

# The Geography of Philosophy: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Exploration of Universality and Diversity in Fundamental Philosophical Concepts

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## I. Why is this project important?

The question that motivates our project is whether fundamental philosophical concepts – concepts that play a central role in the world-view of contemporary Americans and Western Europeans – are religious and cross-cultural universals that are used by people around the world. The debate between those who think that many fundamental philosophical concepts are universal and those who think that no important philosophical concepts are shared by people in all religions and cultures is a venerable one.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, most of the participants on both sides of the debate were philosophers, historians, anthropologists and scholars in cultural studies.<sup>2</sup> During the last few decades, the debate has been joined by psychologists, linguists and experimental philosophers.<sup>3</sup> In recent decades, the debate has also taken on great practical importance. Globalization, high levels of migration, and the emergence of the internet have led to vastly more communication – or miscommunication – among people from different religions and cultures. Shared concepts are one obvious foundation on which to build successful communication, and unsuspected conceptual differences might well play a role in undermining successful communication and exacerbating conflicts between religions and cultures. The vast and unsettling economic and political differences that plague the modern world are, no doubt, the result of many

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<sup>1</sup> When we ask whether people in different religious or cultural groups share a philosophically important concept like *knowledge*, we are asking whether the word that is standardly translated as ‘knowledge’ in the language of one group expresses the same concept as the word standardly translated as ‘knowledge’ in the language of the other group. We are, of course, acutely aware that there is a lively debate over how concepts should be individuated (Machery, 2009). In this project, we take no stand on that issue. When exploring whether religious or cultural groups share a philosophically important concept, we will address the question from a variety of different perspectives on what is required for concept individuation, including those proposed by Rey (1983), Peacocke (1992), Fodor (1998), Millikan (2000), Prinz (2002), Margolis & Laurence (2004), Carey (2009) and Machery (2015). We will examine how the three concepts of interest are used (what philosophers call “their functional role”), paying particular attention to their central uses (Rey, 1983), the uses that lay people view as “primitively justified” (Peacocke, 1992), that is, the uses that people view as justified because they are constitutive of the concepts deployed (one would be deploying another concept if one used it differently), and the uses that people rely on automatically (Machery, 2015). We will also pay attention to the properties the concepts may be tracking (Fodor, 1998; Millikan, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Brown (1991), Benedict (1934), Levy-Bruhl (1923), Lloyd (2007), Mead (1928), Nakamura (1964), Radin (1927), Viveiros de Castro (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Chandler et al. (2003), Machery et al. (2004), Mallon & Stich (2000), Nichols et al. (2003), Nisbett (2003), Norenzayan & Heine (2005), Rosch (1975), Weinberg et al. (2001), Wierzbicka (1972) & (1996).

interacting factors, one of which may be conceptual differences. If the terms for knowledge, understanding and wisdom express different concepts in different religions or different cultures, this may play a significant role in explaining and sustaining differences in political systems, educational practices, and moral beliefs. The plight of many Indigenous cultures may be exacerbated by the failure of dominant cultures to recognize and respect important conceptual differences in a variety of domains.<sup>4</sup>

### **i. What are you trying to do (i.e. what are your objectives)?**

Our project has two overarching goals. The first is to dramatically advance what is known about the extent to which three fundamental philosophical concepts – *knowledge*, *understanding* and *wisdom* – are shared across religions and cultures. These concepts, which loom large in contemporary philosophical and religious discourse, were of central concern to Sir John Templeton, and for good reason, since they play a major role in organizing our thinking about what to believe, how to conduct inquiry, and how to structure our lives. In order to achieve this goal, as we will explain in detail below, we have assembled religiously and culturally diverse interdisciplinary teams of researchers in nine regions around the world. Our second goal is to build on the foundation of these Research Teams to create a new, multi-cultural research community focused on studying important philosophical concepts using the tools and insights of a wide variety of disciplines including philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies.

### **ii. How is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?**

#### **a. Knowledge**

We'll begin our response to these questions by focusing on *knowledge*; we'll then address *understanding* and *wisdom*. The attempt to characterize or analyze knowledge has a long history in Western philosophy, and during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries it has generated a massive literature.<sup>5</sup> The methodology used in this work is characterized by careful argument, consideration of real and hypothetical cases and our judgments or intuitions about those cases, and attempts to construct definitions or theories that accommodate those arguments and judgments. It is a striking fact about this literature that the vast majority of it is written in English, the examples are set out in English, and the questions typically asked about the examples – questions like “Does the protagonist know that she will not win the lottery?” or “Is the protagonist’s belief an instance of knowledge?” – are posed in English.<sup>6</sup> During the last few decades, as the “analytic” tradition

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<sup>4</sup> Chandler (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Borges, de Almeida & Klein (forthcoming), Ichikawa & Steup (2014), Pappas & Swain (1978), Pollock (1986), Shope (1983), Williamson (2000).

<sup>6</sup> In linguistics, by contrast, there has been a much wider-ranging study of “evidentials” – syntactic constructions that are sensitive to the source of the speaker’s knowledge. See, for example, Willett, (1988)

in philosophy has become more popular in continental Europe, an increasing number of European philosophers whose native language is not English have contributed to the analytic epistemology literature. But most of their work is also written in English and is focused on questions, like the two mentioned above, that are posed in English.<sup>7</sup>

In the long and rich tradition of Classical Indian philosophy, there is an extensive literature, much of it in Sanskrit, that is aimed at giving an account of phenomena described with the terms that are typically translated as “knows” and “knowledge”.<sup>8</sup> While there are bound to be many exceptions to any generalization about this vast literature, the methods typically employed are strikingly parallel to the methods employed in the Western analytic tradition: careful argument, assembling intuitions and judgments about real and hypothetical cases, and attempts to construct definitions or theories that accommodate those arguments and judgments.<sup>9</sup> There is also an intriguing literature comparing the concepts that are the focus of the Indian and Western traditions in epistemology. Though no clear consensus has emerged, a number of authors have argued that they are different in important respects.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, little is known about the epistemic terms invoked in Arabic, Persian and Urdu which have been used by the large and important Muslim community on the Indian subcontinent.

There is also a relatively small, but engaging and troubling, literature on “Indigenous epistemologies,” which seeks to characterize how people in various Indigenous communities around the world think about “who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge, ... how truth is verified, ... and related issues.”<sup>11</sup> A theme in much of this literature, as Michael Chandler notes, is that Indigenous people “subscribe to ‘epistemological frameworks’ or *ways of knowing* that are importantly different from those commonly practiced within the cultural mainstream.”<sup>12</sup> Chandler goes on to raise the worrying possibility that if this is true, and if “the forms of pedagogy to which such students are routinely exposed are typically set within knowledge frameworks that Indigenous learners experience as foreign and hostile, then trouble is automatically afoot, and school

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and Aikhenvald and Dixon (2014). Though work on evidentials typically does not provide an analysis of the concept of knowledge used by speakers of the language, it does provides a rich source of information about epistemically important features of the situation that speakers of different languages must be aware of.

<sup>7</sup> In one of the few studies aimed at exploring whether the native language of professional philosophers affects their epistemic intuitions about cases described in English, Vaesen et al. (2013) found that that it does. Native English speaking philosophers had different intuitions from those whose native language was Dutch, German, or Swedish, though all the participants were fluent in English.

<sup>8</sup> The Sanskrit terms that are the primary focus of interest are *jñāna* and *pramā*.

<sup>9</sup> Bilimora (1984), Ganeri (1999), Matilal (1986), Mohanty (1992), Phillips (2016), Sibajiban (1987).

<sup>10</sup> Potter (1984), Stoltz (2007), Shaw (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Gegeo (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Chandler (forthcoming). For related ideas, see Kohn (2013).

failures and lost educational opportunities are sure to follow.”<sup>13</sup> However, Chandler thinks that it would be premature to endorse the prevailing consensus about Indigenous epistemology because “the great bulk of contemporary Indigenous scholarship has relied, up to the present, almost exclusively upon introspection, informal observations and key informants or traditional knowledge stewards as sources for such insights. What is largely missing from this burgeoning literature are programs of *empirical* research that might serve to help test or further elaborate existing claims concerning such distinctive Indigenous ways of knowing.”<sup>14</sup>

What are the shortcomings of the literature we have considered so far? If the goal is to determine the extent to which the concept of knowledge and related epistemological concepts are shared across cultures, then the focus on English in the West, and Sanskrit in the Classical Indian tradition, poses an obvious problem. For these literatures tell us nothing about the epistemic concepts of people in other cultures who speak, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, isiZulu, Quechua or one of the other approximately 6000 extant languages.<sup>15</sup> The exclusive reliance on traditional philosophical methods in the English and Indian literatures is, arguably, also a shortcoming. While those methods have surely led to many insights, they have not produced the substantial level of consensus that the methods of other disciplines have achieved. Chandler is certainly right that the methods used in the Indigenous epistemology literature need to be supplemented by programs of empirical research using the methods of psychology and related disciplines. Much the same is true for traditional philosophical methods. If we want to characterize people’s concepts – be they epistemic concepts or concepts in some other domain – the methods of empirical psychology have an important role to play.

The emergence of “experimental philosophy” in the early years of the current century was an important step in addressing the methodological shortcoming that Chandler emphasizes. The concern motivating one of the first experimental philosophy papers was that people’s cultural background might influence their epistemic judgments.<sup>16</sup> To address that concern, they borrowed some of the methods of contemporary experimental psychology. In the intervening 15 years, there have been nearly a hundred papers using similar methods to explore a wide range of claims made by traditional “armchair” epistemologists.<sup>17</sup> However, to date this literature has made relatively little progress toward resolving the dispute over the extent to which the concept of *knowledge* and other epistemic concepts are shared across religions and cultures. There are a number of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See also McCarty & Lee (2014), Paris (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The linguistics literature on evidentials, by contrast, does provide insight into the sources of knowledge that speakers are sensitive to in a striking range of languages. Willett (1988), Aikhenvald and Dixon (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Weinberg *et al.* (2001).

<sup>17</sup> For helpful bibliographies see Alexander and Weinberg (2007) and Pinillos (2011). For a collection of recent papers, see Beebe (2014).

reasons for this lack of progress. First, and most important, is the fact that, with relatively few exceptions, the experimental epistemology literature has used experimental material written in English, has only gathered data from English speakers, and has not collected data about the religion of participants.<sup>18</sup> Second, in many studies the sample sizes were quite small. In addition, studies using different hypothetical examples or “thought experiments” to explore questions about the concept of knowledge have often reported results that seemed to support conflicting answers, and some earlier studies could not be replicated.

In 2013, in an effort to make more progress in the debate over the universality of central philosophical concepts, Machery & Stich (M&S) launched a project designed to address some of the problems that beset earlier studies. Their focus was on philosophical intuitions, which they characterized as spontaneous judgments about philosophical thought experiments. It is widely thought that these judgments provide important information about the concepts associated with philosophical terms invoked in the thought experiments.<sup>19</sup> The goal of the M&S project was to gauge the extent to which philosophical intuitions in a number of areas of philosophy are widely shared or vary across religions and cultures. To pursue this question, M&S assembled an international team of philosophers, psychologists and anthropologists working in 25 countries around the world. The team collected data from over 15,000 participants in 18 languages. The results were fascinating and often quite unexpected. In the domain of knowledge, their findings suggest that there are surprising cross-cultural universals. But there may also be marked differences between cultures, and even within cultures, in how people conceive of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Though the results of the M&S study provide valuable evidence for some important conclusions, the study also had at least three important limitations. First, since the project was the first attempt at a large cross-cultural study of philosophical intuitions, we aimed at breadth rather than depth. We used thought experiments from six major branches of philosophy (aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language and metaphysics), and we used a small number of thought experiments from each area. For epistemology,

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<sup>18</sup> Exceptions include Kim and Yuan (manuscript), Machery et al.(2015) and Wysocki (2016), all of which report data from non-English speakers.

<sup>19</sup> Inferring the nature of concepts from their uses in intuitions or judgments about thought experiments is fraught with difficulties (Goldman 2007). Such uses may reflect people’s theories about their concepts rather than their concepts themselves; or they may be the product of beliefs that are not constitutive of the concepts in question. We will be mindful of these difficulties, addressing them by attempting to control for people’s explicit theories about their concepts and by taking into account various theories of concept individuation (see footnote 1). Furthermore, we are mindful of the fact that the concepts on which will be focusing do not exist in isolation. Each of them is embedded in a system of further concepts and theories, and these systems may be significantly different in different religions and cultures. It is for this reason that we have assembled research teams that include scholars and scientists from different religions and cultures, representing a wide range of disciplines. This diversity will, we believe, make it more likely that research teams will recognize the conceptually and culturally embedded nature of the concepts they are addressing.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion, see Stich (forthcoming). Machery et al. (2015) and Machery et al. (forthcoming), provide detailed data from preliminary and follow-up studies.

we used only 5 vignettes aimed at addressing 4 different philosophical issues. Second, we used only one methodology – a questionnaire study of the sort that has become common in experimental philosophy. But, as a number of authors have pointed out, these studies can be hard to interpret, since cross-cultural differences, if they are found, need not be due to conceptual differences. Rather, some of the differences may be due to performance errors of a variety of sorts, to cultural difference in background knowledge, common assumptions or patterns of counterfactual reasoning, or to problematic translations of the non-philosophical terms used in the stimulus material.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, the M&S study focused on questions about knowledge and knowing drawn from the Western philosophical literature. This was quite intentional, since the study hoped to engage the philosophical work that has been done in epistemology in the analytic tradition. But it is also a significant shortcoming. As Richard Nisbett, Douglas Medin and other cultural psychologists have emphasized, people from Western and non-Western cultures often view phenomena in quite different ways, ask different questions about phenomena and view different things as puzzling or worthy of inquiry.<sup>22</sup> For example, East Asians can regard as knowledge their belief in the truth of two contradictory propositions. In the Western analytic tradition, this is incoherent.<sup>23</sup> So without a great deal of input from non-Western thinkers, M&S and designers of other studies aimed at exploring cultural universals and differences may simply not know which phenomena to focus on and which questions to ask.

## **b. Understanding**

The nature of understanding was a traditional philosophical topic at least as far back as Aristotle. Indeed Greco (2014) argues for the view, shared by many other scholars, that much of what has been translated as “knowledge” is more correctly described as “understanding”. Since Descartes, however, understanding had taken something of a backseat to knowledge, only recently being “recovered” (Zagzebski 2001).<sup>24</sup> Given this long historical tradition, it is impossible to do justice to everything philosophers have had to say about understanding. However, the methodology invoked in much of the recent literature is broadly similar to the methodology in philosophical epistemology. Accounts of understanding are proposed, they are supported and critiqued by

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<sup>21</sup> On performance errors, see Alexander et al. (2010) and Mikhail (2011); on background knowledge, common assumptions and problematic translations, see Kriegel (forthcoming), Sosa (2007a), (2007b) & (2009); on cultural differences in patterns of counterfactual reasoning, see Chen et al. (2006).

<sup>22</sup> Medin, et al. (2014), Medin et al. (2015), Nisbett et al. (2001), Nisbett (2003), ojalahto, & Medin, D. (2015).

<sup>23</sup> Peng & Nisbett (1999), Peng et al. (2006).

<sup>24</sup> For reviews of the recent literature see: De Regt et al. (2009), Grimm (2011), Baumberger, Beisbart & Brun (forthcoming) and Kvanvig (forthcoming). Grimm, Baumberger & Ammon (forthcoming) is a valuable collection of cutting edge work in the philosophy of understanding.

careful argument, and examples (real and hypothetical) are marshalled in favor of or against them. An important difference between the philosophical literature aimed at analyzing understanding and the philosophical literature aimed at analyzing knowledge is the central role that examples from contemporary and historical science play. This is hardly surprising, since the sort of understanding that science provides is widely agreed to be one of, or perhaps *the*, most important sort of understanding. There is also a substantial psychological literature on understanding. But, with a few exceptions, the literature is not aimed at giving an account of what understanding is. Rather, the focus of this literature is on how to create, assess, and improve understanding. In much of this work, the researchers propose ways of operationalizing understanding that inevitably presuppose at least a rough account of what understanding is.

Our focus is on religious and cultural universality and differences in the commonsense concept of understanding. And while the philosophical and psychological literature mentioned in the previous paragraph provides many valuable insights into the folk concept of understanding that prevails in the West, the religious and cultural comparative project has yet to begin. To the best of our knowledge, there is no literature at all comparing the concept of understanding invoked by people in the West with the closest match to that concept that is invoked in Asian, South American, African or other cultures. Nor is there any empirical literature comparing conceptions of understanding among people of different religions.

### **c. Wisdom**

Accounts of the nature of wisdom are a recurrent theme in Western philosophy. Important early sources include Plato's *Apology* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. But, outside of discussions of Aristotle, wisdom has not been a major focus of philosophical attention in recent decades. Indeed, Smith (1998) laments that "the concept of wisdom has come to vanish entirely from the philosophical map." Osbeck and Robinson (2005) agree; "wisdom," they write, "is not in the set of principle or even legitimate [contemporary] philosophical concerns." And Tiberius and Swartwood (2011) add a striking bit of evidence: "the leading moral philosophy journal *Ethics* has not published an article on wisdom since 1949"! However, attempts to analyze the concept of wisdom have not been entirely absent in recent literature.<sup>25</sup> For the most part, the methodology, in this small philosophical literature, is similar to the methodology in analytic epistemology. Analyses of wisdom are set out, they are defended and critiqued by careful argument, and examples of wise people (real and hypothetical) are marshalled in favor of or against them. Though there is some attention paid to discussions of wisdom in other philosophical traditions, much of this literature is focused on the concept of wisdom invoked by Western thinkers, most notably Aristotle, and

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Kekes (1983), Lehrer and Smith (1996), Nozick (1989), Ryan (1999), Tiberius (2008), Tiberius & Swartwood (2011), Zagzebski (1996), Garrett (1996). For a useful review, see Ryan (2014).

when there is an appeal to intuitions about wisdom, they are typically the intuitions of authors writing in English.

In psychology, by contrast, recent decades have seen an explosion of interest in many aspects of wisdom. Some of this literature is particularly important for our project, since it is focused on giving an account of the “folk” concept of wisdom (the concept employed by ordinary people) or of the implicit theory of wisdom that underlies people’s judgments and beliefs about wisdom. Researchers interested in these issues have used a wide range of quite sophisticated methodologies. One of these employs descriptor-based ratings of attributes of wisdom – attributes generated by one group of people and rated by another group – using multidimensional scaling or factor analysis to deduce common dimensions or factors underlying people’s ratings.<sup>26</sup> In another cluster of studies, which have been called “Personal Experience Studies,” participants are asked to identify persons from their own lives who are wise or to identify events that demonstrate their own wisdom. The features of these cases are then analyzed using a variety of techniques.<sup>27</sup> In a third family of studies, researchers experimentally manipulate the conditions in which attributions of wisdom are made. These studies explore “what causes a person’s perception of someone as wise” (Bluck and Glück 2005, 103), since they describe the differential causal factors that lead people to judge people or actions to be wise or unwise.<sup>28</sup> Most contemporary philosophers who offer accounts of wisdom make no attempt to use the results of this impressive body of empirical literature. A notable exception is Valerie Tiberius whose pioneering work develops a methodology that “begins by examining psychological research on the folk theory of wisdom” from which she extracts an initial account of wisdom. That account is then subjected to philosophical scrutiny using a method modeled on Rawls’ strategy of wide reflective equilibrium.<sup>29</sup>

The psychological literature aimed at exploring the concepts of wisdom among people of different religions or cultures is rather sparse. Most of the studies that seek to determine how lay people define or conceive of wisdom have been conducted within a single culture, typically using either English-speaking North American participants or German speakers in Germany, and they have used a variety of methodologies making cross-cultural comparisons difficult. Information about the religious affiliations of participants is rarely collected or reported. One notable exception is the set of studies by Takahashi and Bordia (2000). These researchers instructed samples of American, Australian, Indian, and Japanese participants to evaluate which personality descriptors most closely match the descriptor “wise.” Their subsequent multidimensional scaling analyses revealed

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<sup>26</sup>Clayton & Birren (1980), Sternberg (1985), Holliday & Chandler (1986), Bluck & Glück (2005), Glück & Bluck (2011).

<sup>27</sup>Orwoll & Perlmutter (1990), Oser et al. (1999), Bluck & Glück (2004), Glück et al. (2005), Weststrate et al. (2016).

<sup>28</sup>Knight & Parr (1999), Hira & Faulkender (1997), Stange et al. (2003).

<sup>29</sup>Tiberius & Swartwood (2011), Tiberius (2013).

that Indians and Japanese were more likely to cluster “wise” with “discreet”, whereas Americans and Australians were more likely to cluster “wise” with “knowledgeable” and “experienced.” Unfortunately, this pioneering cross-cultural work suffers from a number of methodological limitations. The samples Takahashi and Bordia (2000) used to establish cultural differences were underpowered to detect reliable effects. Moreover, they focused exclusively on young undergraduate students studying psychology or liberal arts, raising the question of their representativeness.

In another study, done in conjunction with the JTF Planning Grant for this proposal, Grossman and Kung (unpublished) collected data from over 1000 adults in seven countries – USA, Canada, Argentina, UAE, Russia, China and India. The study revealed some important cross-cultural similarities: wise people in all seven samples were rated as highly competent, capable and skillful. But there were also some notable cultural differences. Indian and Chinese participants judge that wise people are warm and friendly, but Western participants, do not rate wise people as particularly warm or friendly. The study also explored which actions are considered wise when handling an interpersonal conflict situation. Here too, there were both uniformities and differences. In all 7 countries, reflection and empathy were important. However, only the Chinese emphasized the importance of suppressing emotional reactions, and only the Russians thought that a wise person would distance himself from emotionally charged situations. The final section of the study asked people to indicate what strategy, in their opinion, people in their country would think is the most likely path to wisdom. Here again there were both commonalities and differences. Actively seeking new experiences was a popular choice in all seven countries. But only in China was studying the life of sages seen as the most likely path to wisdom.

We are very impressed with the psychological literature on wisdom. But we also think it has some clear limitations. On the empirical side, much more cross-cultural work is needed, and more attention must be paid to the religious beliefs and practices of participants. Moreover, as was the case for knowledge, the hypotheses considered in most of this work are generated by Western researchers, and there is reason to suspect that a more culturally diverse group of researchers might raise many important questions that are not likely to occur to Western researchers. We believe that empirical work on wisdom would also benefit from participation by researchers from a wider range of disciplines. Involving linguists, anthropologists, neuroscientists and cultural historians would, we believe, yield deeper insight into mechanisms and processes that influence people’s thinking about wisdom and about the role that conceptions of wisdom play in shaping societies. On the philosophical side, we think that much more engagement with the empirical work is needed.

**iii. What’s new about your approach, and why do you think you can be successful?**

Our approach is thoroughly cross-cultural both in conception and in execution. We will conduct studies in a wide range of quite different societies, we will collect data from participants who differ in religion, language, education, income and political outlook, and we will collect detailed demographic information about these participants. Moreover, scholars and scientists from each region, drawn from a range of different religious traditions, will be actively involved in articulating the questions to be investigated and designing the studies that we will conduct. This is a quite fundamental feature of our project, since we are acutely aware that if all the questions asked are posed by people drawn from Judeo-Christian religious traditions, whose cultural background is “WEIRD,”<sup>30</sup> many important questions may never be asked.

Our approach is also thoroughly interdisciplinary. Our Research Team includes philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, neuroscientists, scholars in cultural studies and others. Many of these people have been involved in constructing this proposal, and they will be actively involved in designing and conducting our research, analyzing the results, and supervising younger researchers.

In their recent review of the emerging literature on culture and concepts, ojalahto and Medin (2015) conclude that “a critical advantage of multidisciplinary and multicultural teams is their ability to formulate new (or revised) starting points for theory and methods concerning concepts,” and that “culturally diverse research teams may have a critical advantage in asking questions and designing methods to get at the possibility of culturally variable conceptual frameworks” (254, 267). This is a view that we wholeheartedly endorse. It has played a central role in the design of our project. To the best of our knowledge, our strategy of having culturally diverse research teams play a central role in posing research questions and designing research methods has never been used in the study of the concepts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

We believe we can be successful because each of the three PIs has been actively involved in previous, successful cross-cultural interdisciplinary projects, including the University of Sheffield *Culture and the Mind* project and the *Intellectual Humility and Cultural Diversity in Philosophy* project that was discussed earlier (in the section on knowledge). Moreover, we know we work well together. Each of us has co-authored papers with the other two. Another reason why we believe we can be successful emerged as we were assembling our Research Teams. The level of enthusiasm for the project conveyed by scholars and scientists around the world was truly astounding. Over and over again, people expressed the view that there is a vital need for research like this, and that they were keenly interested in being involved.

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<sup>30</sup> “WEIRD” is an acronym for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic. It was introduced by Henrich et al. (2010), and quickly became a ubiquitous meme.

#### **iv. If you succeed, who will it impact and what difference will it make?**

The work we propose to do will be of interest to scholars and scientists in a wide range of disciplines: philosophy, psychology, linguistics, anthropology and cultural studies. It may also make an impact in much more practical areas. As we noted earlier, people concerned about the educational challenges facing Indigenous peoples have suggested that the tension between Indigenous and western views about knowledge and understanding may be one of the factors that discourage Indigenous students. Our work will enable educational policy makers to make much better informed decisions about the risks posed by clashing epistemologies and about how to deal with them. In a very different area, our work will explore religious and cultural commonalities and differences in beliefs about social epistemology. If it turns out that people in different cultures or of different religions have importantly different beliefs about the social structures that are conducive to the accumulation of knowledge, this may be of great importance to scholars and policy makers interested in understanding why some cultures and institutions are much more successful in discovering new knowledge, and in evaluating strategies for redesigning the organization of inquiry. Finally, as a number of scholars have noted, the implicit theories of knowledge, understanding and wisdom held by individuals, cultures or religious traditions “may affect such things as who is revered as a cultural icon, who is successful in school and job applications, and how voting preferences are formed.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The quote is from Bluck & Glück (2005). Others who have urged similar views include Sternberg (1985) and Paulhus et al. (2002).

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