysics, or else anti-realism about consciousness both could offer confirmation of the intuition. However, a realist about consciousness who still embraces naturalism has yet to find a way out. As this intersection is still substantial, I will now turn to the final remaining option, to give up confidence.

4.5 Giving Up Confidence in Intuitions

Given that we have these intuitions and that transformations are not actually possible, the solution is basically to give up confidence in our intuitions. How much exactly is not obvious, so that question will take up the first part of this section. Following this, I'll turn to applying the standards found in the first subsection to particular examples.

The claim this solution denies is "If a story is intuitively understandable, then its involvements should be assumed possible." The negation, then, is that a story is intuitively understandable and its involvements should not be assumed possible. This is not a very bold claim. However, we can, from here, expand our target a bit. We know that some stories that are intuitively understandable are impossible, but which ones are the relevant ones here? Given transformation stories involve the displacement of consciousness across kinds, arguments in and around the matter of the relative abundance and location of consciousness across the universe seem most relevant.

We can look at another attack on intuitions for comparison: Jaynes makes a general point against intuitions. He compares the conscious investigator of consciousness to a flashlight in a dark room investigating light. Of course, he argues, wherever the flashlight "looks" it will "see" light. Intuitively, it would conclude that there is light everywhere. Likewise, then, the conscious investigator will be conscious of anything she consciously investigates, so her intuitive conclusion will be that consciousness is everywhere, at least in her own mentality.⁶⁷ However, empirical

67. Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 23.

research indicates otherwise: we have all sorts of mental activity that isn't conscious.⁶⁸ Our intuitions about which states and modalities of mind are conscious are wrong, and we shouldn't trust them so much. Rather, we should look to non-introspective methods.

But that's about states and modalities, and transformation stories really present a problem for intuitions about the potential consciousness of different kinds of beings. Dennett strikes against the rather appealing intuition that leads us to this kind of abundance of consciousness. He argues that the question Nagel posed, "What is it like to be a bat?" invites us down the wrong path. The question may in fact have no answer, yet it gets us speculating. Rather than looking for what sorts of simple mental mechanisms can explain behaviors, we wonder "what it's like" from the perspective of some other creature, and then proceed to give that what-it's-like-ness some work to do.⁶⁹ Carruthers also argues against this general intuition that there is something that it's like to be any one of several kinds of animals. While "common sense" may deliver us beliefs that animals have conscious experiences, the common sense is groundless. We can explain everything about animal behavior without consciousness, so we have no reason to believe that consciousness is involved. This much is basically the same as Dennett's argument, but then he also explains the intuitions away. The argument goes as follows: First, common-sense psychology doesn't really distinguish consciousness from other mental states. So, since having mental states is conflated with having conscious experiences, and since animals have mental states, animals must have conscious experiences. But this of course relies on a faulty conflation. A second explanation: When we attribute mental states to an entity, we try to imagine the world from that entity's point of view. However, in doing this conscious imagining, we're bringing in our own consciousness. That is, to imagine what a perceptual state is like is to imagine a conscious perceptual state, i.e. a perceptual state with something that it is like. This means we just fail at imagining non-conscious states.⁷⁰

If we acknowledge that some of our intuitions lead us to the impossible because of transformation stories, then the explanations of the intuitions themselves offered by Carruthers work

68. Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 22–44.

69. Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds* (Basic Books, 1996), 160.

70. Peter Carruthers, *Language, Thought, and Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 222–223.

nicely. When you imagine the conscious perspective of an inanimate object, you imagine a human consciousness located where the inanimate object is located. You import your own consciousness into the situation. The only major difference between the intuitions Carruthers attacks and the intuitions under fire in this section is that the intuitions of animal consciousness are about animals with animal consciousness while the intuitions of transformation stories are about objects with human consciousness. Thus, that we import our own consciousness makes sense for transformation stories. When Nagel describes the difficulty of figuring out what it's like to be a bat, he makes the distinction between what it's like for me to be a bat and what it's like for a bat to be a bat, with the latter question being the real question.⁷¹ In the case of transformation stories, we are asking what it's like for a human to be an object. Thus the difficulty lies less in wrapping our minds around what it would be like and more in reconciling the impossible scenario with its intuitive imaginability.

This is the main indicator of how far-reaching our intuition surrender must be. At the very least, we have to give up the intuition that human consciousness can be found elsewhere. At the most, intuitions should be expunged from all philosophical matters. The best answer is probably somewhere in the middle, at least circumscribing matters of consciousness. Since we don't have a truth-tracking intuitive grip on where human-like consciousness might be instantiated, we can't intuit where human consciousness might be. Or can we, in some cases? Taken to its natural end, this prohibition would let the problem of other minds reemerge. Even the intuition that other humans are conscious must be distrusted if I cannot intuit where consciousnesses like mine might be. However, while this conclusion has some sticker shock, it's not that damning. There are other ways about the problem of other minds that don't rely (directly) on intuitions.⁷²

71. Thomas Nagel, "What is It Like to Be a Bat?," *Philosophical Review* 83, no. October (1974): 439.

72. See, e.g., Jeremy E. Henkel, "How to Avoid Solipsism While Remaining an Idealist: Lessons From Berkeley and Dharmakirti," *Comparative Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2013): 58–73 and Stephen P. Thornton, "Solipsism and the Problem of Other Minds," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

5 Alternatives

That we find intuitions at the foundations of investigations of consciousness isn't too surprising. Once starting points are found, other tools of philosophical investigation take over. Unless someone accepting this solution wants to just give up on investigating consciousness, some other mode of investigation must be found to get things going.

We find one rather basic non-intuitive approach in DeLancey's consideration of the complaint against science fiction involving aliens that the aliens are too human. Aliens in science fiction stories tend to be very human-like in appearance, behavior, and experience. Someone making the complaint thinks that intelligent aliens must be somehow very strange to us. However, DeLancey argues, any intelligent life in the universe came about via evolution. So, whatever evolution demands can be inferred about these intelligent beings. What exactly evolution demands is an open question, with answers ranging from very little to quite a bit,⁷³ but we do have more to go on than our intuitions. I don't intend here to settle whether DeLancey's argument works; my point is just that he doesn't need to appeal to intuition to make it. DeLancey might not be wholly free from intuition, though. He assumes that consciousness goes with intelligent outward behavior, which may be an intuition.⁷⁴ It may also be a background assumption, distinct from an intuition in that it exists in the argument without evidence or else with assumed evidence. A background assumption can be "Don't worry about this," or "The evidence for this is elsewhere," whereas an intuition's being an intuition is taken as evidence of itself.

Schneider argues that if we come across very intelligent alien life, it'll probably not be conscious because consciousness comes with drawbacks, so as evolution (biological and technological) progresses, hyper-intelligence may come with the end of consciousness.⁷⁵ This stands in opposition to DeLancey's argument, but it also avoids appealing to intuitions. One may object that Schneider does rely on an intuition that there's no consciousness in the subsystems of our

73. Craig Delancey, "Another Word: Will Aliens Be Alien?," *Clarkesworld* 88 (2014).

74. I thank Eric Schwitzgebel for this objection.

75. Susan Schneider, "It May Not Feel Like Anything to Be an Alien," 2016, accessed November 11, 2018, <http://cosmos.nautil.us/feature/72/it-may-not-feel-like-anything-to-be-an-alien>.

minds that do the stuff we take to be nonconscious.⁷⁶ If this much indeed is based on intuition, then indeed the argument would have to be adapted to only give us the conditional that if there's no consciousness in the subsystems then evolution will eventually eliminate consciousness. Then if the matter of the antecedent turns out to be true, we can return to the original conclusion. So, from these cases, we still see interesting philosophical arguments on consciousness without relying on our not-so-trustworthy intuitions.

One may object that there's some use of intuition lurking in the background. Perhaps if we investigated the arguments for evolution itself we would run into intuitions. However, these would be of a different and yet more basic kind. For example, perhaps we do have to lean on intuition to get around skepticism about induction. But believing that the world will work basically the same tomorrow as it does today reaches much farther than our intuitions about consciousness. Much of science, philosophy, etc. as well as everyday life depends on trusting induction to some degree. The same cannot be said of our intuitions about consciousness. Whether any entity is conscious has limited implications elsewhere. This seems to be a point in favor of giving up only the credibility of intuitions near consciousness, though this seeming itself is based on intuition. There are ways around this problem. If the trust in the more basic intuitions is based on some evidence for their truth-tracking, then we don't need to bundle them with the intuitions about consciousness. Or, if "truth" analytically has us trusting them, then we're still able to trust the basic intuitions while surrendering those surrounding consciousness. That is, if what we mean by "truth" just includes the stuff given by induction, etc., then the intuitions about consciousness that are not included in the meaning of "truth" are substantially different.

Still, one may object that the non-intuitive strategies such as those used by DeLancey and Schneider don't get us all the way to the ground. Perhaps we can give up intuitions about everything besides normal adult humans, but we still need the basic intuition about normal adult humans being conscious, and some introspective intuitions about what exactly is picked out by "consciousness". On the one hand, this much might be fine. We were earlier concerned

76. I thank Eric Schwitzgebel for this objection.

by “consciousness” being defined by pointing to examples of conscious entities and also by the appeal to what-it’s-like-ness. Given the arguments against solipsism, the examples can be reduced to “me and the stuff the anti-solipsism arguments tell me also experiences”. At this point, there is no tension. Further clarification of which particular things also experience, and which things experience but cannot be found by just anti-solipsism arguments, can be done with the aforementioned philosophical tools beyond intuition.

6 Conclusion

Intuitions, then, are neither needed nor should they be wanted in the investigation of consciousness. The arguments presented here at least give us good reason to not allow intuitions as evidence in determining where there is phenomenal consciousness. Though, by “we” here I mean naturalists and others without metaphysical avenues to accept the possibility of inanimate transformation stories coming true. Still, we have anthropological and literary evidence pointing to explanations of our intuitions as cultural accidents rather than anything truth-tracking. In light of this, we should turn to other philosophical tools for investigating consciousness that avoid intuitions, except perhaps in some prior assumptions, such as the methodological goodness of induction.

In addition to rejecting direct uses of intuition (e.g. “I’m sure my cat is conscious.”), we also need to reject their use in many thought experiments. While the thought experiments that exist for the sake of teasing out what we believe or value are unaffected, the thought experiments used to describe the world itself have a fatal problem.⁷⁷

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77. I thank D’Jara Culpepper, Justin Domecillo, Joseph Gallagher, Eric Schwitzgebel, Andy Reath, David Shope, Taylor Doran, Jared Smith, Marek Twarzynski, Rotem Herrmann, Andrew MacDonald, and Erich Reck for their feedback and discussion on drafts.

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