The Role of Statistics in Experimental Philosophy

How philosophers go about their work has not changed for quite a long time. In fact, one might argue that philosophy has not progressed methodologically speaking since Thales, arguably the first philosopher, inferred that everything is water. Call this orthodox philosophical practice: "armchair philosophy." Practitioners of experimental philosophy, myself included among them, have begun to test whether an empirical assumption armchair philosophers make about ordinary people's responses to philosophical thought experiments are accurate. It turns out that philosophers are wrong a lot of the time. What we experimental philosophers do is present ordinary people with surveys and then subject the data collected to statistical analysis. In this presentation, I will discuss the field of experimental philosophy, some results that have been reported by others, some of my own data, and what we can expect from future projects in experimental philosophy.