

Intuitions and Begging the Question

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Abstract. What are philosophical intuitions? There is a tension between two intuitive criteria. On the one hand, many of our ordinary beliefs do not seem intuitively to be intuitions; this suggests a relatively *restrictionist* approach to intuitions. (A few attempts to restrict: intuitions must be noninferential, or have modal force, or abstract contents.) On the other hand, it is *counterintuitive* to deny a great many of our beliefs—including some that are inferential, transparently contingent, and about concrete things. This suggests a *liberal* conception of intuitions. I defend the liberal view from the objection that it faces intuitive counterexamples; central to the defense is a treatment of the pragmatics of ‘intuition’ language: we cite intuitions, instead of directly expressing our beliefs via assertion, when we are attempting to avoid begging questions against certain sorts of philosophical interlocutors.

I. What are philosophical intuitions?

Intuitions are at least something like beliefs. There is a not-very-precise sense in which having the intuition that p seems at least ‘part of the way’ towards believing that p . Many philosophers who have written on intuitions are concerned with the question of how properly to restrict the class of belief-like states in order to end up with the class of intuitions. According to some attempts, intuitions concern particular *subject matters*, like abstracta or central philosophical concepts. Maybe they have a special *etiology*, like the result of looking through a Platonic telescope, or the deliverance of pure conceptual competence. Maybe they have a special *force*—‘presenting themselves as necessary,’ for instance—or are accompanied by a special kind of *phenomenology*. Maybe, similarities to belief notwithstanding, intuitions comprise an independent, *sui generis* mental state.

These attempts to restrict the class of intuitions are familiar. I think, however, that they, and other attempts along similar lines, are misplaced. I’d like to defend a *liberal* conception of philosophical intuition. We have many more intuitions than it is often assumed that we do.

In his brief remarks on methodology, David Lewis (1983) endorses a view with some affinity to the one I favor:

It might be otherwise if, as some philosophers seem to think, we had a sharp line between “linguistic intuition,” which must be taken as unchallengeable evidence, and philosophical theory, which must at all costs fit this evidence. If that were so, conclusive refutations would be dismayingly abundant. But whatever may be said

for foundationalism in other subjects, this foundationalist theory of philosophical knowledge seems ill-founded in the extreme. Our “intuitions” are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same. Some are commonsensical, some are sophisticated; some are particular, some general; some are more firmly held, some less. But they are all opinions, and a reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium. (p. x)

Lewis’s focus here is on the epistemology of philosophy, not the nature of philosophical intuition, but he does present a substantive view on the latter: all philosophical intuitions are ‘simply opinions’, no different in any essential way from our opinions about philosophical theories—or, presumably, our opinions about non-philosophical matters. (Another way in which Lewis’s terminology diverges from my own is that he cites ‘linguistic intuition’, rather than ‘philosophical intuition’ or indeed ‘intuition’ in general; I am inclined to extend Lewis’s treatment to intuitions generally, and not to limit his remarks to opinions about linguistic matters. Much twentieth-century philosophy exaggerated the role of linguistics in philosophy.¹)

This is, of course, not necessarily to suggest that *all* opinions are intuitions; Lewis needn’t say that I have the intuition that it is cloudy today. Perhaps there is a certain proper subclass of our beliefs that are the intuitive ones. If so, then there might be a place for certain restrictions to be developed. But even if this is the case, the attitude we take in cases of intuition is just, Lewis says, the attitude of belief. Lewis, then, is clearly at odds with at least some of the more restrictionist accounts of intuition: Bealer’s, for instance, on which intuition is a *sui generis* state.

Similarly, Peter van Inwagen (1997) writes:

Our “intuitions” are simply our beliefs—or perhaps, in some cases, the tendencies that make certain beliefs attractive to us, that “move” us in the direction of accepting certain propositions without taking us all the way to acceptance. (Philosophers call their philosophical beliefs intuitions because ‘intuition’ sounds more authoritative than ‘belief’.) Our beliefs have all sorts of sources and can very easily be wrong. (p. 309)

More recently, Timothy Williamson (2004) has defended the idea that those states philosophers call ‘intuitions’ are really just judgments, or, with a nod to van Inwagen, inclinations to judge. In his more recent work, Williamson suggests that the practice of citing intuition facts is rooted in a misconception of the nature of evidence, and even goes so far as to suggest that “philosophers might be better off not using the word ‘intuition’ and its cognates.” (2007, 220) I demur from this latter sentiment; I’ll attempt to explain why in what follows. However, I should like to endorse, in broad terms, the liberal, unrestrictive approach to intuitions gestured at by Lewis, van Inwagen, and Williamson:

(Liberalism) S has the intuition that *p* iff S is attracted to believe that *p*.

¹ See Williamson (2007), ch. 1.

(One could, following van Inwagen, say that S has the intuition that p iff S is attracted to believe that p or S believes that p —I’ve chosen the simpler formulation because I take it that they are equivalent: if one believes that p , that belief thereby attracts one to believe that p .)

I have proposed in Liberalism an account of intuitions in the standard philosophical model: $\Box\forall x (F(x) \equiv \phi(x))$. We test it in the usual way: by comparing its verdicts with the intuitive facts about a variety of real and imagined cases. And indeed, when we consult our intuitions about intuition, we needn’t look far for apparent counterexamples to Liberalism. At first blush, my reductivist account seems widely to overgeneralize. According to my account, all of my beliefs are intuitions; however, some of my beliefs are, intuitively, not intuitions. Here are some apparent counterexamples to my account:

- There are some people outside my window
- I am hungry
- Grass is green
- It sometimes rains in Scotland
- Batman is a fictional character
- The Yankees have won several pennants

All of these are things that I now believe (and, *a fortiori*, am inclined to believe). But I admit it seems likely that some readers will have the intuition that at least some of these are not things that I intuit. Either my theory of intuitions is wrong, or the intuition that these beliefs are not intuitions is mistaken. My project, therefore, is twofold: first, to offer positive motivations for Liberalism, including reasons to resist the various attempted restrictions, and second, to attempt to explain away recalcitrant intuitions, such as the intuition that there is no intuition that grass is green. Let’s begin by considering some particular suggestions for restriction.

II. Restricting via etiology

On Kirk Ludwig’s (2007) account of intuition, a judgment is not an intuition unless it is grounded solely in pure conceptual competence.

For terminological clarity, I will use “intuition” to mean an occurrent judgment formed solely on the basis of competence in the concepts involved in response to a question about a scenario, or simply an occurrent judgment formed solely on the basis of competence in the concepts involved in it (in response, we might say, to the null scenario).²

² Although this quotation has the appearance of a technical stipulation—“For terminological clarity...”—it is clear that Ludwig thinks that this is no mere stipulation, but rather the correct account of philosophical intuition. For example, he criticizes some views for claiming to attack intuitions by arguing that the targets in question are not intuitions, since they are not the products of pure conceptual competence.

Like my own view, Ludwig's theory has counterintuitive consequences. Intuitively, (or: *apparently* intuitively) many philosophers have had the intuition that naïve set theory is correct. Since this inclination is not grounded solely in conceptual competences, it is not, according to Ludwig's view, an intuition.

What can Ludwig say in response to this objection? He could offer an attempt to explain away the offending intuition—an argument why (apparent) intuition should not, in this case, be trusted. Although Ludwig offers no such argument in his paper, the analogy with memory, which he does draw in the paper, may suggest a possible argument³:

Memory is factive, the way that I say intuition is; S remembers that *p* only if *p*. A mental state doesn't count as a memory unless it has the proper sort of etiology, in just the same way that a state doesn't count as an intuition unless it has the proper sort of etiology. Sometimes, however, ordinary speech about memory fails to reflect its factivity: thus, we are happy to talk about "false memories," "misleading memories," and two people having "memories that disagree with one another." Since memory is in fact factive, these data show that our ordinary judgments often go wrong in cases like these. So we should not be too worried about ordinary judgments according to which Corbin has an "intuition" that the gambler's fallacy is true.

This argument has the proper form of an attempt to explain away an intuition (or, to speak neutrally on this question, to explain away an unreflective judgment).⁴ It argues that our unreflective judgments are unreliable in a certain domain, and assimilates the offending judgments to that domain. A more satisfying explaining away of our judgments would go into more detail about why we are unreliable in that domain, but as a limiting case, an argument that we are so unreliable (as here, in the observation that we're inclined to judge something that is in fact false—assuming, perhaps plausibly, that the independent case for the factivity of memory is strong), may be sufficient.

I think that this attempt on behalf of Ludwig to explain away unhelpful intuitions about intuitions fails. Although *remembers that* is factive, it is less clear that *has a memory that* is. The argument above does not sufficiently establish that our intuitions about memory do go much wrong. Although intuitively, one can have a false memory, it is not the case that intuitively, Samuel remembers that he packed the matches when, in fact, he did not pack the matches. By contrast, intuitively, I have the intuition that naïve set theory is true. And intuitively, some people have the intuition that Truetemp knows, and some people have the contrary intuition. Furthermore, *remembers that* forms abominable conjunctions⁵—it is transparently

³ Ludwig did offer approximately this argument in a talk at the 'Armchair in Flames' conference on experimental philosophy in Cologne in September 2008.

⁴ Ichikawa (forthcoming).

⁵ DeRose (1995), pp. 27-28.

unacceptable to claim that *Sam remembers that he packed the matches but he didn't pack the matches*—while *has the intuition that does not*—there is no felt conflict in *Corbin has the intuition that the coin is very likely to land heads, even though it is not very likely to land heads*. If Ludwig's theory of intuition is correct, then our unreflective judgments about intuitions seem to be defective in a way that goes beyond any defectiveness in our unreflective judgments about memory.

So I don't think that this attempt, on behalf of Ludwig, to explain away apparent counterexamples, succeeds.

As mentioned above, my own inclusive approach to intuitions faces apparent counterexamples, too; I will go on offer my own attempt to implement an explaining-away strategy along structurally similar lines. I hope and believe that it will fare better than the one just considered. We may admit that it is a counterintuitive result of my view that I have the intuition that grass is green, without denying that it is literally true that I have such an intuition. We do so by explaining away the felt infelicity without positing falseness. The way to do this is, as I attempted to do on behalf of Ludwig above, to posit a kind of systematic error to which humans are prone. My story will be a familiar one: a confusion of pragmatic appropriateness with semantic truth. But first, let's continue resisting more particular attempts to restrict.

III. Other Attempted Restrictions

One very common suggestion is that intuitions must be relatively immediate; a judgment that is the product of inference is no intuition. Jennifer Nagel (2007), for example, describes what she takes to be a very liberal view of intuitions: "The expression 'epistemic intuition' is sometimes used very broadly, as a label for any immediate (or not explicitly inferential) assessment of any claim of interest to epistemologists..." (p. 793) Nagel goes on to offer her own preferred further restriction. Similarly, Ernest Sosa's (1998, p. 257) complaint against the view that intuition is "apprehension without reasoning" is that it is too liberal, admitting, for example, many perceptual beliefs.

One possible motivation for restricting intuitions in this way is the assumption that intuitions are to play a regress-halting role in a foundationalist epistemology. (Sosa, 2007, at least, is explicit about this commitment.) I take it, however, to be an open question whether intuitions will ultimately play such a role; it won't do to build the requirement that they end up successfully playing this role into our theory of what intuitions are.

Of course, 'philosophical intuition' is, in some sense, a philosopher's term of art; there is nothing stopping a philosopher from stipulating a place for intuitions in philosophical theorizing; one might, for instance, argue independently for foundationalism, then stipulate that 'intuitions' stand for the things that play the foundational roles (or perhaps a certain subclass of them). There is nothing illegitimate about such a stipulation; however, a philosopher treating 'intuition' in

that way is, I think, using the term nonstandardly. He must take care not to import features of other, less restrictive, uses of the term. For instance, one cannot, while making such a stipulation, assume that the verdicts about canonical philosophical thought experiments are ‘intuitions’ in the stipulated sense. Sosa, for example, may be stipulating a foundational role for intuitions, but also takes the canonical invocations of intuition to be obvious:

Intuitions are found already in Platonic dialectic, with its ubiquitous use of the counterexample, and in ancient paradoxes: the liar, say, or the sorites, or the statue and the lump.

Intuitions are also important in contemporary philosophical debates: on names and reference, for example; on externalism vs. internalism in philosophy of mind and in epistemology; on the definition of knowledge, the nature of personal identity, essentialism ...; the list goes on. Relevant examples abound: trolley cars, split brains, Matrix scenarios, fake barns, Twin Earth; and so on. (Sosa 2007, pp. 44-45)

I claim that it is a departure from the standard sense of ‘intuition’ to require that intuitions be noninferential. Why think this? For the usual reason: the principle faces intuitive counterexamples. There are many intuitive cases of intuitions that are inferential. For instance, it is intuitive that if something is green, then it is blue or green. Plausibly, my knowledge of this conditional is underwritten by an inference: a key premise, for instance, might be that all green things are green or blue.

Even many of the paradigms of philosophical intuition appear to be inferential. On what basis are we to believe that flipping the trolley switch is good? Notoriously, it is difficult to spell out exactly what principle is at work, but there is little doubt that it has something to do with reasoning from the given fact that flipping the switch will result in fewer deaths.

Williamson (2007, pp. 218-19) discusses revisionary metaphysical views that entail that, for instance, there are no mountains. This, Williamson points out, is, intuitively, a counterintuitive consequence. That is to say, it is intuitive that there are mountains. A theory that denies that there are mountains is inconsistent with some of our intuitions. But the intuition that there are mountains is not foundational; indeed, it is based, for many of us, on perception.⁶

The intuition that there are mountains is a counterexample to many other attempts to restrict the class of intuitions, too. For instance, Sosa (1998) suggested that intuitions must have abstract contents; but mountains are concrete. Bealer (1998) suggests that intuitions must have apparent modal force; but that there are mountains is transparently contingent.

Williamson’s observations about mountains suggests a powerful test for

⁶ Some people, *e.g.* Kansans, may acquire it instead by testimony—another etiology that is sometimes stipulated to be inconsistent with intuition.

intuitionhood: if not- p would be a *counterintuitive consequence* of some theory, then it is intuitive that p , and at least many of us have the intuition that p .⁷ If you want to know whether we have the intuition that p , consider whether the denial of p is counterintuitive. Applications of this test suggest that the class of intuitions is very broad indeed; plausibly, all judgments, or inclinations to judge, will pass the test. Thus is Liberalism motivated.

So there is some pressure towards unrestrictionist approaches to intuition. As we saw early on, however, such approaches do face a challenge: they generate intuitive counterexamples. Many judgments are, intuitively, not intuitions. What is to be said about these unfriendly intuitions?

IV. What We Call ‘Intuitions’

Here is a normal way to describe a Gettier case:

Suppose that Doc wants to know what time it is, so he looks at the clock. The clock reads 12:10, and Doc, aware of no reason to mistrust the clock, accepts that it is 12:10. In fact, however, the clock is broken; it has read 12:10 for some time now. But as it happens, by sheer coincidence, it *is* 12:10. In this case, although Doc has a justified, true belief that it is 12:10, we have the intuition that this belief does not amount to knowledge.

On the view considered, intuitions are just beliefs, or inclinations to believe. Why do we mention ‘intuition’ in this way in this context? Why not say that we have the *belief* that the belief is not knowledge, or, perhaps more naturally, just express the content of the belief, barely asserting that the belief does not amount to knowledge? It is clear that the standard way of invoking intuitions is preferred; compare the bizarreness of divergent patterns of use of ‘intuition’, as in:

... But as it happens, by sheer coincidence, it *is* 12:10. In this case, although Doc does not know that it is 12:10, we have the intuition that he has a justified, true belief that it is 12:10.

Or even:

Suppose that Doc wants to know what time it is, so he looks at the clock. The clock reads 12:10, and Doc, aware of no reason to mistrust the clock, concludes that it is 12:10. We have the intuition that Doc believes that it is 12:10.

The naïve suggestion is that there is an important disanalogy between, on the one hand, the judgment that there is justified true belief, or the judgment that Doc believes that it is 12:10, and, on the other, the judgment that the belief is not knowledge: that the belief is justified and true is *given* to us by the text; that it’s knowledge is something we have to draw out from it ourselves.

But such a disanalogy cannot hold up. Indeed, it is not at all clear that there is even a

⁷ Thanks to Daniel Nolan for helping me properly to formulate this test.

prima facie disanalogy here. The description that we were given of the hypothetical scenario did not contain an explicit statement to the effect that Doc had a justified true belief, any more than they did that he did not have knowledge. Of course, one may say, the scenario *entailed* that there was justified true belief; but likewise, of course, did it entail that there was not knowledge.⁸

Here is my suggestion. The invocation of ‘intuitions’ in philosophical arguments such as the Gettier argument plays not an epistemic role, but a dialectical one. Intuitions are just judgments; they are not epistemically special. We do not know things ‘by intuition’. The apparent distinguishing feature of the judgments that we describe as ‘intuitions’ is merely dialectical. We use ‘intuition’ talk to avoid begging the question against certain kinds of philosophical opponents.⁹ We find the intuition attributions intuitively false because we find them objectionable; but they are objectionable on pragmatic grounds, not semantic ones.

Compare the confusion made by the characters mentioned by King and Stanley (2005), who thought knowledge entailed doubt, because it sounds bad to say that you know that *p* when there is no doubt about *p*. See also Unger (1975), who expresses sympathy for this view: “Perhaps, it is not required of one who knows this thing that he *believe* this thing. Perhaps, even, this is not required because it is required of him *not* to believe that there are rocks but to be in some *higher* or *better* state or position: to *know* that there are rocks. One may here think to oneself: ‘What do you mean, do I *believe* that there are rocks? I don’t *believe* there are rocks; I *know* that there are.’” (p. 18)

Let’s take a brief detour through the general phenomenon of begging the question, before returning to intuitions and ‘intuition’.

V. Begging the Question

My misguided friend alleges that Roger Moore is the best James Bond. I do something wrong if, in an attempt to correct her error, I present her with this argument:

Connery’s James Bond is better than Moore’s; therefore, Moore is not the best Bond.

In what does the deficiency of this argument consist? We are inclined to say that my argument ‘begs the question’ against my friend; what does this mean? The problem with my argument is not a formal one: the argument is straightforwardly valid. Indeed, the argument is sound. Neither is the problem an epistemic one; I have

⁸ I am here bracketing worries about the underspecification of the text; the text itself doesn’t guarantee, for instance, that Doc didn’t form his belief on the basis of checking his wristwatch, which was working; I take it that it is clear that in the case we’re meant to consider, this is not what occurs. See Ichikawa and Jarvis, 2009, and Ichikawa, forthcoming.

⁹ Some passages in Timothy Williamson (2007), (*e.g.* p. 214), suggest an approach along these lines.

sufficient familiarity with each relevant Bond, such that I know the premises perfectly well.

Neither does the problem seem to have to do with transmission failure—there is a well-known apparent difficulty with inferences like *I have hands, therefore I am not a brain in a vat*; the diagnosis appears to have something to do with something like the charge that knowledge of the conclusion is antecedently necessary for knowledge of, or warrant for, the premise.¹⁰ This is not so for my argument; one *can* come to know that Moore is not the best Bond by coming to know that Connery is better than Moore, then inferring to this conclusion. (Imagine a lost soul who saw *The Spy Who Loved Me*, and thought it was great, before seeing *Goldfinger*, and learning what he'd been missing.) Indeed, for most normal subjects, the argument is a perfectly cogent one, even though it begs the question against this opponent.¹¹

The problem with my argument, I think, is not intrinsic to the argument itself; any shortcoming is dialectical. It is inappropriate for me to use this argument in the given conversation, not because it is a defective argument—it's a perfectly good argument—but because of something having to do with my interlocutor. One clear way to see this is to observe that, in a different context, with a different interlocutor, it would be a perfectly felicitous argument. If my friend has never seen a Connery *Bond* movie, my judgment might be a perfectly useful, non-question-begging one. ("Really? There's a Bond even better than Moore?") The problem is that my friend is already familiar with Connery's Bond, and is committed to the deviant judgment that it's inferior to Moore's.

So do I beg the question any time I rely on a premise my interlocutor believes to be false? Not quite, for my friend may have had the belief that Moore was better than Connery, and yet be willing to defer to my testimony. Maybe she's never seen Connery, but knows that he was a Bond, and has heard from a source less reliable than me that Moore was better. The original defect, I think, was this: in the case where she believes that Moore is better than Connery, and it is common knowledge that my testimony to the contrary will not sway her in this matter, my argument is illegitimately question-begging.

A central purpose of assertion is to shrink the context set, which is fixed by shared beliefs. When I assert to my friend that Connery is better than Moore, I have no chance of accomplishing this aim. Similarly, I am guaranteed failure to transmit

¹⁰ Wright (2002).

¹¹ So it is a mistake to tie cogency of argument too closely together with begging the question, at least in the sense in which I am using it. Wright (2003, p. 57), for example, identifies question-beggingness with non-cogency by virtue of deviant warrant transmission. But this argument, in this context, begs the question, even though warrant is properly transmissible from premises to conclusion. It may be that 'beg the question' has, in the warrant transmission literature, taken on a quasi-technical meaning that divorces it from the dialectical role I'm considering.

knowledge, another plausible aim of assertion. This suggests a conversational norm beyond those articulated by Grice: do not assert what you know will not be believed. That is to say: do not beg the question. (A complement rule: do not assert what is common knowledge.) One simple test for whether such a norm is in play is whether it generates an implicature; Grice's maxim, assert only what is relevant, gains support from the fact that an assertion that p generates an implicature that q , where q is a necessary condition on p 's relevance. I tell you that there's a gas station around the corner, and now you know that it's open, because it wouldn't be relevant otherwise. Such an implicature is generated in the relevant case for my proposed norm, although it is slightly less direct to test for, since, unlike Grice's maxims, this one will not very often generate implicatures that the other party didn't already know. (You don't, at least typically, learn that you're willing to defer to my testimony with regards to p on the basis of my assertion that p .) Nevertheless, third-party implicatures are available: if I assert to my friend that p , and you overhear me, you may reasonably believe, *ceteris paribus*, that my friend (a) didn't already know that p , and (b) will accept my testimony. Furthermore, in the cases where these conditions are not met, my friend can challenge the implicature: "I don't believe you," "why should I think that p ?", "I think that not- p " (or: "I already know that p ").

So what am I to say to my misguided friend, if I am barred from flat-out asserting that Connery is better than Moore? In some cases, I may be able to engage with my friend by citing my reasons for thinking that Connery is better than Moore: I may point out, for instance, that Connery was much more rugged and badass, while Moore was something of an unfunny pretty boy. Whether such assertions are legitimate, of course, depends on my friend. Maybe she'll admit that Connery was funnier, and be persuaded that he was better after all. More likely, she'll admit that he was funnier, but insist that Moore was still generally to be preferred. Or of course, she might not even admit that he was funnier, biting the bullet and accepting the absurdity that Moore is funnier, in order to buttress the ranking to which she's steadfastly committed. In this last case, it may be very difficult for me to engage with her in any meaningful way. There just aren't many things that are relevant that she's likely to admit as common ground. The dialectic is effectively brought to a standstill. I am, of course, still justified in continuing to hold my well-supported belief, but in the case imagined I may have to give up on my project of bringing my poor lost friend to the light. I stop trying to persuade her, then, but I still wish my view to be entered into the record: "well, I think that Connery is better."

This assertion, about my thoughts, meets the conversational norm gestured at above: my friend is likely to accept this introspective testimony. But it is not plausible that it is intended to convey argumentative force with respect to the original disputed claim; one cannot convince someone that Connery is better by citing one's own beliefs. My description of my own view is not best thought of as a contribution to the evidence on the matter of the best Bond; it is a declaration of my opinion. It is what happens when I decline to continue to argue, because further arguing could only beg the question.

VI. Intuition and Begging the Question

I want, of course, to generalize this approach to philosophical methodology. Suppose I am arguing with an interlocutor who thinks that knowledge is identical to justified true belief. Here is a ridiculously question-begging argument:

- (A) Imagine a case where a subject has JTB but doesn't know. Such a case is possible, but is a counterexample to $K=JTB$; therefore $K=JTB$ is false.

This is a perfectly good argument; it is sound, I know the premises, etc. But it is question-begging in its context; I do no work by running it in the conversation, as my interlocutor won't accept it. Better, then, to spell out the case more specifically. This version is, for the purposes of the conversation, a little better:

- (B) Suppose that Doc wants to know what time it is, so he looks at the clock. The clock reads 12:10, and Doc, aware of no reason to mistrust the clock, accepts that it is 12:10. In fact, however, the clock is broken; it has read 12:10 for some time now. But as it happens, by sheer coincidence, it is 12:10. In this case, although Doc has a justified, true belief that it is 12:10, this belief does not amount to knowledge.

Argument (B), like (A), is sound. But it is dialectically superior to (A) for the purposes of engaging with someone who holds the JTB view of knowledge: someone could be convinced to give up the view via an argument like (B). It would be a very strange creature indeed who rejected $K=JTB$ when confronted with (A). But of course, (B) may not be universally persuasive. Some misguided souls might continue to believe the JTB theory, even in the face of (B). One way they might do that is to refuse to admit that Doc fails to know what time it is. Against an opponent like that, (B), which barely asserts that Doc fails to have knowledge, begs the question.

In such a case, it may be that the thing to do is to give up on the project of convincing the opponent, and to leave our poor soul to his misguided theories. Instead of producing an argument for the skeptical premise, I may just report my own opinion: well, *I* think he doesn't know, anyway. In many cases, I may be able to do even a bit more, still without begging the question: although my interlocutor refuses to accept that Doc doesn't know, he may still have an inclination to believe it: "well, it's at least *intuitive* that he doesn't know," or even "we have the intuition that he doesn't know." As in the case above, these claims about intuitions are not attempts to argue for the desired conclusion; they're attempts to find common ground, even once we've admitted it's no use continuing to try to bring our interlocutor to the light.

I should note, by the way, that there is a tendency, at least in some metaphilosophical circles, to give up on the project of providing arguments, and retreat to intuition-talk, much sooner than is strictly required. For example, in the case of an interlocutor for whom (B) is question-begging, I said that one option is to give up on arguing and retreat to intuitions, but it is not the only one. We can also attempt to provide arguments for the disputed premises; if my interlocutor insists that the subject knows, I can argue, *it was just a coincidence that the subject got it right, or the subject was crucially relying on the false assumption that the clock*

worked properly. This is the sort of thing we do when our students resist the Gettier judgment. There are often more things to say, and sometimes, some of them will not be question-begging. So the decision to give up on arguing and retreat to intuitions is in general a pragmatic one: it depends on whether you think you'll get anywhere, how busy you are, and how much you care about bringing this particular lost soul to the light.

These sorts of considerations give the lie, I think, to the widespread assumption, mentioned above, that it is essential to intuitions that they be unreflective, independent of theory, and unfounded by argument. Earlier, I gave one reason to reject this view: that there are many facts which are believed reflectively, based on argument and theory, for which their denials are counterintuitive. Now I offer a second: even for many, perhaps all, prototypical examples of philosophical intuitions, there are arguments and theories that support them, and it is plausible that some of us accept them on the basis of these considerations.

We now have the resources available to understand the use of 'intuition' talk in philosophy. Timothy Williamson suggests that, since intuitions are just beliefs or inclinations to believe, philosophers might be better off eschewing the word altogether. On this practical suggestion, I disagree; the Williamsonian, Lewisian, van Inwagenian account of intuitions can be supplemented with a pragmatic story about the circumstances under which it is valuable to speak with the 'intuition' language: we describe judgments as 'intuitions' when we are taking care not to beg the question against interlocutors. If my stubborn opponent refuses to admit that Gettier subjects don't know, he may at least admit to feeling some intuitive pull towards that verdict. So instead of asserting that he doesn't know, I assert that it is intuitive that he doesn't know. If, as occasionally happens, my opponent won't even admit this much, I may fall back even further, and assert merely that *I* (or: *many people*) have the intuition that he doesn't know.

Why do I even bother saying things like this? If, as I claimed above, there is a general expectation that participants in a conversation accept one another's assertions, then if my interlocutor asserts that *p*, and I refuse to go along, it is conversationally helpful for me to register my reticence. (If I don't offer any indication that I disagree, I may mislead my interlocutor, and any witnesses to the conversation—they may reasonably believe that I now believe that *p*.) So in some cases, I think there is a legitimate conversational role for the invocation of intuitions in this way.

Let's go back to the data given above. It is felicitous to claim that it is intuitive that the Gettier subject does not know; it is infelicitous to claim that it is intuitive that the Gettier subject believes. Why? It's good to call the skeptical judgment an intuition because we're arguing with someone who is committed to K=JTB. We weaken the premise to something we expect him to go along with. It's bad to call the belief attribution an intuition because something stronger is available without begging the question: all parties to this debate will admit that the subject believes.

The prediction, then, is that in different contexts, with different dialectical opponents, the appropriateness of ‘intuition’ talk shifts. This prediction is borne out. If I am arguing with an eliminativist about belief, I may claim it intuitive that the Gettier subject believes; if my opponent is not also an eliminativist about knowledge (maybe he’s arguing that knowledge doesn’t entail belief), the bare claim that he knows is apt. If I am arguing with an antiskeptical externalist J=K theorist, I may claim it intuitive that the Gettier subject has JTB. This pattern generalizes widely.

Here is a normal trolley case presentation.¹²

Five people are tied to the trolley tracks. The trolley is heading for them, and will kill them all if nothing is done. But Nemo is standing near the switch; by flipping it, he could divert the trolley onto another path, where only one person is tied to the track. So the five people would not die. We have the intuition that, in this case, it is morally good to decide to flip the switch. This would save the five people, but kill one person who would otherwise live.

We’re used to this one; we use it to challenge a tension between certain consequentialist and deontological moral intuitions. In such a context, these alternate presentations of the same case are very strange:

...Nemo is standing near the switch; by flipping it, he could divert the trolley onto another path, where only one person is tied to the track. So the five people would not die. We have the intuition that, in this case, deciding to flip the switch would save the five people; this is a morally good thing to do.

...he could divert the trolley onto another path, where only one person is tied to the track. So the five people would not die. This would save the five people, but we have the intuition that the trolley would kill one person who would otherwise live.

...Nemo is standing near the switch; if he flipped it, this would divert the trolley onto another path, where only one person is tied to the track. This would be a morally good thing to do. We have the intuition that Nemo could decide to flip the switch.

...The switch is currently in the left position; the left track has five people tied to it. The right track has only one person tied to it. We have the intuition that if the switch were flipped to the right, the five people will be saved, but the trolley would kill one person who would otherwise live.

Stretching things a bit, the first of these three might be useful in a debate about whether human action ever made an important difference (“humans are powerless to do anything important”). The second might be apt in a debate about what sorts of things can be causes (“only events can cause things; objects never cause anything”). The third might be relevant in a debate about whether humans have causal abilities (“people’s actions are determined by their brain activity, which is ultimately physically caused, so you can’t ever decide what to do”). The fourth has a natural home in a discussion about whether contingent counterfactuals are ever true (“quantum mechanics shows us that the trolley might, if it is directed right spontaneously tunnel to the other side of the person on the tracks, so it’s not the

¹² Thomson (1976).

case that if it were directed right, it would kill someone.”)

Let’s return to the apparent counterexamples to the liberal view listed in §1:

- There are some people outside my window
- I am hungry
- Grass is green
- It sometimes rains in Scotland
- Batman is a fictional character
- The Yankees have won several pennants

These are things I believe but which, intuitively, I do not intuit. But for each, there are contexts where describing it as an intuition is perfectly felicitous. When faced with a metaphysical view entailing that there are no people, I object that it is intuitive that there are people outside my window. If you claim on confused neuroscientific grounds that it is brains, not persons, who can be hungry, I reply that intuitively, *I* am hungry. Many scientists say that objects do not have colors; only light has color—this conflicts with the intuition that grass is green. If someone thinks that it almost never rains anywhere, because rain requires pure H₂O to fall from the sky, I point out that intuitively, it sometimes rains in Scotland (even though it is common knowledge that pure H₂O never falls from the sky in Scotland). I claim it intuitive that Batman is a fictional character against the tempting view that there are no fictional characters. And a ship-of-Theseus-style skeptic about team identity over time might nevertheless admit it to be intuitive that the Yankees have won several pennants.

The apparent counterexamples to the liberal view disappear, given suitable conversational contexts.

VII. Objection: Why Talk about ‘Intuition’?

On my view, intuitions are beliefs, or attractions to believe. I offer a pragmatic story for why we sometimes describe our beliefs, using the language of intuitions, and why we sometimes barely express them by asserting their contents. But I have not yet offered a comparison of pragmatic differences between, on the one hand, asserting that one has the intuition that *p*, and, on the other, asserting that one believes that *p*. If intuitions are just beliefs or inclinations, then why don’t we describe the things we describe as intuitions as beliefs or inclinations? What accounts for the special place for ‘intuition’ language in philosophical theorizing?

The first thing to recognize is that it is easy to overestimate the role of ‘intuition’ language in philosophy. ‘Intuition’ language in presentation of philosophical thought experiments—even those that serve as prototypes in metaphilosophical discussions of intuition—is rarer than one might, given the prominence of metaphilosophical discourse on intuition, suppose. The word ‘intuition’ does not appear in Edmund Gettier’s own presentation of his famous cases; he describes it as “equally clear that Smith does not know” that the man who will get the job has ten coins, and just

barely asserts that “if these two conditions hold, then Smith does *not* know that” Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona. Gettier presumably felt—justifiably and truly!—that his examples were sufficiently compelling that such bald presentations of them would not beg questions against many dialectical opponents. (Had a staunch JTB theorist accused him of begging the question in asserting that Smith doesn’t know, Gettier might well have, as I suggest, fallen back to a claim what he thinks or is inclined to think or intuit.)

In other cases, even when authors write with greater circumspection, avoiding making bald assertions of controversial theses, they make their more tentative claims without invoking the word ‘intuition’. Kripke doesn’t use the word ‘intuition’ when presenting the intuitive verdict about the Gödel-Schmidt case:

So, since the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about ‘Gödel’, are in fact [on the descriptivist view in question] always referring to Schmidt. But *it seems to me that* we are not. (84, my emphasis)

It would have been equally natural for Kripke to have said that ‘it is intuitive’ that we are not, or that ‘I have the intuition that’ we are not; the claim about the seeming played just the same role.

In Judith Jarvis Thompson’s famous violinist argument in defense of abortion rights, she invites the reader to imagine that he has been forcibly connected to a violinist, whose survival now depends on your bodily connection. In describing the intuitive reaction to the case, she does not say that ‘intuitively’, you are not morally required to maintain the connection; instead, she makes a tentative claim about what the reader will think about the case: “I imagine you would regard this as outrageous, which suggests that something really is wrong with that plausible-sounding argument I mentioned a moment ago.” (71)

I find no reason to think that the word ‘intuition’ plays a unique, critical role in philosophical inquiry. I argued above that the truth conditions for claims about intuitions were equivalent to those about beliefs or attractions to believe; it seems to me that the pragmatics are likewise parallel. Claims about intuitions have their place in philosophical discourse, but that place is also well-suited for “I believe that,” “it seems to me that,” “plausibly,” etc.

VIII. Conclusion: Methodological Morals

Intuitions are just beliefs, or inclinations to believe. Although some of our judgments are naturally described as intuitions, while others are not, any distinction between these categories is pragmatic, rather than semantic, and it carries dialectical, rather than epistemic, significance.

Three methodological morals suggest themselves.

First, it is a mistake to think of intuitions as evidence for their contents; the intuition

that p is not, typically, to be used as evidence for p . When I reflect on what reasons I have to believe that p , it would be perverse to cite among them that I believe that p , or that I have an inclination to believe it. (This, even if we have good general reasons to think that most of our beliefs are true.) My beliefs are, or should be, sensitive to reasons of their own; so, *a fortiori*, with my intuitions. The intuitions themselves, then, ought not to be used as evidence, generally speaking.

(A corollary to this moral: it is not obviously of great epistemic value for a philosopher to spend significant resources investigating what intuitions he actually has, or what intuitions philosophers on the whole have, or what intuitions members of the folk have. These are legitimate psychological and sociological questions, but they are not particularly important for the purpose of engaging in first-order philosophy. Compare other disciplines: biologists, say, needn't engage in excessive introspection, or surveys of their colleagues or the folk, in order responsibly to engage in their inquiries.¹³)

Second, and relatedly, if the pragmatic story offered above is correct, then the philosophical commonplace that appeals to intuitions do in fact play a central role in philosophical methodology, as actually practiced, is incorrect. We cite intuitions when engaging with disagreeing opponents, and are taking care to avoid begging the question. We attempt to render our own positions more understandable: "this is what I think, and you can at least see why someone might want to think that." This is not a description of our evidence; it's just a description of our position. It would be a perverse methodology for any truth-aimed inquiry to try simply to construct a theory matching as many of our beliefs, or inclinations to believe, as possible. Such an exercise would lead to a description of our beliefs about the world; this is far from an exhaustive description of the aim of philosophy. That would be a sort of intellectual autobiography, not the serious investigation of reality that philosophy is. But if, as I have argued, all beliefs are intuitions, we are forced, by orthodox descriptions of intuition-based methodology, into this caricature. (*E.g.* this passage from Swain *et. al*, 2008: "According to standard practice, a philosophical claim is *prima facie* good to the extent that it accords with our intuitions, *prima facie* bad to the extent it does not ... intuitions about thought-experiments are standardly taken as reasons to accept or reject philosophical theories.") The absurdity of this picture may be made particularly manifest via a comparison, again, with other disciplines. Holmes is considering whether the murderer used a blunt instrument. This move is no part of anything like standard crime scene methodology: Holmes rejects the theory on the basis of his discovery of a belief in himself that the murder was a

¹³ As Jonathan Weinberg rightly pointed out to me, there are still some reasons why philosophers ought to be interested in psychological questions about how philosophers think. Without some reflection of this kind, for instance, our beliefs about our own philosophical abilities have little upon which to ground themselves. Knowing what intuitions we have, and what judgments we make, is important in knowing how good we are at what we do. So it is with all fields; philosophy is not exceptional.

stabbing. It is highly misleading to describe appropriate crime scene investigation methodology as an attempt to articulate the theory that predicts the truth of most of the investigator's beliefs; so likewise is it a mistake to think that a central desideratum in philosophy is accordance with 'intuition'. (This is not to deny the obvious consequence of this approach that the end result of a successful inquiry will be a theory that is in line with the theorist's intuitions.)

Third, we should not necessarily prefer 'pretheoretic' intuitions over reflective, considered ones made by experts. One reason that is sometimes offered to prefer such naïve judgments is that they are thought to be less likely to be the products of commitments to mistaken theories. Perhaps this is so—professional philosophers do have vested interests in their particular views, and it is not implausible that we should be, to some extent, prone to overstating the cases for the views for which we're on the record.

But of course, folk judgments are influenced by antecedent beliefs, too, and folk theories are not always good ones. Although they're less likely than those of professional philosophers to admit of the particular epistemic vice mentioned above, it is not, I hope, implausible to think that philosophers might be, on the whole, more reliable in judging philosophical questions than the folk are, even though we face a particular potential vice from which the folk are in less danger. To refuse to admit this is to claim that philosophical training does nothing at all to increase our understanding of philosophical matters—a radical repudiation of philosophy.

Again, the parallel with other disciplines is informative. The proposed argument favoring folk intuitions over philosophers' should generalize widely: practitioners in other academic disciplines, like philosophers, have staked some degree of their professional reputations on particular theories; it is plausible that these commitments might bias them, therefore, in favor of beliefs confirming their antecedent views. Members of the folk are relatively free from these sources of bias. But no one takes seriously the idea that therefore, for instance, historians should be consulting folk judgments about, say, the effect of the printing press on the Protestant Reformation. If you're going to consult anyone's judgments on this matter, consult those of professional historians. Better still, if you want to do serious scholarship, consult the evidence, and examine the arguments, on which the judgments are based.¹⁴

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