

PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS – PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

---

A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

By

JAMES F. MCBAIN JR.

Dr. Peter J. Markie, Dissertation Supervisor

AUGUST 2008

© Copyright by James F. McBain Jr.

All Rights Reserved

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS—PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

presented by James F. McBain Jr.,

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

---

Professor Peter J. Markie

---

Professor Paul Weirich

---

Professor Donald Sievert

---

Professor Matthew McGrath

---

Professor Todd R. Schachtman

This work is dedicated to

Elizabeth I. McBain

and in loving memory of

James F. McBain Sr.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has been a long time coming. I have received enormous encouragement and support from so many for so long. First, I would like to thank Dr. Peter J. Markie for his never ending support and belief in me. Dr. Markie not only has helped me through this project, but has shown me what it means to be a philosopher and a teacher. I can never adequately express my gratitude. None of this would have ever been possible if it were not for him. I would also like to thank the members of my committee – Dr. Paul Weirich, Dr. Donald Sievert, Dr. Matthew McGrath, and Dr. Todd Schactman. The feedback they gave me helped this work become what it has. Any improvements in this work are attributed to my committee, any errors are solely mine. This dissertation has also helped from the numerous conversations I have had over the years with Jared Bates, Jason Berntsen, Jesse Estevez, Darin Finke, Bruce Glymour, Amy Lara, Jordan Lindberg, Jon Mahoney, Alan Nichols, Doug Patterson, Jamie Phillips, Mark Price, Don Viney, Yeongseo Yeo, and numerous others from the University of Missouri TA corral. They have all helped me in so many ways and I am grateful to each one. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their love and support. In both my professional and personal life, they have been the center and the ones to give me a hand when I needed it. So to Mom, Dad, Janice, Jerry, Stephen, and Andrew, I love you and thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
PREFACE – AN OVERVIEW OF AN AMBITIOUS GOAL.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. THE ROLE OF INTUITIONS IN PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS	
1.1 Introduction.....	7
1.2 A Sample Philosophical Analysis: The Gettier Problem.....	12
1.3 Robust Conceptual Analysis.....	17
1.4 Robust Conceptual Analysis-Modified.....	24
1.5 Modest Conceptual Analysis.....	26
1.6 Explication.....	32
1.7 Reflective Equilibrium.....	36
1.8 Concluding Remarks.....	50
2. THE STRUCTURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS	
2.1 Introduction.....	51
2.2 Intuitions as Psychological States.....	53
2.2.1 Intuitions as Specific Psychological States.....	54
2.3 Intuitions as Propositional Attitudes.....	56
2.3.1 On Confusing Intuitions with Perceptions and Memories.....	56
2.3.2 Intuitions as Propositional Attitudes, but Not Beliefs.....	58
2.4 Understanding the Content of an Intuition.....	62
2.5 The “Spontaneous” Nature of Intuitions.....	65
2.5.1 Are Intuitions Judgments?.....	66
2.5.2 The Theory-ladenness of Intuitions.....	70
2.6 Degrees of Convictions.....	76
2.7 The Fallibility of Intuitions.....	78
2.7.1 A Philosophical Argument for the Fallibility of Intuitions.....	78
2.7.2 Empirical Reasons for the Fallibility of Intuitions.....	80
2.8 Do Intuitions Involve an Apparent Necessity?.....	83
2.9 Concluding Remarks.....	86
3. THE EPISTEMIC STATUS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS	
3.1 Introduction.....	88
3.2 A Sample of the Supposed Epistemic Status of Intuitions – The Gettier Case.....	91
3.3 Traditionalism about the Epistemic Status of Intuitions.....	92
3.3.1 The Self-Defeat Argument.....	93
3.3.2 Worries about the Self-Defeat Argument.....	98
3.3.3 The Epistemic Autonomy ‘Argument’.....	100
3.3.4 Worries about the Epistemic Autonomy ‘Argument’.....	103

3.3.5	Summary of the Criticisms of Traditionalism.....	105
3.4	Skepticism about the Epistemic Status of Intuitions.....	105
3.4.1	The Calibration Argument.....	106
3.4.2	Worries about the Calibration Argument.....	107
3.4.3	The Unreliability of Intuitions.....	110
3.4.4	The Legitimacy of the Unreliability Criticisms.....	114
3.4.5	Hales’ “Problem of Intuition”.....	116
3.4.6	Worries about the “Problem of Intuition”.....	117
3.5	The Moderate Stance on the Epistemic Status of Intuitions.....	120
3.5.1	Informed Intuitions.....	121
3.5.2	Intuitional Degrees – The Hierarchical Status of Intuitions.....	125
3.5.3	Responding to the Unreliability Worries.....	131
3.6	Concluding Remarks.....	132
4.	<b>PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS IN LIGHT OF THEORY-LADEN INTUITIONS</b>	
4.1	Introduction.....	133
4.2	Revisiting the Methods.....	134
4.2.1	The Task and Goals of Conceptual Analysis.....	134
4.2.2	The Task and Goal of Explication.....	134
4.2.3	The Task and Goal of Reflective Equilibrium.....	136
4.3	The Problem of Disagreement.....	137
4.3.1	The Problem of Disagreement – Empirical Version.....	138
4.3.2	The Problem of Disagreement – Philosophical Version.....	143
4.3.3	Intuition-Based Philosophical Methods and Disagreement.....	146
4.4	The Charge from Psychology.....	150
4.4.1	Can Intuition-Based Philosophical Methods Avoid the Charge?.....	152
4.5	Evaluating Reflective Equilibrium.....	154
4.6	A Methodological Proposal – Practical Explication.....	156
4.7	Practical Explication and the Ambitions of Philosophy – A Few Brief Remarks.....	160
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>163</b>
	<b>VITA.....</b>	<b>169</b>

# PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS – PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

James F. McBain Jr.

Dr. Peter J. Markie, Dissertation Supervisor

## ABSTRACT

This work is a defense of philosophical intuitions and the use of them in philosophy. First, I survey the main forms of intuition-based philosophical methods – conceptual analysis, explication, and reflective equilibrium – and demonstrate how each treats philosophical intuitions as basic evidential sources. Next, I will develop and argue for a conception of what a philosophical intuition is. Third, I will provide an argument for the evidential status of intuitions based on the correct account of the nature of a philosophical intuition. Finally, I will argue that if philosophy wishes to use intuitions in philosophical theorizing, then it must engage in practical explication. To this end, I will be developing an account of philosophical intuitions that correctly captures the nature of the intuitions used in philosophy and demonstrating how philosophers best can use those intuitions to justify their analyses of philosophical concepts.

## Preface – An Overview of an Ambitious Goal

This work is a defense of philosophical intuitions and the use of them in philosophy. There has been much in the way of addressing this topic particularly in the last 10 years. In that ever-growing literature, two main positions have formed. On the one side there are those, mostly rationalists, who hold vigilant to a conception of philosophical analysis which makes use of a priori intuitions and maintain that the only legitimate philosophy is so intuition-based. Their opponents are those, mostly naturalists, who maintain the use of intuitions in philosophy is what ultimately plagues philosophy. These naturalists maintain we ought to give up all use of intuition-based philosophical methods altogether. The ever-raging debate has largely followed these demarcated lines. What is surprising about this debate is that little has been said about the middle ground. And it is this largely ignored middle ground where I believe a solution to the debate lies. To that end, I will be developing an account of philosophical intuitions (a non-a priori account) which correctly captures the nature of the intuitions used in philosophy and demonstrating how philosophers best can use those intuitions to justify their analyses of philosophical concepts.

This work is divided up into four chapters. In chapter one I survey the various philosophical methods used in philosophy and show how they all make use of intuitions. To that end, I will look at three main methods – conceptual analysis (of which I will break into the further more refined versions of robust conceptual analysis, modified robust conceptual analysis, and modest conceptual analysis), explication, and reflective equilibrium. Each of these methods makes use of intuitions although they make use of

different conceptions of intuitions as I will show. Furthermore, I will show not just that each of these philosophical methods makes use of intuitions, but they treat intuitions as a basic evidential source. By this I mean that each method uses intuitions as a foundational state (particularly a foundational mental state) which provides a reason for one's believing a certain proposition is true. As will become clear, this survey of how each method makes use of intuitions, the type of intuitions they make use of, and the way in which they treat the intuitions as a basic evidential source will be necessary in order to later assess which methods make use of the correct conception of intuition and are in the end viable as correct methods for philosophy.

In chapter two I develop an account of philosophical intuitions. Specifically I will be developing and defending what I see as the correct conception of philosophical intuitions. This conception will be different than the standard conception discussed in the philosophical literature. The standard conception is that intuitions are:

1. Psychological States;
2. Epistemic States;
3. Propositional Attitudes;
4. Fallible (though some deny this);
5. Are Held as Convictions;
6. Are NOT the Result of a Conscious Inference; and
7. Involve an Apparent Necessity.

In this chapter I will demonstrate why 1-5 are in fact correct, but why 6 and 7 are incorrect. I will develop an account of theory-laden intuitions where the intuitions are formed as the result of background theories. Intuitions are laden with theories that underlie the understanding and deployment of a concept or predicate. Theory-ladenness will be further broken down into the kind where the theory-ladenness does not involve the direct application of a rule or principle (what I will call "theory-informed") and laden

in the sense that the intuition is the direct result of the application of a principle, theory, or some system of belief (what I will call “theory-driven”). What I plan to show is that, contra the standard account of intuitions, all philosophical intuitions are theory-laden in this robust way – both theory-driven and theory-informed. In this way, I plan to show 6 is false. Furthermore, given the theory-ladenness of intuitions, intuitions need not, though may, involve an apparent necessity. So, I will maintain that 7 is false as well. While it may seem that my account of intuition is not very different than the standard (in that I only differ with regard to two conditions) it is those two conditions that will ultimately show how philosophers may still make use of appeals to intuitions which are discussed in later chapters.

Once I have developed and defended my account of intuition I will move on in chapter three to show how those intuitions have epistemic weight – that they can be used to justify beliefs. To show how theory-laden intuitions have epistemic, evidential weight, I will look at three positions with regard to the question of the epistemic weight of intuitions – the traditionalists, skeptics, and moderates. More specifically, I will look at each position with regard to their answer to where the following is true:

( $\Phi$ ) If S intuits that p, then S is prima facie justified in believing that p.

Traditionalism concerning the epistemic status of intuitions maintains that intuitions one’s intuiting that p provides prima facie justification for one’s belief that p or for one to know that p. Such a position is held largely by rationalist philosophers such as George Bealer and Laurence BonJour. While there are slight differences between these various advocates of traditionalism, the main thesis is that  $\Phi$  is true where ‘intuition’ is cashed out in terms of a priori intuitions. Furthermore, traditionalists maintain intuitions

are not theory-laden. So, what characterizes the traditionalists position is that  $\Phi$  is true and intuitions are a priori and non-theory-laden. Skepticism concerning the epistemic status of intuitions maintains  $\Phi$  is false. There is something either about the intuition-producing mechanism, the context in which the intuition was formed, or the lack of ability to calibrate our intuitions that leads the skeptics to the conclusion that intuitions in philosophy have no epistemic weight and should be excluded from philosophical analysis. It must be noted that most of the skeptics' arguments for the falsity of  $\Phi$  is due to their concern with the nature of intuitions as cashed by traditionalists. Most of the skeptics' worries about the epistemic status of intuitions are worries about the epistemic status of a priori intuitions. Skeptics have not concerned themselves with an account of intuitions as was developed in chapter two. The moderate position holds intuitions ought to and do count as evidence in support of some claim (contra the skeptics), but we need to rethink how this happens in light of empirical considerations and how much support intuitions can give (contra the traditionalists). Moderates take  $\Phi$  as true, but the account of intuition is more or less cashed out in terms of the account developed in chapter two. They do reject the epistemic status of a priori intuitions, but do not believe  $\Phi$  to be false.

I will be defending a moderate position on the epistemic status of intuitions. To this end, I will look at two arguments in support of the epistemic status of intuitions – the self-defeat argument and the epistemic autonomy 'argument' – and will show that both of these arguments are problematic. Then I will assess three arguments for the skeptical position – the calibration argument, a generalized argument concerning the unreliability of intuitions, and Hales' "problem of intuition" – and show the premises of these arguments are true, but the conclusion – intuitions are epistemologically useless – does

not follow and ought to be weakened. In this way I will develop my case for the moderate position. I will show that intuitions can and ought to be treated as having epistemic weight, but only once we have addressed the skeptical worries.

In chapter four I will return to the various philosophical methods presented in chapter one – conceptual analysis, explication, and reflective equilibrium – and show how each fares in light of the account of intuition developed and defended in chapter two as well as the moderate position on the epistemic status of intuitions developed in chapter three. What I will show is that there is one philosophical method which can capture the correct account of intuitions and epistemic status of intuition and that is what I will call *practical explication*. I will do so by evaluating two main arguments against intuition-based philosophical methodologies – the problem of disagreement and the charge from psychology. I chose these two since they are not meant to be directly against intuitions themselves, rather against intuition-based philosophical methodologies altogether. I will show that conceptual analysis cannot account for my accounts developed in the previous chapters or for the two objections present in the chapter. The same will be true of reflective equilibrium. However, explication can accommodate my account of intuitions and the epistemic status of intuitions all while avoiding the objections considered.

Hence, the methodological choice for philosophers is to engage in practical explication.

And so this work begins with a discussion of the various types of philosophical methodologies and follows along two key aspects of those – what is the type of intuition at work in the method and what is the epistemic status of those intuitions ultimately arriving at the conclusion that if philosophers are to pursue intuition-based philosophical methods, then they ought to pursue practical explication. This is not to say that I have

answered every question concerning philosophical intuitions. However, as Nicholas Rescher puts it, the “inability to resolve all the problems of the field nowise precludes the prospect of achieving a satisfactory resolution of many or even most of them” (2006, vii). I believe I have found a satisfactory resolution for most of the problems concerning what philosophical intuitions are, what the epistemic status of philosophical intuitions is, and what is the best method in philosophy for making use of those intuitions with that epistemic status.

## Chapter One – The Role of Intuitions in Philosophical Analysis

*“It is critical that philosophers understand what it is they are doing when they do philosophy if they are to do it well.” – Richard Fumerton, “The Paradox of Analysis”*

### 1.1 Introduction

The goal of this first chapter is to illustrate how intuitions are used in various types of philosophical theorizing. These various types of philosophical theorizing take intuitions to count as some sort of basic evidential source or as evidence for or against a philosophical theory or as justification for a proposition. It is important to demonstrate this fact, as it will set the stage as to the importance of the normative question as to whether we ought to treat intuitions as evidence which will be addressed in later chapters.

Philosophical analysis needs intuitions. Yet, the problem with establishing this claim is that certain philosophical analysts have not been very forthcoming methodologically speaking (particularly in the case of conceptual analysis). Philosophers do not often give straightforward characterizations of what it is to do analysis. Here I will look at four versions of philosophical analysis. The first takes concepts to exist independently of us and analyzing a concept involves the making a complex concept’s simple constituent parts explicit (henceforth, I will call this version “robust conceptual analysis”). The second version takes concepts to be had by us. We have the concepts of knowledge, justice, freedom, etc., in our minds and we analyze the concept in an attempt to understand the concept better (henceforth, I will call this version “modest conceptual analysis”). The third is explication (or as some call it “rational reconstruction” or “broad analysis” (Swartz 1991, 100)). With explication, the concept is still had by us, but when analyzing it, we take a concept that is too vague for our purposes and replace it by a more

precise concept (I will remain using ‘explication’ for this type of method). The fourth is perhaps the most widely discussed method in contemporary philosophy – reflective equilibrium. Here it is a matter of people’s considered judgments being brought into balance with the principle or theory under review as well as other background theories. The balance is achieved through a process of reflective revision in which the considered judgments may be revised, the principle or theory may be revised, or both.<sup>1</sup> After asking what each method is, I will show the intuitive presuppositions of each. I will illustrate how each has at its foundation the evidential use of intuitions as essential to the method itself and attempt to articulate what the phenomenological nature and/or mental structure of the intuitions being used are.

Before launching into the methods themselves, two concepts need to be explained – *intuition* and *basic evidential source*.<sup>2</sup> While chapter two will be entirely devoted to the analysis and development of an account of intuition, I will here lay out some of the fairly uncontroversial features of intuitions for purposes of clarity. First and foremost, intuitions are psychological states. While many phrase intuitive reports in the form of “what one would say”, I believe that most contemporary philosophers do not take intuitions to be mere linguistic dispositions, but rather full, independent psychological states. Though intuitions are psychological states, they are different than perceptual or memorial states. I take it that one can form novel intuitions without having any perceptual or memorial information about the situation in question stored in her memory.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that in describing the first three forms of analysis I talked exclusively of concepts, while with reflective equilibrium I talk of principles or theories. This is not to imply that reflective equilibrium eschews concepts in any way. In reflective equilibrium, philosophers often start with a concept and then offer a theory or principle to explain the concept. The theory offered is more than a simple statement of necessary and sufficient conditions (as with say robust conceptual analysis). The reason for this is that often our conception is too robust to be captured in a statement of necessary and sufficient conditions.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis of the concepts I present here is in no way a full or final treatment of the concepts. In later chapters, both concepts will be discussed in much greater detail.

Furthermore, intuitions are propositional attitudes. The standard content of the propositional attitude is thus going to be classificational proposition(s) of the form “this case, C, is (or is not) an instance of \_\_\_\_”. That proposition is going to be about the classification of a natural kind, concept, or predicate. Furthermore, one must have sufficient understanding of the kind, concept, or predicate involved. If one does not understand what the content of the intuition is, then one will not be convinced that the content is being satisfied or that the proposition is true. Intuitions must also be non-inferential in that they must not be reasoned to by argumentation. In this sense, intuitions are spontaneous. They must also be held as convictions (which albeit come in degrees), and as such cannot be mere hunches or guesses. This is not to say that intuitions cannot be arrived at via various types of mental processes. It is possible for one to consider a variety of cases and then form the intuition that they all have x in common. In this way, the intuition would be non-inferential, not a mere hunch or guess, and stem from more than the consideration of one case. Finally, intuitions are fallible (while this was not traditionally held by philosophers in the early part of the twentieth century, I take it to be widely accepted today). I take these to be some basic features of intuitions. Thus, the account of intuition that I am using is that an intuition is a spontaneous propositional attitude which classifies some case as one of a kind, concept, or predicate. I grant that not every philosopher would agree to this account of intuitions in full. As will be shown below, different methods of philosophical analysis take intuitions to have different various characteristics, some of which may or may not be listed above. Yet, this aside, I take this to be a sufficient working account of what an intuition is in contemporary philosophical theorizing and one that will be accepted as a minimal account.

One further point about intuitions needs to be made before continuing. It is important to note that when discussing the epistemic status of intuitions, I am not considering intuitions to be instances of either knowledge or justified belief. All intuitions are not instances of knowledge nor are they all justified. That one intuits that  $p$  does not in itself imply that one knows that  $p$  nor has a justified belief that  $p$ . It may be the case that all intuitions are defeasibly justified. It is plausible that intuiting that  $p$  can lead to one being defeasibly justified that  $p$ . I do not at this time wish to weigh-in on this issue. I am leaving it as an open question as to what the epistemic status of intuitions is exactly.

Another point about philosophical intuitions, as I am discussing them, needs to be made. It is common in mathematics and the philosophy of mathematics to discuss intuitions of the existence of numbers, of the truth of proofs, etc. ‘Intuition’, in these disciplines, refers to intuitions as a sort of perception (Gödel 1964, 483-484).<sup>3</sup> Those who invoked intuition as a way to attain mathematical knowledge treated intuition as a faculty, like perception, which *saw* mathematical truths giving way to *immediate* knowledge. The type of intuition that I will be discussing is not of this kind.

Mathematical intuitions are apprehensions of mathematical objects directly and also allow us to see mathematical truths. In other words, as Jerrold Katz points out, they are intuitions of the structure of abstract mathematical objects (2000, 45). The content of mathematical intuitions is thus different than that of a philosophical intuition.

Mathematical intuitions have as their content abstract mathematical objects. Yet, the type of intuition that I am referring to as “philosophical intuition” or “epistemic intuition” is a ‘judgment’ that results in a propositional attitude. Philosophical intuitions have as their

---

<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that this is not a form of sense perception in the normal sense of ‘sense perception’.

content propositions. With philosophical intuitions, as stated earlier, there is no analogy with perception.<sup>4</sup> The content of epistemic intuitions is completely different than mathematical intuitions.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of a basic evidential source is not a new or mysterious concept. The concept is that of a foundational state (a mental state for our purposes) which provides a reason for one's believing a certain proposition is true. Various types of mental states are unquestionably considered to be basic evidential sources. Perception, memory, and, by some, introspection are taken to count as evidence for the truth of some propositions. Visual states, auditory states, taste states, etc. are basic evidential sources because when a person experiences a state of seeming to see, hear, taste, etc. that something is the case, she has evidence for the truth of the proposition expressing that something (Goldman & Pust 1998, 180). The reason that we are *prima facie* justified in believing the proposition is that the mental state is a generally reliable indicator of the truth of the proposition. The contents of the mental states are generally true. When I place a piece of sushi, say a tuna roll, in my mouth, my taste sensation is that of tuna (under normal circumstances; e.g., given that the sushi chef has not tucked a wad of wasabi in the roll unbeknownst to me). And, given that my taste sensations are generally reliable, I have *prima facie* evidence that I am eating tuna. It is in this way that certain mental states are basic evidential sources.

It is important to note at this point that initially I am assuming a reliabilist framework in developing the basicity of intuitions. An intuition evidences a belief if it

---

<sup>4</sup> This does not stop people from talking of philosophical intuitions as *seeings* in a metaphorical sense.

<sup>5</sup> In one sense there is an analogy between philosophical and mathematical intuitions. According to many philosophers, propositions are abstract objects as are mathematical objects, so both types of intuitions have abstract objects as their content. Yet, since I believe that we can maintain, despite both being abstract objects, they are different types of beasts. So, I maintain the analogy does not hold.

is reliably connected with the truth of that belief. In this way, intuitions function as a sort of experience. The intuition justifies a belief, but is not itself justified. Now, I do not take this as the final word on the matter. There are plausible alternatives to the way I have just discussed for intuitions to evidence beliefs. I am in no way committing myself to one particular framework here. I simply find that it will be easier to discuss the epistemic weight of intuitions if I have a working framework from which to discuss.

Characterized this way, basic evidential sources scream of foundationalist epistemology (particularly evidentialist-foundationalism). While, traditionally the notion of “basicity” has been associated with foundationalism, I do not take it that the concept of basic evidential sources is confined to foundationalism. One’s holding a particular theory of evidence does not necessarily commit one to holding that knowledge, justification, warrant, or any other epistemic terms must be analyzed in terms of a foundation. Whether one commits themselves to a foundationalist epistemology depends in part on the details of how various states function as basic evidential sources, not just whether they are basic evidential sources or not. So, I remain open to the view that intuitions are themselves capable of gaining epistemic support from other factors such as how well they cohere with our other beliefs and intuitions. I take it that seen in this light, such coherentist-tinged methods, e.g., reflective equilibrium, can take states, such as intuitions, as basic evidential sources. I will briefly discuss the connection between reflective equilibrium and foundationalism later in this chapter.

## 1.2 A Sample Philosophical Analysis: The Gettier Problem

In epistemology, one of the essential questions (if not *the* essential question) is “What is knowledge?” Philosophers since Plato have addressed this question.

Specifically, philosophers have attempted to determine what conditions need to be met in order to say that someone knows something. When philosophers ask, “What is it for someone to know that p?” they are asking for a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that determine what it means for the person to know that the proposition is true. In developing an answer to this question, philosophers have attempted to provide an analysis that captured the (or our) conception of knowledge by providing conditions that are jointly sufficient and individually necessary.

The traditional or standard account of knowledge, which had been advanced since Plato, is what is referred to as the “JTB Account”.<sup>6</sup> This account maintains that:

(JTB) S knows that p if and only if

- (i) p is true,
- (ii) S believes that p,
- (iii) S is justified in believing that p.

The first condition, the truth condition, requires that the proposition be true. The basic idea is that it is impossible to know a false proposition. The second condition, the belief condition, requires that the subject have the corresponding belief. One cannot know that p is true without having the belief that p in her head. The third condition, the justification condition, can be cashed out in various ways. Some, such as Roderick Chisholm, cash this condition out in terms of the person having adequate evidence; while others, such as A. J. Ayer, require the person have the right to be sure that p is true (Gettier 1963, 237). However, epistemologists articulate the justification condition, what it amounts to is the person having *good reason* for believing p to be true. One reason for this condition is to

---

<sup>6</sup> Though this is disagreement as to whether Plato did actually advance the JTB account of knowledge is a matter of debate. Suffice it to say that it is Edmund Gettier who makes this claim, without explanation, and I am merely assuming it. Whether the JTB Account truly coincides with Plato’s epistemology, I leave for some other time.

eliminate the possibility of the subject acquiring knowledge by mere luck (Steup 1996, 4). We surely would not want to say that one can know that p is true by just happening to believe a true proposition. So, epistemologists maintain that one must be justified in her true belief that p. These three conditions exemplify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which, were believed by those epistemologists, to capture what we mean by 'know'.

To test this analysis, philosophers turn to the method of counterexamples. Is it possible to provide a counterexample to the proposed set of necessary and sufficient conditions? A counterexample is a thought experiment (or a real world case) that would falsify the proposed analysis. To say that there is no counterexample to a proposed analysis is to say that it is logically impossible to construct a case that would satisfy one half of the proposed bi-conditional and falsify the other half of the proposed biconditional. For the above proposal, if it is possible to construct a case where either one can have a justified true belief without knowing that p or know that p without having a justified true belief, then the analysis is inaccurate. The most famous counterexamples to JTB were given by Edmund Gettier. Gettier provided two cases which showed that the JTB account does not state a sufficient condition for a person to know that p. His cases showed that it is possible for someone to have a justified true belief that p without knowing that p. His cases were based on two background assumptions about justification. First, it is possible for one to be justified in believing a false proposition. Second, for any proposition, p, if someone, S, is justified in believing p, and p entails q, and S believes q on the basis of deducing q from p, then S is justified in believing that q (known as the *closure principle*) (Gettier 1963, 238).

Let us for sake of simplicity look at one of Gettier's two cases. Suppose that Smith is justified in believing the proposition that "Jones owns a Ford." Smith is justified in believing this since as far back as he can remember Jones has always owned a Ford and he just offered Smith a ride while he was driving a Ford. Yet, as it turns out, Jones has sold his Ford and is currently driving a rented Ford. Thus, the proposition "Jones owns a Ford" is false. But Gettier asks us to further suppose that Smith constructs three propositions about the whereabouts of his other friend Brown. By randomly selecting three places, he constructs the following three propositions:

1. Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Boston.
2. Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona.
3. Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Brest-Litovsk.

Each of the three is entailed by the proposition, "Jones owns a Ford". Now as it turns out, Brown is in fact in Barcelona. So, 2 is true. However, Smith has no evidence for believing this proposition. Nevertheless, Gettier maintains Smith is justified in believing 2, though he does not know it. Since Smith is justified in believing that Jones owns a Ford, and since "Brown is in Barcelona" is entailed by "Jones owns a Ford", Smith is justified in believing 2. Thus, we have a case where one has a justified true belief, but does not know.<sup>7</sup>

So, what is this case supposed to show? The case is intended to have us form the intuition that Smith does not know that Brown is in Barcelona despite Smith having a

---

<sup>7</sup> The structure of this case (and of any "Gettier-style case") is as follows:

A Gettier-style case for some S and p has it that:

- (a) the truth condition for p holds,
- (b) the belief condition for p holds,
- (c) the justification condition for p holds,
- (d) some proposition q is false,
- (e) either the justification condition holds for q or at least S would be justified in believing q,
- (f) S does not know that p.

Any case which is constructed in this way can be said to be a Gettier case (Shope 1983, 4).

justified true belief. What is interesting about the method of counterexamples is that it is based on the appeal to our intuitions. We are supposed to ask ourselves if the case truly does establish what Gettier believed it did. In other words, do we all share the intuition that Smith does not know that Brown is in Barcelona? The answer is, for the most part, yes.<sup>8</sup> Since we all supposedly agree that Smith does not know, we all can agree that the traditional JTB account ought to be rejected. Since we all share the same intuition, and we all treat that intuition as having some evidential weight against the JTB Account, we should reject the proposed analysis and attempt to develop a new one that will not suffer the same fate.

Our sample analysis then has the following features: (1) an account of knowledge (the JTB Account), (2) some background assumptions (e.g., the closure principle), (3) a description of a possible case where, given the background assumptions, the subject has knowledge (the Gettier case), and (4) the intuition that the subject does not actually know. Now, any subsequent attempt to fix the account of knowledge will be assessed in the same manner. Once an account is proposed that is immune to counterexamples we can say that we have the correct analysis. This method of theorizing is not exclusive to epistemology. Throughout philosophy, philosophers have used this method to analyze various concepts and theories. The important point, for my purposes, is that all of them use (and have used) the appeal to intuitions to assess, defend, reject, and criticize various analyses.

There is one final point about our sample analysis. I have characterized the intuition as of a logically possible case. This is often assumed by those in epistemology

---

<sup>8</sup> I grant that not everyone agrees with Gettier conclusion. The fact that some epistemologists disagree does not affect the point being made. For a review of the literature after the publication of Gettier's paper see Shope (1983).

specifically and philosophy in general. Yet, it is important to note that this assumption is based upon the sort of analysis one is trying to do. In the sample, the analysis is meant to yield a logically necessary truth. And given this goal, any logically possible case where the analysis does not hold will be sufficient. Yet, if we attempt to perform another type of analysis (e.g., explication), then we may require more than just logical possibility of the intuited cases. It may be the case that we require that the cases are possible worlds where the beings in that world are “like us” in their lives and abilities, thus ruling out situations such as demon worlds. So, the conditions we place on an intuition are going to be determined by the expectations philosophers have for the analysis.

Given these preliminary points about intuitions, basic evidential sources, and how intuitions generally play into analyses, we can now look into some standard, detailed positions on the nature of philosophical analysis and how intuitions function in each. What follows will be an overview of conceptual analysis (three versions), explication, and reflective equilibrium as standardly conceived, the nature of the intuition at work in the type of analysis, and how intuitions function as basic evidential sources in each.

### 1.3 Robust Conceptual Analysis

There is a tradition going back to G. E. Moore according to which doing philosophy is a matter of making explicit the simple constituents of very complex concepts. This view takes concepts to exist independently of our minds, akin to properties. Concepts like person, causation, knowledge, freedom, etc. exist in the world and it is the philosopher’s job to analyze such concepts.<sup>9</sup> The analysis of such concepts is

---

<sup>9</sup> I would like to say that some may disagree with characterizing RCA in this manner. Those such as Bealer (1996a, 1996b, 1998), BonJour (1998), and Plantinga (1993) all have some sort of RCA in mind when they discuss the nature of a priori knowledge, but they all have different notions of what the metaphysical underpinnings are. Yet, I will take it that RCA has as its subject matter, at least traditionally speaking,

the attempt to provide, in Moore's words, a "definition" of the terms (1966, 3). This is not a definition in the normal sense of the word. According to Moore, when we ask for a definition, we are asking for that which describes the real nature of the object or notion denoted by the word (1966, 7). Such a definition can be given only when the notion is complex. So, there is a distinction between simple and complex concepts. Concepts like yellow, good, and necessity are simple concepts. They cannot be broken down into any simpler parts. They may be articulated by giving synonyms of the terms, but they may not be broken down into any simpler concepts. Complex concepts, on the other hand, are analyzed only by being broken down into its simpler constituent parts. For example, when epistemologists ask the question, "What is the nature of knowledge?" they are asking what are the constituent, simple concepts that make up the complex concept knowledge.

Any correct robust conceptual analysis (RCA) will take the form of a necessarily true statement of necessary and sufficient conditions. In order for a RCA to be correct, that which does the analyzing (the analysans) must specify conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for that which needs to be analyzed (the analysandum). The analysans and the analysandum must entail each other if the analysis is to be correct. Moreover, these logically necessary and sufficient conditions give the "elements" or the "constituents" of the concept we are analyzing. For example, take our sample epistemic question of "What is the nature of Knowledge?" In asking what knowledge is, philosophers are asking for the analysans to the following biconditional:

*S knows that p if and only if \_\_\_\_\_.*

---

abstract, eternal objects such as mathematical objects (e.g., numbers), universals, etc. I am willing to assume, for sake of discussion, these answers to the metaphysical questions in order to focus on the epistemological ones.

When philosophers filled in the blank with “justified true belief that p”, they were attempting to tell us what knowledge is. Knowledge just is justified true belief. By providing those conditions, they were attempting to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for one to know a particular proposition. The JTB account of knowledge maintained that if one is to know a proposition, then she must have a true belief that is justified. Also, if she has such a justified true belief, then it is enough to have knowledge of that proposition. From this example, we see that RCA is in the business of uncovering the necessary and sufficient constitutive elements of the concept. But there is more going on here. When philosophers do RCA on a concept, they are not just trying to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for when a proposition that expresses that concept is true. The biconditional specifying the analysis must not just be true, but also *necessary* (Stich 1996, 171). They are also attempting to provide an analysis that is immune from counterexamples in any possible world. When we do RCA we are attempting to provide an analysis that can survive any possible case. As Matthias Steup puts it, if an analysis is correct, “there is no possible case (or possible world) in which there is an object that is an instance of the analysandum (that which is being analyzed), but fails to satisfy the condition set out in the analysans (that which does the analyzing), and vice versa” (1996, 27). Now it must be understood that this is the goal. It is questionable as to whether it is possible to come up with an analysis that is completely immune to counterexamples. Just because we cannot immediately provide a counterexample to the proposed analysis does not establish that the analysis is immune and hence true. Someone may later come up with an intuition that provides a counterexample. So, it is important to remember that it

is a goal to provide an analysis that is immune from counterexamples. Whether philosophers are able to do this is a matter of contention.

Yet, there is a question that remains. How do philosophers establish that the analysis is immune from possible counterexamples? They turn to our intuitions. If they can provide an analysis where there is no possible case where our intuitions tell us that the concept applies, but the analysis is not satisfied, then the analysis is correct. It is important to note that this process of analysis is a priori. It is a priori since it is a matter of self-evident intuitions telling them whether the statement of the necessary and sufficient conditions is logically necessary in the sense that there are no intuitions that provide counterexamples. They intuit the analysis and we intuit the judgments involved in assessing whether the biconditional is logically necessary. The result of this process is knowledge of the world that is gained by a priori intuition.

Consider the Gettier case. The description of the Smith case is the description of a possible world. Epistemic agents, once presented with the description of the case, can intuit the following claims: first, if the description is true, then Smith has a justified true belief that Brown is in Barcelona. Second, if the description is true, Smith does not know that Brown is in Barcelona. Now, given our knowledge of these two claims, the agents can infer that if the description is true, then Smith has a justified true belief, but does not know. And, given that the agents have an intuition that it is in fact possible that the description is true, we can conclude that it is not necessary that S knows that p if and only if S has a justified true belief that p.<sup>10</sup> So, we can see that the agent is supposed to have an intuition of the necessary conceptual truth that if the description is true, then Smith does not know that p.

---

<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank Peter J. Markie for illustrating this line to me.

The nature of the intuition in RCA is traditional a priori intuition. Such intuitions have been called “intellectual seemings” (Bealer, 1996a, 1996b, 1998) and “rational insight” (BonJour, 1998).<sup>11</sup> Terms like ‘seemings’ and ‘insight’ are appropriate because the account of these intuitions starts from their phenomenological descriptions. When one has an intuition that p, p *just seems to be true* to the agent. This seeming is intended to be conceptually distinct from a belief. To demonstrate this, consider that it is possible that one might believe a logical theorem if she has recently proven the theorem without it seeming true to her. One could believe that p without having any intuition about p whatsoever. Such a case is intended to show that having a belief that p is not sufficient for having an intuition that p. To show that having a belief that p is not necessary for having an intuition that p, consider any philosophical paradox. A paradox is where one is presented with intuitively acceptable propositions that lead to an intuitively unacceptable conclusion by perfectly acceptable reasoning. Once one knows that she is presented with a paradox, she will suspend all beliefs about the propositions even though they still maintain their intuitive force.

Such a priori, self-evident intuitions are also more than mere hunches or guesses. Phenomenologically speaking, hunches or guesses do not have the same degree of *seemingness* that intuitions do. When one intuits that p, she comes to *grasp* or *see* that p is the case. One does not lose that feeling of grip when one is presented with contrary evidence to the proposition. Yet, one feels perfectly at ease in giving up something that they merely guessed to be true.

---

<sup>11</sup> Bealer and BonJour are obviously not the only defenders of such types of intuitions. I mention them only because they have presented substantive defenses in very recent literature.

Perhaps the most important feature for such intuitions is that they not only have a high level of felt certainty that the proposition is true, but they have a high level of felt certainty that the proposition is *necessarily* true. As BonJour characterizes it, “I am able to see or grasp or apprehend in a seemingly direct and unmediated way that the claim in question cannot fail to be true” (1998, 101). Bealer characterizes them as having a “certain kind of strong modal tie to the truth” (1998, 202). Though this feature may seem unreasonable to some, it is often demanded.<sup>12</sup> This feature in particular points out how the intuitions of RCA are a priori, self-evident. The justification of the propositions in question comes from the mere understanding of the propositional content itself (BonJour, 1998, 102). Such a proposition is able to have its necessity grasped and as such is self-evident to the person.

The characterization of such intuitions as *seeing* into the necessity of the propositions raises a further question – are such intuitions infallible? Perhaps traditionally such intuitions were thought to be infallible. Yet this need not be the case. BonJour argues there are numerous counterexamples to the thesis that such intuitions are infallible. For example, the claims of mathematics and logic are usually regarded as self-evident, a priori intuitions by those mathematicians and logicians who put them forth, but they have turned out to be mistaken. Furthermore, consider the claims of rationalist metaphysics of Plato, Spinoza, Leibniz, etc. Surely it cannot be the case that, BonJour points out, all such claims are true. And if they all cannot be true due to the widespread disagreement and conflict, but are claimed to be the result of such a priori intuitions, then infallibility is suspect (1998, 112). What BonJour is illustrating is that it is possible for a

---

<sup>12</sup> Bealer and BonJour are not alone in demanding that these intuitions have this tie to necessity, Plantinga claims, “To *see* that a proposition p is true – in the way in which we see that *a priori* truths are true – is to apprehend not only that things *are* a certain way but that they *must* be that way” (1993, 105).

proposition to *seem* necessary and self-evident, but nonetheless be false.<sup>13</sup> So, it would seem that an advocate of RCA need not (and according to those like Bonjour, should not) accept that the self-evident a priori intuitions be infallible.

Now, what is the epistemic force of such intuitions? Does the intuition that, say, Smith does not know that Brown is in Barcelona give one defeasible justification that Smith does not know that Brown is in Barcelona? There are some who believe that there are no defeaters for a belief justified a priori. Panayot Butchvarov maintains that in order for S' belief to be justified a priori, it must be "unthinkable" to her that it be mistaken (1970, 94-95). Hilary Putnam likewise maintains a strong defeasibility condition in that if a belief has a maximal degree of justification, then it is "always rational to believe, nay...never rational to even begin to doubt" (1983, 90).<sup>14</sup> Such strong defeasibility conditions amount to the exclusion of *any* defeaters. Yet, some have claimed that this strong defeasibility condition is mistaken. Plantinga argues that if this view is correct, then it is never rational for you to change your mind about p (1993, 112). This, he argues, is unacceptable. It is possible to be given an argument that defeats my justification for my original belief. If I am given an argument that appears to me to be cogent, and after careful reflection I cannot find any faults in the reasoning, then surely it would be the case that I no longer have warrant for my original belief.

So, others (like Plantinga) invoke a weak defeasibility condition in that there may be defeaters but not of an experiential nature. Defeaters of this sort must come from the inside; i.e., are other conflicting intuitions the agent has. If S has an a priori intuition that p, and has another conflicting a priori intuition, then the second intuition can act as a

---

<sup>13</sup> Plantinga argues a similar line by illustrating the same point in terms of the Russell paradoxes (1993, 109).

<sup>14</sup> Putnam thinks of these in terms of Aristotle's "first principles" and Descartes' "clear and distinct ideas".

genuine defeater. This is not to say that experience plays no role whatsoever in defeating a belief justified by an a priori intuition. As BonJour points out, it is possible that an experience can challenge an a priori claim in that the experience supports some other a priori claims. An experience can refute an a priori claim by being supported by other unquestionable a priori premises (1998, 124). So, such a priori intuitions, while traditionally deemed indefeasible, are defeasible in a few ways.

A final question to consider is whether this type of analysis, and its use of a priori intuitions, commits one to a type of foundationalism or coherentism. All things being equal, advocates of RCA are going to adhere to some version of foundationalism.<sup>15</sup> A general characterization of such a view is that there are some non-inferential, basic beliefs from which other inferential beliefs derive their justification. Why are RCA advocates committed to such a view? By taking a priori intuitions to be self-evident, it is implied that the intuitions are taken to be basic. They are not in need of justification from another source. They are direct insight into necessary truths. Other beliefs derived their justification from the high-level of justification that such a priori intuitions are supposed to have. Furthermore, according to BonJour, any notion of coherence will fail to account for such a priori intuitions. In order to say that such a priori intuitions are justified by the way they cohere together as a whole one must first assume certain principles of coherence must themselves be self-evident and immune to challenge (1998, 118). The principles of coherence must be basic. Hence, according to BonJour, no purely coherentist framework is going to be able to account for the justification of such a priori intuitions.

#### 1.4 Robust Conceptual Analysis – Modified

---

<sup>15</sup> Plantinga is one obvious exception here.

While traditional RCA takes concepts to be entities that exist outside of the mind, it is possible to maintain RCA is the correct philosophical methodology and treat concepts as being mental entities. Such a modified robust conceptual analysis (MRCA) denies that concepts are independent entities that exist outside of the mind. So, when epistemologists ask, “What is the nature of knowledge?” they are asking about the nature of *our* concept of knowledge. The question asks about the way people *conceive* of the concept of knowledge, what *their* mental entity is. Such a method assumes that there is a common conception of, say, knowledge (or whatever concept is being discussed). The question philosophers are asking is about the *common* concept and not any one person’s concept.

Such a method characterizes its analysis as a proposal about the common concept of knowledge. The concept of knowledge is our common concepts of justification, truth, and belief. Such a proposal is a conceptual truth. It is a conceptual truth that S knows that p if and only if S has a justified true belief that p. So, unlike RCA, MRCA does not claim that the proposed analysis results *directly* in a necessary truth. Rather it is a conceptual truth that knowledge is justified true belief. It is a conceptual truth in that it is a claim whose truth can be assured merely by the examination of the relation between the concepts and not of a mind-independent reality. The necessity here lies in the relation between our concepts rather than in the world.

Yet, it is possible to tie MRCA back to RCA. One *can* maintain that a correct MRCA will take the form of a necessary, conceptual truth. If one does claim this, then she can apply the method of testing the analysis against various descriptions of possible cases. Here, just as with RCA, it is a matter of self-evident, a priori intuitions as to what

is possible and whether the proposal violates the cases being described. So, the type and role of intuitions in MRCA is the same as in RCA. The only difference is that the concepts being investigated are in one's mind and not mind-independent entities.

### 1.5 Modest Conceptual Analysis

There is still another way to do conceptual analysis while treating concepts as mental entities. Here, philosophers have a concept in their heads and when they do conceptual analysis, they are attempting to understand that concept better. To illustrate this, suppose that natural kinds have essences and the discovery of these essences is one task of science. When researchers start their investigation, they may not know what the essence is. Researchers do have a concept of the natural kind and this concept serves as the foundation for their investigation into the essence. Before modern chemical notions, people were able to pick out instances of water and attempt to understand the nature of water and its role in various natural processes. In picking out instances of water, people developed a concept of water as watery stuff that flows in rivers and streams, etc. and once this concept was had they arrived at this account of water merely by reflecting on the concept. Whether the researchers have the correct concept is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the meaning of the term we attach to a natural kind is determined by the concept. The goal of such research is the seeking of a concept that accurately describes the essence in question. In this sense, conceptual analysis is, as Graham and Horgan put it, "a broadly empirical...enterprise" (1998, 272).

Modest conceptual analysis (MCA), while being different from RCA in the type of concepts it takes to be analyzing, is essentially the same as its robust counterpart in certain respects. Both take conceptual analysis to be a method of providing bi-

conditionals that are immune to counterexamples. MCA *may* also be put into the form of necessary and sufficient conditions. And, finally, it is our intuitions that modest conceptual analysts turn to provide the evidence that the analysis is correct.

Consider the Gettier case. The traditional analysis of knowledge maintains that knowledge is justified true belief. Philosophers then test this by describing a case where we intuit that the agent has a justified true belief, but does not know. The intuition here is not a self-evident, a priori intuition, but rather a non-inferential judgment about how things seem to us when we consider the case-description. The content of this intuition is that, given the case-description, Smith has a justified true belief, but does not know. We can think of the situation in the following inference:

1. We intuit that, given the Gettier case-description, Smith has a justified, true belief, but does not know.
2. So, our concept of knowledge is not the same as our concept of a justified, true belief.
3. So, the traditional analysis of knowledge does not capture our common concept of knowledge.

What is important for our purposes here is that the inference from 1 to 2 is only possible if we take our intuition to count as a basic evidential source. It is a basic evidential source in this case since we are arguing from the fact that we are having an intuition that Smith has a justified, true belief. That we have the intuition is taken as evidence that our concept of knowledge is not the same as our concept of a justified, true belief. The intuition is basic in the sense that it alone is doing the epistemic work. Without taking our intuition as a basic evidential source here, MCA could not justify the inference from 1 to 2.

A point needs to be clarified here. One might mistake the intuition that *p* doing the epistemic work and the belief that I intuit *p* doing the epistemic work. When one

talks of intuitions as basic evidential sources they are referring to the intuition that p itself doing the epistemic work, not the belief that one intuits p. The reason for this is that the strength of the belief is based in part on the strength of the intuition. For the belief that I intuit that p to do any epistemic work, the intuition itself must have justified the acceptance of the belief. When MCA takes intuitions to count as basic evidential sources, it is not doing so because the agent believes that she intuits that p. It is the intuition itself which is acting as the basic evidentiary source.

So, what exactly does MCA deliver? What is it that we gain from MCA? What we gain when we have a correct MCA is our shared theory about the concept in question. That is, by providing a correct MCA, philosophers reveal what the common, shared theory is. As Frank Jackson states:

My intuitions about possible cases reveal my theory...they could hardly be supposed to reveal someone else's! Likewise, your intuitions reveal your theory. To the extent that our intuitions coincide, they reveal our shared theory. To the extent that our intuitions coincide with those of the folk, they reveal the folk theory (1998, 32).

What if the intuitions clash? If the intuitions do not coincide, then what we learn is that the other person uses 'knowledge' to cover different cases than we do. This is different than saying they are wrong. What the goal is is to extract the theory that reveals our shared, folk theory. But, if we cannot extract such a shared, folk theory, then the analysis is not a failure. What it shows is that there is perhaps no universally shared, folk theory and it is a matter of where the majority of the responses to the cases lie. In this light, MCA is akin to methods in psychology and linguistics.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> There are some (particularly Stephen Stich and Hilary Kornblith) who question the benefit of such a method. I will leave all critical points for later chapters since it is only the goal of this chapter to illustrate what roles intuitions are playing in the various methods.

Yet there are some questions left open here. First, if we consider the intuition to not be a self-evident, a priori intuition, then what is it? As is usually maintained, the intuition to be a non-inferential judgment about how things seem to us. Yet, isn't this just another way of saying it is a self-evident, a priori intuition? If it is not, what is the difference between a non-inferential judgment about how things seem (which is supposed to count as a basic evidential source) and a mere hunch (which usually does not count as basic evidential source)? Where RCA uses self-evident, a priori intuitions to attempt to arrive at statements of necessary and sufficient conditions that are logically necessary, MCA attempts to use intuitions that provide evidence of the content of the concept that one holds. When one does MCA, she is attempting to assess whether her concept is shared by others by testing an analysis of that concept against possible cases and seeing if people have the same intuitions as to whether possible counterexamples violate the analysis. It is in this sense that modest conceptual analysis is a non-aprioristic, broadly empirical method.<sup>17</sup> Since various findings and theories of scientific disciplines will figure into people's concepts, MCA must be empirically informed. Furthermore, when determining whether a particular concept is a shared one, we may, as Jackson points out, turn to polling samples and opinion polls (1998, 36-37). This is not to say that MCA cannot be done from the armchair, so to speak. Rather, it is that if one engages in modest conceptual analysis, she must have (a sufficient amount of) the various relevant information about the subject matter in question.<sup>18</sup> So, MCA does not give us knowledge

---

<sup>17</sup> It may not be the case that MCA is completely non-aprioristic. What is the case is that any advocate of MCA hold that the method is not exclusively aprioristic. Any MCA must acknowledge that empirical facts will play a role in any correct analysis.

<sup>18</sup> One way to think of this is to think of MCA as the method of Reflective Equilibrium; or rather that any correct conceptual analysis must be brought into equilibrium with the current scientific findings on the matter in question.

about the metaphysical world per se. Instead it gives us information about both our concept of knowledge and that of others. What it does is illuminate the content of our concepts and show whether those concepts are shared by others.

The thing that distinguishes MCA from RCA and MRCA is that the intuitions are not those mental states that are “getting at” the necessity of a statement. While much of the phenomenological feel to the intuitions at work in MCA is the same as those of RCA and MRCA, there is no attempt to establish the necessity of the statement or to provide knowledge about the world. The type of intuition being used in MCA is different and the degree of reliability that the intuition needs to achieve is lower. The intuition being used is not an a priori, self-evident intuition; rather, it is an intuitive judgment about what is correct to say about certain cases. It is a matter of what Graham and Horgan call an “ideological pull” (1998, 277). It is just to provide access to the content of the concept that one holds. In this sense, the evidential weight of the intuition need not carry the level of certainty that the intuitions of RCA and MRCA carry. The intuition does not need to be able to access the necessity of the statement, rather be able to have access to the content of one’s own concepts.

But why is the intuition different than a mere hunch? The reason given as to why they are different is phenomenological. Intuitions have a phenomenological feel of conviction to them. Whereas mere hunches do not carry the feel of conviction, they are not considered to have any evidential weight. When we intuit though, we come to what seems to be the case. There is a felt seeming-ness here that is absent with a mere hunch.

It is this felt seeming-ness that points us to the felt conviction. So, while the intuitions of MCA are not a matter of certitude, they are a matter of conviction.<sup>19</sup>

MCA's intuitions are also like RCA's and MRCA's in that they are considered to be fallible. The intuitions are considered to be fallible indicators of the content of our concepts. Why? The first reason is due to arguments we have already seen. The defender of MCA can use the arguments from RCA for the fallibility of intuitions. If it is the case that the strongest possible intuitions (self-evident, a priori intuitions) are considered to be fallible, then any weaker intuition is also going to be fallible. But aside from such arguments, the MCA-ist can make appeals to contemporary psychological findings about the widespread fallibility of intuitive judgments.<sup>20</sup> Cognitive phenomena such as the fundamental attribution error (mistakenly attributing character traits to a person as the explanation of her behavior when the behavior is actually explained by the situational factors) show that people more often than not make mistakes when they intuitively judge a situation or case-description. And if such research findings are true, then we have empirical reasons for treating such intuitions as fallible.

Such fallibility also shows that the justification that such intuitions provide is defeasible. It is possible to be presented with a defeater for the intuition. But unlike RCA and MRCA, the defeater can be either from the "inside" or the "outside". Any other conflicting intuition to our original intuition can obviously act as a defeater, but it is also possible here to have a defeater in the form of evidence that the cognitive

---

<sup>19</sup> The difference between intuitions and hunches will be articulated in greater detail in the next chapter. For now we can think of the difference as one of conviction. Intuitions have a feeling of certitude whereas hunches do not. Though some may say that it is possible for someone to have a hunch with a high degree of certitude, I will take it at this point that they have formed something more than a hunch and simply treat hunches as more or less low degree acceptances.

<sup>20</sup> For a recent detailed discussion of the psychological literature on the problems with intuitive judgment making see Myers (2002) and Hogarth (2001).

mechanisms at work or the way in which the intuitive judgment was formed was problematic. Defeaters of the first sort could be considered “contradicting defeaters” and those of the later sort “undermining defeaters”.

There is one final question to address - Does MCA commit us to a version of foundationalism as it seems RCA and MRCA do? It would seem to be the case that it does. What MCA is essentially saying is that certain beliefs are justified by their relations to other mental states, in this case, intuitions. The proposed analyses are inheriting their justificatory status from their evidential relationship to the intuitions the agent has. Treated this way, it would seem that MCA does *prima facie* commit one to a moderate foundationalism. Yet, MCA may also be considered a coherentist view if the coherentist maintains that justification of the belief about our intuitions is ultimately a matter of its coherence with our other beliefs. In the Gettier case, philosophers are offering a belief about our intuitions as evidence for a belief about our concept. The coherentist can treat this the way she treats any other case in which she attempts to justify one belief by another. Thus, it is possible for MCA to be used in a coherentist epistemology.

### 1.6 Explication

‘Explication’, as Rudolf Carnap used the term, described a process of revising a concept (1950, 3-8).<sup>21</sup> In an explication, philosophers take a concept that is too vague, the “explicandum”, and replace it by a more precise concept, the “explicatum”. The

---

<sup>21</sup> I should note that there are some who disagree that explication is a matter of revising a concept. W. V. O. Quine (1960, § 53) and Joseph Hanna (1968, 30) both agree that it is better to speak of explicating linguistic terms or, as Quine calls them, “defective nouns”. The reason for this is that, as they see it, concepts are mysterious and it is better to avoid them when it is possible to make the same point referring only to predicates. I leave this for the time being an open question and will continue to speak of explicating concepts since I am following Carnap’s method primarily and it is he that speaks of explicating concepts.

latter concept is supposed to be less vague than the original, but it is not supposed to be perfectly precise. The explicatum is intended to be an improvement over the previous concept, but it is not intended to be suitable in all subsequent circumstances. Take, for instance, the concept of salt. People may first have this concept in mind when discussing seasonings, but this concept will not do for chemists. For chemists, salt will be replaced by the concept sodium chloride (NaCl). This latter concept is much more precise than the original. Now, obviously the concept of sodium chloride will not work for someone interested in physical chemistry, so it may at some time be replaced by a more precise concept.

Carnap maintained there are four factors in judging an explication to be adequate. First, it is necessary that the explicatum (the revised concept) is similar to or, as Hanna puts it, “agrees with” the explicandum (the pre-analyzed concept) (Hanna 1968, 36). Philosophers cannot treat the correspondence between the two concepts as a mere coincidence. There needs to be some similarity between the two to warrant the explication. Second, the explicatum needs to be as exact as possible. The characterization of the explicatum needs to be given in as exact a form as possible so it can be easily integrated into a well-connected system of already accepted concepts. Third, the explicatum needs to be fruitful. The revised concept is more fruitful the more it can be brought into connection with other concepts on the basis of observed facts and the more it can be used in the formation of laws governing the concepts in questions. And, finally, the explicatum needs to be as simple as possible. The simplicity of a concept is measured by the simplicity of the form of its definition and the simplicity of the forms of the laws that connect it with other concepts. Simplicity, as Carnap notes, is only of

secondary concern. The factor's importance only comes into play when there is a choice between numerous concepts which seem to satisfy the other factors the same. When the explicatum meets these four conditions, it is said to be adequate.

What is important to recognize is that an explication is not intending to give necessary and sufficient conditions. Since explication is a matter of *revising*, the question of whether it is true is misleading. The judgment that an explicatum is similar to the explicandum may be judged true or false *to a certain degree*. As well it may be judged true or false whether the explicatum is exact, fruitful, or simple *to a certain degree*. The reason I say "to a certain degree" is that the judgment is a matter of whether the explicatum is similar, exact, fruitful, or simple *enough* to be adequate. Since there is this inherent vagueness even within the explicatum, an explication cannot result in necessary and sufficient conditions which demand the analysandum be precise and there not being counterexamples to the analysis.

One thing to note is that unlike the other methods, our concepts cannot be incorrect in the sense of failing to correspond to a mind-independent reality or with our shared, common theory (as with RCA, MRCA, or MCA).<sup>22</sup> It is possible for our concepts to be incorrect in that they are confused, but this is not the same as in the other methods. The goal of the analysis is *not* to provide us with a correct account or with our shared, common theory; rather it is to eliminate confusion.

Let us apply the method to the Gettier case. When philosophers ask "What is the nature of knowledge?", on this view, they are not searching for a better understanding of the mind-independent concept (as in RCA) nor are they searching for a better

---

<sup>22</sup> In this sense it does not matter whether there is a mind-independent reality. Explication does not, in this sense, necessarily beg any metaphysical questions.

understanding of our shared mind-dependent concept (as in MRCA and MCA). They are looking to replace our current, confused, imprecise concept with a concept that is less confused and more precise. So, the traditional account of knowledge is meant as an explication in that it is supposed to be a replacement for our confused concept of knowledge. The Gettier case, then, is intended to show that there is an important criterion that is not being met by our current explication of knowledge being justified true belief. Since an adequate explication must overlap with the initial concept, our intuition that Smith does not know is good evidence that the proposed explication does not overlap enough with our initial concept.

So, what is the nature of the intuitions in this method? The intuitions at work in explication are the same as those in MCA. That is, they are treated as non-inferential judgments about how things seem to be. They are not treated as self-evident, a priori intuitions. The intuitive judgment is not intended to be “getting at” any necessity. Since explications do not yield necessary and sufficient conditions, the intuitions at work in the method do not need to be those of the a priori, self-evident sort. The intuitive judgments only need to have a felt strength to them. So, as with MCA, they are more than mere hunches. Furthermore, the intuitions of explication are similar to those of MCA in that they are fallible and provide defeasible justification.

Despite the initial similarity, the method of explication has a somewhat different and weaker concept of intuition at work than that of RCA, MRCA, and MCA. Intuitions, in explication, are intuitive *judgments* that reflect people’s understandings of the terms and as such the concepts involved (the explicatum and the explicandum). When a philosopher performs an explication, she is intuitively judging whether the revised

concept meets the four conditions of adequacy. She is judging whether the analysis was like or unlike the original concept. This judging is via reflection on the concept she already possesses. Given that the explicatum and the explicandum go through a process of deliberative revision, it would seem that they would be more akin to the considered judgments of the method of reflective equilibrium than the a priori, self-evident intuitions of RCA and MRCA or the minimal intuitions of MCA.

Does explication commit us to foundationalism? No. Unlike the other methods, explication could be used in a foundationalist epistemology or a coherentist epistemology. It could be that the intuitions as to whether the explication is adequate are treated as basic and transferring justification to other beliefs about the concepts. Yet, it is possible to think of the intuitions as dictating whether there is coherence in the circle of beliefs. Our intuitions as to whether Smith knows inform us as to whether the proposed, traditional explication of knowledge coheres with our other beliefs about knowledge. So, it would seem that one could advocate explication and be either a foundationalist or a coherentist.

### 1.7 Reflective Equilibrium

The method of reflective equilibrium is perhaps the most widely discussed and most controversial method in contemporary philosophy. Since Nelson Goodman (in *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, 1965) introduced it in relation to the justification of inductive and deductive principles of logic and John Rawls' development of the method in the fields of moral and political philosophy (in *A Theory of Justice*, 1971), reflective equilibrium has been the focus of most questions concerning philosophical methodology. Views on reflective equilibrium range from the treating it as *the* method of philosophy

(consider Michael DePaul's comment that "[t]he fundamental reason I am in favor of "this reflective equilibrium business" can be stated easily enough: Any other approach to philosophical inquiry is irrational" (1998, 300)) to treating it not as a philosophical method per se, but as an empirical one (consider Robert Cummins' comment that "[a]s a procedure, reflective equilibrium is simply a familiar kind of standard scientific method with a new name" (1998, 113)). Yet, however one views this method; it is unquestionably the method to address in contemporary philosophy.

The method of reflective equilibrium is essentially the working back and forth between people's considered judgments about particular cases, principles believed to govern those judgments, and other theoretical considerations that the people believe apply in the decision to accept or reject those considered judgments or principles; and the revision of any of these elements when it is deemed necessary to reach a state of coherence in the system. The method begins by the philosopher surveying the beliefs she has about the subject in question (as an example, questions about the nature of knowledge). Some beliefs she has will be the result of judgments about actual or possible epistemic cases. Other beliefs will concern general epistemic principles (e.g., those concerning what makes for adequate testimonial evidence). She then eliminates any of those beliefs that were formed in circumstances that are likely to have resulted in mistaken beliefs (e.g., those that were the result of wishful thinking). The remaining set of judgments she has are referred to as her "considered judgments".

The next step is for the philosopher to attempt to construct a theory that accounts for the set of considered judgments. This is not to say that the philosopher's considered judgments act as a definite data set that must all be accounted for by any adequate theory.

Rather the philosopher attempts to construct a theory that is in balance with the set of considered judgments. This balance is achieved by the mutual adjusting of the set of considered judgments and the theory being proposed. This mutual adjustment amounts to the assessment, via reflection, of whether it is the set of considered judgments that needs to be revised or whether it is the theory that needs to be revised. For example, suppose that a theory is constructed and that theory accounts for a wide range of the philosopher's considered judgments. Yet, suppose that there are other of her considered judgments to which the theory is in conflict. In such a situation, it is not the case that she *has to* revise the theory. Rather, she must reflect on the state of balance and determine by reflection whether she finds the theory or those considered judgments in conflict as more likely to be true. If the considered judgments in conflict are so firmly held by her that she cannot give them up, she needs to revise the theory to account for these considered judgments. Yet, if the theory as it is being proposed accounts for all her central and fundamental considered judgments, then she will need to abandon those conflicting judgments. This working back and forth results in the formation of a coherent system of considered judgments and theories that account for said judgments. It must be noted that this state of equilibrium that has been reached is not a static state. It may be that later the balance may be upset. When this occurs, the philosopher must reflect upon the theories and judgments again in an attempt to reach another equilibrium state. In this sense, the method of reflective equilibrium is an ongoing method.

Once this initial state of equilibrium is reached, however, the method is not complete. The initial state, called "narrow reflective equilibrium", must be widened to include other judgments, theories, and principles she already accepts. The philosopher

must bring the initial equilibrium state into balance with held background, say, metaphysical theories, psychological theories, anthropological theories, etc. Yet, it is not only these outside theories that are now taken into account. The philosopher must now consider arguments for alternate principles or theories that may not have been the conception in the narrow state. Once she is convinced by one of the particular arguments that a particular set of principles or theory is more acceptable, then she works back and forth between the three to arrive at an equilibrium point consisting of the triple (Daniels 1996, 22, 82). In other words, this state must be brought back into balance, now with these other theories. So, the process of mutually adjustment is now between the set of considered judgments, the proposed principle or theory, and the background theories already held. The process is still adjusted via reflection on which seems most likely or that which is most firmly held. This “wide” reflective equilibrium is intended to capture an even more comprehensive set of beliefs of the philosopher.

The aim of reflective equilibrium is a better understanding of our concept. But it is acknowledged at the outset of the method that we may be revising our concept in the process. In this light, it is like explication and unlike MCA and RCA. We may replace our concept with one that is clearer, with one that covers more cases, and/or with one that provides a basis for additional research. Given how the method operates, it is likely that the resulting concept will not be a mere accurate description of the concept started with. Also it should be noted that the “our” here could refer to the shared, common concept or just to the concept held by the person. It is unclear as to whether reflective equilibrium is focusing on our shared concept or on just the person’s concept. Some such as DePaul describe reflective equilibrium as a philosopher’s attempt to cash out her concept, yet

others such as Rawls (and even critics of the method like Cummins) characterize the method as attempting to capture what the shared, common concept is. I believe it is a matter of capturing the shared, common concept, but I acknowledge that one may constrain reflective equilibrium by focusing only on the agent's concept.

Reflective equilibrium is also different than the methods of RCA, MRCA, and MCA in that the method itself does not guarantee that it will lead to true beliefs (DePaul 1998, 297). Since the method is based upon the philosopher's own initial judgments and her ability to construct theories to account for those initial judgments, it is possible that we have a situation where the philosopher has very bizarre initial judgments, background theories and unusual ways of resolving any potential conflicts that arise during reflection. In such a situation, the bizarre initial judgments, etc will reflect something about the agent's conceptual framework; we cannot take it to represent what the agent actually believes. Though this is not usually the case, it is possible; hence, we cannot say that the method will in fact yield true beliefs about one's concept.<sup>23</sup>

The method is similar to explication however. In both reflective equilibrium and explication, we start from the judgments or intuitions that we already have. Those judgments and intuitions may very well be mistaken. Since those judgments or intuitions may be mistaken or change over time, it is the principles that will explicate what it is that those intuitions represent. To illustrate, consider Rawls' analogy between reflective equilibrium in moral theory and in linguistics (1971, 46-53). In linguistic theory, the aim is to describe people's ability to recognize grammatical sentences by constructing principles that make the same discriminations that we already intuitively make. In this

---

<sup>23</sup> DePaul (1998, 298-299) also maintains that the method will not reliably lead to the truth and cannot be counted on to yield justified beliefs. I do not find these claims completely uncontroversial. I do take it that the method's inability to guarantee that it will yield true beliefs is uncontroversial however.

way, linguistic theory investigates people's sense of grammar and the theories attempt to capture that sense. Yet, people's sense of grammar can change over time or their intuitions that represent their sense of grammar may be mistaken in that they misrepresent that of the linguistic community. Given this, it is the constructed principles that will explicate the people's sense of grammar into a much clearer sense, one that is in a state of equilibrium. Moral theory, just like linguistic theory, aims to arrive at principles that make the same discriminations that people already make among moral cases. And, just like linguistic intuitions, moral intuitions represent people's sense of justice and may also be mistaken. It is the proposed moral principles that attempt to explicate the sense of justice that people have. When a state of equilibrium is reached, the sense that the person has become revised and more precise.<sup>24</sup>

Rawls himself draws an even further connection between reflective equilibrium and explication. He develops the "explication" of the total range of judgments where this is understood as "a heuristic device which is likely to yield reasonable and justifiable principles" (1999, 7). The explication, as Rawls states, is "defined to be a set of principles, such that, if any competent [judge] were to apply them intelligently and consistently to the same cases under review, [her] judgments, made systematically nonintuitive by the explicit and conscious use of the principles, would be, nonetheless, identical, case by case, with the considered judgments of the group of competent judges" (1999, 7).<sup>25</sup> Put simply, a set of principles explicates a set of considered judgments when

---

<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that it is not always going to be the case that it is the person's sense of X that is revised. As was discussed earlier, any part of the triple may be revised in light of the other parts of the system. I am merely attempting to show that part of the reflective equilibrium methodology can amount to something similar to explication.

<sup>25</sup> According to Rawls, a "competent" judge is one who (1) has a requisite degree of intelligence (or "normally intelligent"), (2) required to know those things concerning the world about her, (3) is a reasonable person (follows the rules of logic, attempts to find reasons for beliefs and actions, is open-

the set of principles, along with the facts of the case, entail the set of considered judgments. If the specifics of the case and the set of principles entail the considered judgments of the competent judges, then the explication is acceptable. If not, then the explication is rejected.

Once we have the explication in hand, we are then faced with the (perhaps most important) question of the reasons for accepting those principles as justified. That is, we are faced with the question of our being epistemically justified in believing the principles to be true of our concepts. To this end, Rawls gives four reasons (1999, 10-12). First, we have reason for accepting the principles since the principles explicate the considered judgments of the judges and since it is these judgments that are more likely than any other judgments to represent the convictions of competent judges.<sup>26</sup> If some principle, p, is part of the explication of the considered judgments of competent judges, then we have a first ground for accepting p thereof. Second, p is justified if p has the ability to “win free and willing allegiance” of the competent judges after they have considered the virtues and vices of the principles against their own considered judgments in an open forum or discussion (1999, 11). Third, principle, p, is justified if p can, in the face of disagreement, yield a result that is acceptable to all competent judges and conforms to their intuition of what constitutes a reasonable decision. The justificatory status of a principle is dependent upon the principle’s ability to resolve moral conflicts. Fourth, principle, p, is justified if p continues to feel certain against a sub-class of considered moral judgments of competent judges. So, by the fact that when there is conflict between a principle and a set of considered judgments, the principle is still maintained in that it is

---

minded, knows how her emotions and intelligence affect her judgments, and (4) has “sympathetic knowledge” of the beliefs and interests of other people (1999, 2-3).

<sup>26</sup> This Rawls calls the constant feature of what we call “moral insight” (p. 10).

*felt* to be certain, we take the principle to be justified. Though the conditions for a successful ‘explication’ are different between Rawls and Carnap, we can see that there is a similar structure to the methods.<sup>27</sup>

Let us put things simply in terms of the Gettier example. When we are presented with the Gettier case that Smith does not know, we are supposed to have the intuition that Smith does not know. This intuition plays a different role here than it did in the previous methods. The fact that we intuit that Smith does not know is now treated as a bit of data to be captured in reflective equilibrium by a successful account of knowledge. It is not, as with the other methods, used as a premise in the argument that the JTB account of knowledge does not capture our sense of knowledge. The content of the intuition is used as part of the system. But, it is important to realize that it is not necessarily going to be used in the reflective equilibrium. The intuition can be ignored or explained away. Whether it is or not depends on the “fit” that is found in the system.

One thing all advocates of reflective equilibrium hold is that appealing to considered judgments is justified in some cases. Considered judgments must at least have a level of credibility which allows philosophers to use them to resolve conflicts in the method (Sencerz 1986, 78). If they were not able to be used, then there would be no reason to test the principles and/or theories against them. Furthermore, this credibility must not be derivative, rather it must be intrinsic. If the credibility was derivative, then the method would be viciously circular. It would be circular in that the considered judgments would be chosen merely because of their credibility derived from principles, the principles would be chosen in accordance with the derivative considered judgments,

---

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that the third condition (that principle, *p*, is justified if *p* can, in the face of disagreement, yield a result that is acceptable to all competent judges and conforms to their intuition of what constitutes a reasonable decision), all things being equal, applies only in the case of moral principles.

and finally the considered judgments would be in equilibrium with the principles which had been chosen to ascribe the considered judgments their initial credibility (Sencerz 1986, 79). It is important to note that this problem is not purely a foundationalist problem, rather it is one based in the method itself. If we take the considered judgments as being credible due to their being the result of a conscious application of background principles, then once we attempt to perform an analysis, we will be attempting to place the principles in question in equilibrium with the background principles that yield the considered judgment. In this way, the problem faces the method of reflective equilibrium as a whole. So, in order for the method of reflective equilibrium to work, it must be presupposed that considered judgments are the types of things that have enough initial credibility to warrant philosophers appealing to them.

But what are these things that are to have said credibility? In other words, what is the nature of the intuitions or considered judgments in this method? Are considered judgments the same as intuitions? It is obvious that the considered judgments of reflective equilibrium are not self-evident, a priori intuitions getting at the necessity of a proposition. But, most who write on the method of reflective equilibrium refer to considered judgments as intuitions. Yet, Rawls does not exactly lump considered judgments under the broad heading of intuitions. Rather in an early paper, he goes on to define the class of considered judgments by maintaining that they satisfy the following criteria (Rawls, 1951 (1999, 5-7)):

- (1) It is given under such conditions that the judge is immune from all of the reasonably foreseeable consequences of the judgment.
- (2) The conditions must be such that the integrity of the judge is maintained.
- (3) The case, on which the judgment is given, be one in which there is an actual conflict of interests.

- (4) The judgment must be one that has been preceded by a careful inquiry into the facts of the question at issue, and by a fair opportunity for all concerned to state their side of the case.
- (5) The judgment must be felt to be certain by the person making it.
- (6) The judgment must be stable, that is, that there be evidence that at other times and other places competent judges have rendered the same judgment on similar cases to be those in which the relevant facts and competing interests are similar.
- (7) The judgment must be intuitive with respect to ethical principles, that is, that it should not be determined by a conscious application of principles as far as this may be evidenced by introspection (1999, 5-6).<sup>28</sup>

Here, Rawls is providing what he takes an intuition to be and it is not an intuition as we have seen with some of the other methods – it is not an a priori, self-evident intuition. Rawls’ account of an intuition is a judgment that is intuitive in that it is not arrived at by the conscious application of principles. Furthermore, most of the criteria that Rawls provides are not actually restrictions on the judgments themselves, but restrictions on the circumstances of the judge. Criteria 1-4 seem unproblematic, yet, I believe, 5, 6, and 7 call for further elaboration since Rawls has more or less defined the class of intuitions in terms of what they are not rather than what they are.<sup>29</sup>

The fifth criterion is a matter of ‘certitude’. This is to be distinguished from certainty, in the sense of a logical relation between a proposition or theory, and its evidence. We should trust those considered judgments that have a stronger *feel* to them. Such a criterion is what Robert Audi calls a “firmness requirement” (1997, 40). As Audi puts it, “One must come down on the matter at hand; if one is up in the air, the jury is still out” (1997, 40). The judgment must have this felt certainty if it is to hold up in the method. That is, the judgments have to have a degree of certainty that is weighty enough

---

<sup>28</sup> It must be noted that Rawls was particularly concerned with the considered judgments of justice and did not focus on epistemology per se. Hence, criterion 4 is specific to considered judgments of justice.

<sup>29</sup> The third condition may not always apply. It would seem to apply more often than not in moral contexts, but not in, say, epistemological contexts.

only to be revised or given up after deliberation upon a conflict between the judgment and the principle (or other judgments). This helps to distinguish considered judgments from mere hunches. Hunches are intuitive inclinations to believe a proposition is true. With a hunch the evidential support that it lends is less clear. With a considered judgment, the evidential weight is more substantial. It is not something that is easily relinquished. The distinction between intuitions and the intuitive is not sharp here. I will leave the analysis of this distinction for the next chapter.

The sixth maintains that we trust those judgments that have been maintained over time and by different people. This seemingly social dimension to the considered judgments leads the judgments to have a certain stability. The stability is a matter of various competent judges making the same judgments on similar cases where it is such that the facts are determined by the judges to be similar and the interests of the judges are to be similar as well (Rawls, 1999, 6). The reason for this criterion is that if competent judges widely disagree, then it is unreasonable to have any confidence that the judgment is correct.

The seventh criterion must not be read as a type of impulse or instinct. It may be that the judgment is arrived at through reflection on the facts of the matter or even from the application of a commonsense rule (e.g., promises are to be kept). This is not to say that the judgment is arrived at by use of a systematic set of ethical principles. The reason for this is that if we take the judgments as being laden with an explicit underlying theory, we end up with the method of reflective equilibrium being circular. We cannot evaluate a

set of principles if they are being judged by judgments already established by some other principles.<sup>30</sup>

With these criteria in mind, the positive account of intuitions we get is that of propositional attitudes that are pre-theoretical, firmly held, socially stable, and well thought out (have an adequate understanding of the concepts) given certain conditions about the judges' circumstances. Considered judgments are stronger than mere hunches, but not a priori, self-evident mental states. They may be fallible and need not be arrived at by the use of a distinct mental faculty other than those used in normal, everyday reasoning. Though this may seem a somewhat lacking account of considered judgments, the important point (the point of agreement amongst advocates and critics of the method of reflective equilibrium) is that the judgments not be arrived at via the explicit use of principles.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, it is obvious that the intuitions or considered judgments are defeasible. It could be the case that we are confused about our judgment or not attentive enough to the intuition in the case. It is also possible to have a defeater come from one of the principles in the system. A defeater here could come from any element of the equilibrium state. So, with reflective equilibrium, the justification is defeasible justification.

---

<sup>30</sup> This reading of the seventh criterion may lead to a problem in that one may revise her set of judgments to fit some principles. If she uses that set of judgments to further evaluate some principles, then she is judging principles by judgments established by some other principles. I grant the legitimacy of this problem. The reading of the seventh criterion is based solely Rawls' conception. As will be discussed later, the problem of theory-laden judgments will ultimately pose a problem for such a reading.

<sup>31</sup> I say that both advocates and critics agree on this point since it is this point that has lead many to dismiss the method of reflective equilibrium or to dismiss it as Rawls conceives it. Advocates of the method must accept this point to avoid circularity and critics usually attack this point to show that either the method is viciously circular because considered judgments are such that they cannot satisfy the criterion or that considered judgments are not themselves able to carry justificatory weight themselves (see Stich (1990), Sencerz (1986), Cummins (1998) as examples of attacks somewhat along these lines).

What of the foundationalism/coherentism question? Reflective equilibrium is traditionally considered a coherentist method. As Rawls states:

[T]he idea of justification paired with full reflective equilibrium is nonfoundationalist in this way: no specified kind of considered judgment of political justice or particular level of generality is thought to carry the whole weight of public justification. Considered judgments of all kinds and levels of generality may have an intrinsic reasonableness, or acceptability, to reasonable persons that persists after due reflection. The most reasonable political conception for us is the one that best fits all our considered convictions on reflection and organizes them into a coherent view. At any given time, we cannot do better than that (2001, 31).

This nonfoundationalist or coherentist aspect to reflective equilibrium poses a concern to the concept of a basic evidential source. By Rawls' admission, no considered judgment carries the burden of evidential weight; hence, it would seem that none can play the role of being a basic evidential source. Furthermore, since in wide reflective equilibrium the considered judgments are even more revisable (since they can be revised not just in response to the proposed principle, but also the other background theories), we cannot grant any considered judgments any epistemological priority (Daniels 1996). So, it would initially seem that no considered judgments can play the role of a basic evidential source.

Yet, there are those who would deny reflective equilibrium's shunning of any foundationalist element. Joel Pust has argued that while it is initially acceptable that narrow reflective equilibrium has a foundationalist structure, even wide reflective equilibrium is foundationalist at bottom (2000, 26-28).<sup>32</sup> Pust points out that it is not enough to say that a method is nonfoundationalist if no particular set of considered judgments is immune from revision. A weak foundationalism can allow for the revision

---

<sup>32</sup> Even defenders of the coherence nature of wide reflective equilibrium, such as Norman Daniels, acknowledge that narrow reflective equilibrium treats the considered judgments as foundational (1996).

of any particular member of the set of foundational propositions. Furthermore, it would seem that considered judgments play just as much of a foundational role in wide reflective equilibrium as they do in narrow reflective equilibrium. The reason for this, according to Pust, is that the principle or theory initially derives its epistemic status from its explicating the set of considered judgments. The other background theories derive their epistemic status from the explication of the other considered judgments that constrain those background theories. And, the principle or theory derives its epistemic status from being supported by those background theories. As Pust argues, even though the coherence of the principle or theory may increase its epistemic status, it is still the case that their initial and “ultimate” source of positive epistemic status is derived from the considered judgments. It would seem that the considered judgments provide the data base for the formation and justification of the principles. This idea of the considered judgments acting as a data base, Pust believes, is nothing more than an evidential appeal to particular considered judgments. And, such an evidentialist appeal leads him to conclude that there is a foundationalist element at work in the method.<sup>33</sup>

If Pust is correct in his assessment, then the concept of a basic evidential source is not problematic for reflective equilibrium. The considered judgments at work in explicating the principles and those at work in explicating the other background theories provide the evidential basis for the ultimate justification of the principle or theory. This is not to say that in this method the considered judgments do all or even most of the

---

<sup>33</sup> I must note that there will be many who disagree with Pust’s line of argument. I have no intention of supporting or denying his conclusion at this point. I am discussing it only to show that there are those who maintain that it is not a problem to have a notion of basicity at work in the method of reflective equilibrium.

justificatory work, rather it is merely to say that the considered judgments splay some basic evidential role.<sup>34</sup>

### 1.8 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have illustrated how various types of philosophical analysis rely on various types of intuitions as their evidential base or data set. Upon seeing this, I believe that the questions of the nature of intuitions, the epistemic status of intuitions, and what philosophical methodologies can adequately make use of intuitions have the spotlight now on them. If philosophers are going to do philosophy and do it well, then we need answers to these questions. The next chapter will start down the road of answering those questions, starting with the following question: “What is a philosophical intuition?”

---

<sup>34</sup> I must note that the method of reflective equilibrium, the role of considered judgments, and the structure of considered judgments has been presented here in very broad strokes. There are many philosophers who have revised the method of reflective equilibrium or the role that considered judgments play (see DePaul 1993 as an example). Furthermore, the evidential status and the structure of the considered judgments has given birth to a vast literature – too much to adequately represent here. That said, my goal was to merely show that the method of reflective equilibrium has at its core the use of intuitions. I believe I have shown this in general terms.

## Chapter Two – The Structure of Philosophical Intuitions

*“The topic of intuition arouses much interest when it is raised in general conversation. Moreover, even though people might be hard-pressed to define intuition, they typically consider it seriously, if not with some awe.” – Robin M. Hogarth, Educating Intuition*

### 2.1 Introduction

In the last chapter we saw that intuitions play a major role in various types of philosophical analysis. Furthermore, each type of analysis made various claims about the type of intuition at work. As we saw, while there seemed to be some base features of intuition that the various forms of analysis agreed upon, there are others that they did not. It is now time to attempt to develop one core conception of what a philosophical intuition is so we can assess the merits of the various types of philosophical theorizing. It is my contention that there is one correct form of philosophical intuition. This conception of a philosophical intuition is important in that it will serve to determine whether the various types of analysis are plausible in yielding our philosophical goals (whether they are truth, clarification of our concepts, etc.).<sup>35</sup> To this end the goal of this chapter is develop and defend a particular conception of intuitions in light of the various features of intuitions assumed by the various types of philosophical analysis. In other words, I am going to develop an account of intuition that captures the appropriate form of intuition for the appropriate form of philosophical analysis. This account will go beyond the brief explication of ‘intuition’ given at the beginning of chapter one. I will be developing each of those aspects of intuition, refining some and rejecting others. So, in the end, my

---

<sup>35</sup> At this point I will remain neutral as to which forms of philosophical analysis are plausible given what I take to the correct account of the structure of a philosophical intuition. The question of the viability of the various types of philosophical analysis discussed in chapter one will be addressed in chapter four.

conception of intuition will be different from what was assumed at the outset of chapter one.

Many who write on the topic of philosophical intuitions maintain their only concern is what philosophers (particularly, contemporary analytic philosophers) mean by the term ‘intuition’. Hence, they are not concerned with how other disciplines use the term or what they mean by it (Pust 2000, 30). While I am primarily concerned with philosophical usages of the term, I will not shun all other disciplines and what they mean by the term. Particularly, I will appeal to the findings of empirical psychology to arrive at and inform my own account of intuitions. The reason I include this discipline, and not say mathematics or philosophy of mathematics, is because the findings of empirical psychology help to articulate what people mean by the term ‘intuition’ (including philosophers), what type of mental state it is, and help to assess when intuition can be problematic. This is not to say that all disciplines share what they mean by ‘intuition’. Some refer to intuitions as intuitive judgments, some as self-evident a priori intuitions, some as akin to observations, some as a sort of “sixth sense”, and others as dispositions to believe. Despite my widespread use of various disciplines, I will be careful to distinguish between the various uses in focusing ultimately on the appropriate use of ‘intuition’ for philosophical analysis.

Despite the appeal to empirical psychology, in what follows there will substantial appeal to the phenomenological analysis of people’s first-person introspections of intuitions. The reason this is necessary is that, as Pust points out, when we investigate the issue of intuitions, we are investigating what “having an intuition that p” involves from a first-person perspective (2000, 31). Since testimonial evidence is not perfectly

reliable and due to the fact that many claims that agents report of their own cognitive lives can be mistaken, free appeal to how it *seems* to one to intuit that p is made. To this end, I will assume that the phenomenological feel of an intuition is largely the same for most people, though where this assumptions is challenged I will note it.

Finally, this chapter will be organized in terms of the possible features of intuitions, not in terms of people who have provided accounts. I will mention those who have developed substantive accounts of intuitions when their account has the feature that I am discussing in that section. I do not intend to attack or defend anyone's account directly per se; rather I will attack or defend the necessity of particular desiderata. The rejection or defense of anyone's account is purely tangential to my overall goal.

## 2.2 Intuitions as Psychological States

It would seem obvious to many that intuitions ought to be treated as psychological states. But this first requirement is not just that intuitions are psychological states, but *genuine* psychological states. This is to be contrasted with a trend by some philosophers who treat intuitions as a linguistic disposition. For example, J. L. Austin makes frequent appeals to intuitions where he asks agents to consider "what we should say if asked" a particular question, e.g. "How do you know there is a tea-party next door?" (Austin 1979, 76-77). Richard B. Miller echoes Austin when he claims:

The intuition is the reader's own introspective judgment about his or her own linguistic disposition as manifested in the imagined circumstances...Intuitions, then, are the personal epiphenomenal residue of public linguistic habits (Miller 2000, 235).<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> The quote as it stands implies that intuitions themselves are introspective judgments that are the "residue" of agents' linguistic habits. And, since introspective judgments are psychological states, intuitions are psychological states.

While philosophers may make appeals to intuitions in language as Austin does, it must be taken, as Pust notes, if it is to be interesting at all, to be the report of some kind of propositional attitude that *p* (Pust 2000, 43). The reason we would say what we would say is because we *have* the state of seeming toward *p* and that state *seems* to be the correct way to respond to the question. Thus, all appeals to intuition, at bottom, treat intuitions as some kind of genuine psychological state.

### 2.2.1 Intuitions as Specific Psychological States

While it is clear enough that intuitions are psychological states, it is important to point out that they are psychological states of a particular type – namely, ones that play an epistemic role or do epistemic work. They are usually treated as having an evidential role. Moreover, they are often treated as being basic evidential sources (Goldman and Pust 1998, 179). Other such basic evidential sources are visual seemings, memory seemings, introspective seemings, and the like. What all these have in common is that for each:

[T]here is a class *M* of contentful mental states such that being in one of these mental states is *prima facie* evidence for the truth of its content (Goldman and Pust 1998, 180).

The necessary condition for when a class of psychological states classify as basic evidential sources, according to Goldman and Pust, are:

Mental states of type *M* constitute a basic evidential source only if *M*-states are reliable indicators of the truth of their contents (or the truth of closely related contents), at least when the *M*-states occur in *M*-favorable circumstances (1998, 180).

This is what Goldman and Pust call the “reliable indicatorship requirement”. What this essentially maintains is when the psychological states occur in circumstances that are favorable for them to occur, their contents are “generally true” (1998, 180). When one

intuits that Smith does not know, then, given that it is in favorable circumstances, it is usually true that Smith does not know. In this way, intuitions are more than mere psychological states. They are psychological states that count for the evidence of some beliefs.

The proposal here is if S intuits that p, then, given a reliable connection between intuition and the truth of the proposition intuited, that S intuits that p is evidence for S that p. This is not to say that the belief that S intuits that p evidentially supports the belief that p. Rather, S's intuiting that p itself evidentially supports the belief that p.<sup>37</sup> This way of construing the epistemic nature of intuitions illustrates how the epistemic nature of intuitions is externalistic. The epistemic role of intuitions depends on the contingent facts of reliability. In this way I am denying that intuitions are epistemic states in any intrinsic way or that it is the case that necessarily, if S intuits that p, then S is prima facie justified in believing that p. We can distinguish intuitions from, say, knowledge. Both are psychological states, but only knowledge is truly an epistemic state. Knowledge contains the epistemic state of justification. Intuition does not. So, knowledge, necessarily, is an epistemic state. Intuitions are contingently evidential.

One might claim at this point that I have loaded too much into my conception of intuitions. By maintaining intuitions are contingently evidential I have left a priori intuitions behind. It is generally taken that if one intuits that p, then p is prima facie justified for her. The intuition that p leads to one being justified in believing that p. In this way it is the having of the intuitive state that is the justification of p. Yet, I have claimed the justification is contingent on facts of reliability. Such questions of reliability

---

<sup>37</sup> This point may be put as follows: the experience that one has the intuition that p evidentially supports the belief that p. However we phrase it, it is not the belief that one is intuiting, but the intuiting itself that does the epistemic work.

often challenge conceptions of a priori intuitions. A priori intuitions are often seen as not contingent upon the reliability of the faculties that produce them.<sup>38</sup> Yet even a priori intuitions must be checked against the cognitive employment of the agent. All intuitions must be free from errors of, say, bias and cognitive access problems if they are to serve an evidential role (BonJour 1998, 137). As such, the mechanism that produces the intuition must be reliable. If the mechanism producing the intuition is not reliable, then it cannot have any evidential weight (given that intuitions are contingently evidential). Reliability considerations do not remove the possibility of a priori intuitions.

### 2.3 Intuitions as Propositional Attitudes

While it may seem obvious that intuitions are genuine psychological states, it is less obvious as to what kinds of states they are. In this section I will consider various attempts to characterize the psychological state of intuition.

#### 2.3.1 On Confusing Intuitions with Perceptions and Memories

Throughout the literature on intuition there has been a tendency to characterize intuitions as analogous to perceptions. We treat intuitions as a *seeing* of the truth of some proposition just as we treat our perceptual *seeing* of some state of affairs. As Robin M. Hogarth points, there are several reasons for this analogy (2001, 8). First, intuition, like perception, is covert in that we do not have access to the process by which you are able to see/intuit what you do. Second, in both cases, you cannot justify what you see/intuit in terms of a conscious, logically formulated process. Intuition is seen as not resulting from a conscious mental process in that it produces an answer in some way. Next, both processes occur automatically and quickly. Finally, in both cases, the resulting process leaves the agent attending to various “cues or pieces of information” (8).

---

<sup>38</sup> Bealer (1998) is an example of one who holds such a view.

While the analogy between intuition and perception may be tempting, I believe that it is a mistake to fully characterize intuitions in this way.<sup>39</sup> There is a significant point of disanalogy between the two. This reason is perhaps obvious and trivial – when people intuit various cases, they are not constrained by the physical world. As Bealer points out, “most things that can seem intellectually to be so cannot seem sensorily to be so” (1998, 208). Moreover, when one intuits something, any logically and/or metaphysically possible world can be entertained (Pust 2000, 45). Perception only shows what is actually the case, but, as many claim, intuition shows what is necessarily or possibly the case.<sup>40</sup> In this way, intuition is not constrained as perception is. Moreover, intuition is unlike perception in that it need not be exclusively about observables (Audi 1997, 42). There are various things that we have intuitions about – knowledge, rights, grammar – that we cannot perceive. When one says that she knows that *p* in some Gettier-style case, her knowing is something that is not seen visually. Furthermore, if intuition was so constrained, then mathematics and logic would be highly suspect in their reliance on intuition. Again, the analogy between perception and intuition fails.

We should not confuse intuition with memorial states either. That is, we should not consider intuition as implying or being implied by memory. To show this, consider two cases (Pust 2000, 45). First, it is possible that one remember a Gettier-style case is not a case of knowledge without having the relevant intuition. Second, it is possible to have a novel intuition without remembering the intuited proposition. It is possible to

---

<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that we should not use perceptual *talk* in discussing intuitions, just that an adequate account of the nature of intuition will not treat them as perceptual states.

<sup>40</sup> Here I am thinking of traditionalists about the role of intuition such as Bealer (1998), Bonjour (1998), and Pust (2000). This claim is controversial and I will address it in this chapter in a later section. In any event, even if this claim is false I still take it that the analogy between intuition and perception fails.

have an intuition about something that is not in my memory. Due to such possibilities, I believe it is obvious that intuitions ought not to be thought of as memorial states.

### 2.3.2 Intuitions as Propositional Attitudes, but Not Beliefs

Intuitions are propositional attitudes. A propositional attitude is a mental state that has propositional content; particularly, the content is identified by the ‘that’-clause (t-clause) in the attitude ascription (Richard 1990, 7). Beliefs, desires, fears, etc. are all propositional attitudes. In each case, there is an attitude or state that has as its content a proposition (designated by the t-clause); where the form of such an attitude ascription is “S (believes, fears, desires, hopes, etc.) that p”.<sup>41</sup> Intuitions are attitudes “that p” for some suitable class of propositions.

The content of such propositional attitudes is going to be a proposition containing a kind, concept, or predicate. The propositions identified by the t-clause in the attitude ascription can contain any natural kind, concept, or predicate. As long as what is identified by the t-clause is a grammatically correct proposition, then the attitude ascription is correct in form. For example, if a stockbroker, upon assessing the state of the market that day, forms the intuition that she ought to buy a certain stock, then her attitude ascription “I intuit that I ought to buy this particular stock now” is correct in form since it is an intuition that she has and the content is propositional in nature.

While intuitions may be propositional attitudes, many may think that intuitions are merely beliefs or a special kind of belief. Yet this is incorrect. Beliefs are not *seemings*, but intuitions are. Bealer illustrates this with the following example (1998, 209). One can have an intuition – say of the truth of the naïve comprehension axiom of

---

<sup>41</sup> In more precise terms, an attitude ascription is a sentence whose primary verb is any verb that can take a t-clause as an object and singular terms as subjects (an attitude verb) (Richard 1990, 7 fn).

set theory – even though one does not believe in the truth of it (since she knows of the set-theoretical paradoxes). So, it is not the case that if S intuits that p, then S believes that p. There are also many mathematical theorems that one may believe because she has seen the proofs, but these theorems do not *seem* to be true to her nor do they *seem* to be false. One may have a belief without any corresponding intuition. So, it is not the case that if S believes that p, then S intuits that p.

Another problem with equating intuition with belief is that belief is highly susceptible to doubt. This is not the case for intuition. The strength of one's intuitions does not usually diminish very easily, yet the strength of one's belief can be diminished in the face of intimidation, authority, etc (Bealer 1998, 208). This is not to say that intuitions are not plastic at all. Rather, it is to say that there is a definite difference between the plasticity of intuitions and beliefs. So, we have further reason to accept that intuitions are not the same as beliefs.

Finally, one might maintain that while intuitions are not beliefs, they are dispositions or inclinations to believe. Ernest Sosa takes this line in developing his account of intuitions (Sosa 1996, Sosa 1998).<sup>42</sup> Sosa provides the following account of intuition:

At t, it is intuitive to S that p if and only if (a) if at t S were merely to understand fully enough the proposition that p (absent relevant perception, introspection, and reasoning), then S would believe that p; (b) at t, S does understand the proposition that p; and (c) the proposition that p is abstract (Sosa 1998, 259).

This suggestion does in fact grant the above analysis of the various paradoxes (e.g., Bealer's example of the set-theoretic paradoxes mentioned above) – that intuition is not analyzable in terms of belief. Yet, it suggests that intuitions might be definable in terms

---

<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that Sosa uses "inclination", rather than "dispositional state", but Sosa does not dismiss his view having intuitions characterized as dispositional states (1998, 259).

of what one does or would believe (Sosa 1996, 153). He claims that most of us “*would* naturally believe the naïve comprehension axiom in the absence of the reasoning involving the set-theoretical paradoxes, if one relied just on one’s understanding of what the axiom itself says” (Sosa 1996, 154). So, Sosa’s move is to accept the analysis of intuition as not belief, but note that if the person did not have the relevant defeating information, she would believe the proposition in question.

Sosa’s proposal fails for a few reasons. As Pust points out, in the paradox cases, this proposal implies that the agent fails to have an intuition at all (2000, 40). Consider Sosa’s second condition (b). (b) states that S does understand the proposition that p. (a), however, states if S understands p “enough”, then S would believe that p. (b) (in conjunction with (a) and (c)) implies the agent understands the proposition without having the relevant reasoning for the proposition as she would have just “enough” to understand what the axiom states. Yet, if the agent does not have the relevant reasoning for the propositions involved in the paradox cases, then she cannot have the appropriate intuition. Part of the paradox case is that the agent has done the relevant reasoning – reasoned her way to the belief that the axiom falls prey to the paradoxes. But, since she has not done the relevant reasoning, she fails to satisfy (b). She cannot *merely* understand the proposition that p if she has not done the relevant reasoning. But, we want to say that she does in fact have the intuition. If we do want to say that she has the intuition, but has failed to satisfy (a) or (b), then Sosa’s account is not an adequate account of intuition.

A second problem with Sosa’s account is that it implies that if one has the intuition, then she must have the corresponding belief (given conditions (a), (b), and (c))

are satisfied).<sup>43</sup> It is possible to have an intuition without forming any belief. Suppose that you are considering any theoretical explanation.<sup>44</sup> One may form the intuition that some explanation, e, does explain phenomenon, p. But, it obviously does not have to be the case that she immediately believes that e explains p. To do so would be to prejudge the issue as to whether e explains p. The problem is Sosa's proposal is too demanding. It does not coincide with our experience of approaching theoretical explanations of phenomena. Thus, I maintain that we ought not to accept intuitions as inclinations or dispositions to believe.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, we must not characterize intuitions as the mere "raising to consciousness of nonconscious background beliefs".<sup>46</sup> The problem with treating intuitions as mere reporting of previously held background beliefs is that I can have a whole host of various background beliefs that are in direct contradiction to my intuitions on the matters. For example, suppose that one has the standing background beliefs that the axioms and rules of classical logic do not all hold (Bealer 1998, 209). Upon being questioned, the negative background belief that these rules and axioms do not hold becomes raised to my consciousness. But, suppose that one does have the intuition that the rules and axioms do all hold. If this is possible, then this belief was raised to consciousness from a standing background belief. Thus, the person is holding two different, contradictory background

---

<sup>43</sup> I say 'must' here because Sosa presents this as a matter of entailment. The having of an intuition *entails* one have the corresponding belief.

<sup>44</sup> This example was given to me by Bruce Glymour.

<sup>45</sup> It has been suggested to me that it may not be that Sosa is best characterized as giving a dispositional account of intuitions. Rather Sosa should be seen as presenting intuition as a particular form of understanding. We understand an abstract proposition where our understanding of it (to a certain degree) is sufficient to lead us to believe the proposition. I am not convinced that this is correct. When setting up his proposal, Sosa claims that we may be tempted to think of intuitions as "*inclinations* to believe based on...understanding" (1998, 359). From this I believe that Sosa's proposal is meant to show that intuitions are not a type of understanding, but rather be developed from understanding. Thus, I believe it is correct to view Sosa's proposal as dispositional.

<sup>46</sup> This quote is from Bealer (1998, 209) and he attributes such a view to Kornblith.

beliefs. The point here is that we can have a whole host of standing background beliefs of which we have no intuitions and we can have intuitions without having any standing background beliefs (or background beliefs to the contrary).

From these considerations I maintain that intuitions are not to be characterized as beliefs, dispositions to believe, or the raising to consciousness of nonconscious background beliefs. Though intuitions may *seem* like beliefs, it is incorrect to characterize them as beliefs. Yet, surely there must be some relation between intuition and beliefs since other *seemings* are related to beliefs. One way to see a relation between them is by drawing a loose analogy with sensory seemings. For any sensory seeming that p, the belief that p can arise and is evaluated on the basis of whether I did in fact have the sensory state in question. In this way, such beliefs are sensorily grounded. The belief comes from one's having of the sensory state in question, but the belief does not come with the sensory state. I take it that intuitions and beliefs can be characterized in the same way. If one intuits that p, one can form the belief that p, but it is not the case that the belief comes with the intuition. The belief arises from one's having the intuitional seeming.

#### 2.4 Understanding the Content of an Intuition

In order for an intuition to be a propositional attitude, the agent must have an understanding of the propositional content of the psychological state. This feature is what Audi calls the "comprehension requirement" (Audi 1997, 41). The agent must comprehend the content (the concepts) of the proposition. If someone is to genuinely intuit that p, she must have a sufficient understanding of the individual concepts and their relations to each other in the context in question.

While it may seem obvious that some understanding of the constituent concepts of the attitude is necessary for the agent to form a genuine intuition, two things need to be addressed. First, what counts as a sufficient level of understanding is unclear. Though I grant that this is a serious worry, I do not intend to delve into the issue of what counts as “sufficient understanding”. Suffice it to say, I am taking this condition to mean, minimally, that the agent has the ability to entertain conscious thoughts where the concepts in question play a role or figure into the attitude.<sup>47</sup> If one intuits that *p*, she understands the concepts in *p* to the point where she can entertain thoughts that contain those concepts. Yet, I do not intend to say that if one understands the concepts in *p* to the point where she can entertain thoughts that contain them, then she can intuit that *p*. The reason for this is that it is possible to understand some, say, mathematical concepts well enough to grasp and believe some mathematical truths containing those concepts, but still not understand the mathematical concepts enough to be able to form intuitions about them.

Second, I have not provided any sort of argument for this understanding requirement. It does not seem to be part of the phenomenology of intuitions that the agent has any such understanding. It may be that one’s understanding the proposition is part of how the intuition experience seems to her, but I do not think that any such phenomenological argument can be given for this requirement. The argument for this requirement comes from its necessary connection to other requirements. Specifically, without any such understanding requirement, it is not possible to say that intuitions are to

---

<sup>47</sup> This idea is taken from Peter Carruthers (1992, 97). I must note that Carruthers takes this to be a feature of beliefs where concepts play a role. In saying that intuitions have this same feature I do not intend to say that intuitions are akin to beliefs. I take it that any propositional attitude will have this feature – in fact, I take it that any mental state which involves concept possession will have this feature.

be held as ‘convictions’ (this “firmness” requirement will be discussed in section 2.6). If one does not have an understanding of the concepts involved, then there is no way we can say that she is *convinced* by her forming the intuition – her intuition having a felt certainty attached to it. It must be said that intuitions are not genuine convictions. Convictions are beliefs and, as I have said, intuitions are not beliefs. What is being said here is that intuitions involve a proposition’s seeming true to us. A proposition cannot seem true to us unless we understand the content of the proposition. This understanding requirement is necessary once we see that intuitions are used in judgments as to the classification of one thing as falling under or not falling under another. For example, if intuitions are to be used in philosophical analysis at all, the agent must be able to make a judgment about the concepts being analyzed. This ability requires that she understand, at least minimally understand, the content in question.

But what if one does not have a sufficient understanding of the concepts involved? If one does not have such a sufficient understanding, then she would be having something akin to a mere hunch, not a genuine intuition. Any time one has a superficial understanding of some concept she would not be able to have an intuition with any degree of ‘conviction’. One must understand the proposition fully enough that it *seems* true to us, but whether a proposition *seems* true to us may be determined by more than how well we understand it.

It is in this way that I understand the nature of this requirement as well as believe it to figure into the overall account of intuitions. I grant that my assessment of “sufficient understanding” is weak, but I do not feel it is weak enough to warrant further argument. I

do not take it that any of my arguments hinge on the degree to which one must understand the content of the attitude in order to intuit it.

## 2.5 The “Spontaneous” Nature of Intuitions

It is commonplace to say that intuitions are spontaneous. Most, if not all, philosophers writing on the epistemic status of intuitions treat them as mental states that arise quickly or immediately upon considering the proposition. The question here is not whether intuitions are spontaneous, rather the way in which they are and the degree to which they are spontaneous. The importance of this question is due to the fact that other features of an intuition depend upon the answer.

At the outset, I maintain that we need to be careful about the use of the term “spontaneous”. The reason for this is because it is unclear what various philosophers mean by the term. Consider the Pust’s account:

*Intuitions are not the result of conscious inference.* This is, I take it, what is meant when one refers to intuitions as “spontaneous” seemings or judgments (2000, 44).

This treats spontaneity not as a matter of the speed of arising, but as a question of whether they are the product of some inference. It is this that many would seem to have in mind. Consider Rawls’ account of considered judgments discussed in the last chapter. Rawls is adamant that considered judgments not arise from the conscious application of principles as evidenced by introspection (1999, 6). Audi echoes Rawls in his *non-inferentiality requirement* which maintains that the intuition must be non-inferential in that it cannot, at that time, be held on the basis of a premise (1997, 40). So, when philosophers talk of the spontaneity of intuitions, it would seem that they are talking about a propositional attitude that is not the result of some inference. To be a genuine

intuition, for those like Pust, Rawls, and Audi, the attitude cannot be the result of some inferential process. It cannot be, so to speak, the conclusion of an argument or the result of the application of some rule or principle. It is this sense that will be focus in what follows. Yet, what we have to understand is that there are features of intuitions which force us to weaken this demand for non-inferentiality. Let me now turn to those features.

### 2.5.1 Are Intuitions Judgments?

Many philosophers consider philosophical intuitions to be a species of judgments. This is not to say that they consider them to be beliefs, rather they consider them to be another type of mental state. Consider the discussion of reflective equilibrium in the last chapter. There, Rawls uses the phrase “considered judgments” instead of “intuition”. Others echo Rawls in the view that intuitions are judgments. Consider Cohen’s account of ‘intuition’:

An intuition that p is...just an immediate, unreflective, and untutored inclination, without argument or inference, to judge that p (and that anyone who faces the same issue ought also to judge that p), where the judgment that p is of a kind that is in principle not checkable by sensory perception or by accepted methods of calculation (1986, 75).

Cohen’s account is that intuitions are not judgments proper, they are inclinations to judge. There is some direct causal relation between an intuition and judging. Rawls and Cohen have in mind that if S intuits that p, then S is caused to judge that p. Care must be taken in making this point. While Rawls seems adamant about intuitions being judgments, Cohen is less so. By saying “inclination to judge that p”, Cohen seems to be allowing the possibility that one could have the intuition that p, but not be led to judge that p. This is curious. Since Cohen maintains anyone in a similar state (“who faces the

same issue *ought* also to judge that p”) will make the same judgment, it would seem that the weakened language of “inclination” is misleading. Since there is a normative claim on the table, Cohen’s account would seem to force us to the view that if one intuits that p, then one judges that p. In this sense intuitions are a special class of judgments.

While some take it as commonplace that intuitions are judgments, not all are in agreement over this point. Bealer argues that intuitions are “quite distinct” from judgments (1998, 210). He claims there are “significant restrictions” on the propositional content of an intuition. There are almost no restrictions on what we can judge.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, judgments are not seemings whereas intuitions are. The reason Bealer gives for this is that judgments are occurrent beliefs and as such they are not seemings (1998, 210). And due to the characterization of judgments as occurrent beliefs, intuitions are not judgments.<sup>49</sup>

While I agree with Bealer that intuitions are phenomenologically distinct from beliefs, I do not agree with him on the issue of intuitions being phenomenologically distinct from judgments via the route of occurrent beliefs. Bealer maintains that if S intuits that p, then she does not judge that p. His justification for this is that judgments are not seemings, they are “a kind” of occurrent belief (1998, 210). Bealer seems to be claiming that if S intuits that p, then it seems to S that p. But if S judges that p, then it *does not seem* to S that p. Hence, intuitions are not judgments.

---

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that this leaves open the possibility that intuitions are a *kind* of judgment. The existence of such restrictions implies that *some* judgments are not intuitions, yet does not imply that some intuitions are not judgments. Despite this, I will avoid this worry as I will be addressing another problem with the view later.

<sup>49</sup> It must be noted that Bealer gives essentially the same argument for the claim that occurrent beliefs not being seemings as he does for the earlier claim that intuitions are not beliefs.

Initially, Bealer's argument seems enticing. If S judges that p, then S has the occurrent belief that p. For some propositions however, S intuits that p, but does not believe it. Taken together we see that for some proposition, p, S intuits that p, but does not judge that p. This Bealer takes to be enough to get to his conclusion.

But there is a worry here. It is not clear that judgment is akin to occurrent belief. There are at least three ways in which one can mean 'judgment': (1) a mental faculty, (2) an act, and (3) the product of an act. It would seem that Bealer has the third in mind. Yet, to equate judgment with occurrent belief seems to violate what the third is intending. It would seem that when we use 'judgment' by itself, what we are referring to is a product of a particular mental faculty. My judging that it is cold is my coming to be in a state with the propositional content, "It is cold". This state is the result of the operating of my mental faculty of judgment. In this way we usually treat judgment as both the thing you do and the thing you get when you do it. In other words, judgments are distinguished from at least some beliefs in that judgments involve some act of affirmation. Thus, judgment seems, phenomenologically speaking, to not be a kind of mere occurrent belief. From this, we can see that it would seem that intuition has more in common with judgment than it does belief. When we intuit, it does, phenomenologically speaking, seem that it is a matter of the mental faculty of intuiting and the propositional product – the intuition. I believe we have no reason to accept Bealer's argument against treating intuitions as judgments. But it is important to note that it is true that one's intuiting that p does not entail her believing that p, it is also true that one's intuiting that p entails her judging that p.

If intuitions are judgments, then what of the claim that intuitions are immediate in the sense of non-inferential? It would seem that if we say that intuitions are immediate it would pose a problem for treating them as akin to judgments (which would not normally have such a property attributed to them). But this is incorrect. It is true that many of the intuitions that one has are immediate. Suppose one presents the Gettier Case to a group of freshman students. Upon hearing the case, each student would form her intuition as to whether Smith knows immediately. Each student would grasp or understand the relevant propositional content and thus intuit that Smith knows or not. Such intuitive cases are everyday occurrences and they show the phenomenal speed to which intuitions are formed.

Yet, not all intuitive judgments are as such. Consider the following case: you are interviewing a job candidate (Hogarth 2001, 10). Over the course of the interview, you develop the impression (from the intuition) that the candidate does not have the relevant background for the specific area you desire. In such a situation, you will not be able to pinpoint any specific moment you formed the intuition. Instead, it would seem that the intuition was developed over a period of time or that the intuition “built up” over the course of the interview. Here the intuition is not a non-inferential grasping of the content. We can characterize this case as you inferring the content of the intuition from background beliefs about candidate’s expertise, etc. Furthermore, it would seem that some like Audi would in fact allow for such non-immediate states to count as intuitions despite his adherence to the non-inferentiality requirement. As Audi states, “Intuitions are sometimes regarded as arising quickly upon considering the proposition in question; they need not so arise and in some cases probably should not so arise” (1997, 41).

The point here is that we should treat non-immediate intuitions as being genuine intuitions. In some cases it may take some time to come to grasp the content of the intuition (indeed I believe that many freshman students would not be able to form immediate intuitions to Gettier Cases, but this is mere speculation).

### 2.5.2 The Theory-ladenness of Intuitions

A question that arises with the connection between intuition and judgment is whether intuition is like judgment in that it makes use of background knowledge or theories. Whereas judgment is usually considered to make free use out of these, intuitions are considered flawed or not genuine if they do. Many philosophers writing on the subject of intuitions treat any form of theory-ladenness as a bad thing indeed (e.g., Audi, Bealer, Goldman and Pust, Rawls). It is important to note at the outset that the question of theory-ladenness is not one of the epistemic force of intuitions. This is a question of the structure of intuitions themselves – Are intuitions themselves inherently theory-laden? Yet, before we can assess the theory-ladenness of intuitions we need to get straight on what is being meant by these philosophers.

There are two senses in which an intuition could be theory-laden. First, the intuition may be laden with a theory that underlies the understanding and deployment of a concept. This kind of theory will be implicit in the intuition and will not usually be able to be detected by introspection or even articulated. This kind of theory-ladenness does not involve the direct application of a rule or principle. Let us call this sense of ladenness “theory-informed”. For instance, Bealer argues that intuitions cannot be identified with a “‘raising-to-consciousness’ of nonconscious background beliefs” because it is possible to

have no nonconscious background beliefs about a subject, but have very clear intuitions about it (1998, 209).

Second, an intuition may be laden by a theory *about* a concept. It may be laden in the sense that the intuition is the direct result of the application of a principle, theory, or some system of belief. Let us call this sense “theory-driven”. I presume that philosophers who argue against the theory-ladenness of intuitions are referring to this second kind. In fact, some such as Goldman, Rawls, and Audi intentionally allow for the possibility of intuitions being theory-informed, but not theory-driven. For instance, Goldman and Pust maintain if a subject evaluating a case is a philosophical theorist who holds some explicit theory about the nature of the case, this background theory may twist her intuitions about the case at hand (1998, 183). They call this *theory contamination*. Theory contamination is the allowance of theory-informed intuitions, but the disallowance of theory-driven intuitions, intuitions which are driven by explicit background theories. Due to this, they claim we should prefer subjects who have no theoretical views about the case since having such a prior theoretical commitment will not provide favorable circumstances. Audi invokes what he calls the *pretheoreticality requirement* which states, “[intuitions] are neither evidentially dependent on theories nor themselves theoretical hypotheses” (1997, 41). Finally, Rawls is perhaps most explicit about this. Rawls maintains that genuine intuitions should not be determined by the conscious application of background principles (1999, 6). Thus, what these philosophers are not allowing for is the subject’s intuition about the applicability of the target concept being inferred from or arrived at via a background theory or background system of belief.

There is another reason why some believe that theory-ladenness is problematic. Cohen maintains that if intuitions are theory-laden, then they are inferential. He argues that unless intuitions are non-inferential in that they do not arise from the explicit use of background theories or knowledge, they cannot act as “ultimate premises” in philosophical analysis and argumentation (1986, 76-77). Various types of philosophical analysis treat intuitions as basic evidential sources not admitting of further inferential support from background theories and knowledge. Yet, if intuitions were theory-laden, then they would not be able to play such a role. So, intuitions must be non-theory-laden.

While some may be tempted by such lines of reasoning, I believe it is a mistake to accept them. When we use the term 'theory' we refer to systematically organized information pertaining to a certain phenomenon which allows us to analyze, predict, or otherwise explain the nature of the phenomenon in question. A minimum requirement of a theory is that it have a *classificational scheme*. By classificational scheme I am referring to the ability to identify something as of a certain type. In this sense, all theories have classificational schemes. Any theory must, at minimum, be able to classify one thing as another. For example, a simple theory that claimed only that "All F's are G's" would still be able to classify particular F's as G's. Though all theories must contain a classificational scheme, one may ask whether all classificational schemes are theories. Some would maintain the answer is no. Some might argue that there seems to be one type of case (and only this one type of case) in which there is a classificational scheme, but no theory is employed. The case in question is that of perceptual judgments. It does seem possible to employ a classificational scheme about what one perceives, but employ

no theory.<sup>50</sup> Thus, perceptual judgments seem to be a case where I employ a classificational scheme, but employ no theories.

Now, the accounts of intuitions given by the likes of Bealer, Audi, BonJour, Goldman, and Pust dictate that the contents of intuitions are singular classificational propositions. It is obvious that there is some classificational scheme at work here, but there also does seem to be a theory being employed. If the intuited propositions are of the form "this case is (or is not) an instance of A", then we need a theory to help classify the kind, concept, or predicate (whatever A may be). For example, suppose that we ask some subject, S, whether Smith knows in the Gettier case. S's intuition on the case is that Smith does not know. The fact that Smith does not know is not something that S can just intuit on its own. S's being able to classify this case as Smith not having knowledge seems to depend on various other factors (such as S's conception of knowledge, what she counts as relevant evidence, her upbringing, prior exposure to these types of cases, her beliefs about the facts of the case, etc.). Thus, there seems to be a theory being employed in the classificational scheme.

But it would seem that this theory-ladenness is just a matter of being theory-informed and as such the distinction holds. Yet, this is not the case. If we accept intuitions as theory-informed (as I think we should and most, I presume, would agree), then the background theory or knowledge being employed is playing a direct, substantive role in the application of the concept. If the background theory or knowledge is playing a direct, substantive role in the application of the concept, then that background theory or knowledge is *driving* matters as to when we can correctly identify whether the case

---

<sup>50</sup> I do recognize that there are those who will contest this claim, but I do not think it affects my overall argument and merely am pointing out that such a view is plausible.

satisfies the application of the concept. The background theory or knowledge is directly dictating when we can intuit that “This F is a G”. If my background theory underlies when I can correct classify an F as a G (in the sense of theory-informed), then this understanding is going to influence, consciously or unconsciously, when I intuit cases where it is the case that we have an F that is a G. The intuition will be derived, consciously or unconsciously, from the background theory. If this is the case, then there is no real distinction being made here. The distinction between intuitions being theory-informed and theory-driven collapses. So, it is the case that if we should accept that intuitions are theory-informed, we should also accept that they are theory-driven.

One may object to this by saying that there is no conscious application of, say, an epistemic principle in the intuition of the Gettier case and as such it is not theory-driven. While this may seem like a legitimate objection on the surface, I believe it does not hold. Once we have accepted that intuitions are theory-informed, then we acknowledge that what background beliefs we have will influence our understanding of the concept in question. For example, as a foundationalist learns more about her theory, she will be more driven by her foundationalism. As a consequentialist learns more about her theory, her intuitions will be driven by her consequentialism. The point here is that once one acquires more and more background knowledge, she will be driven by that background theory or knowledge. It is not the case that we are blank slates. We do not come to the table without any driving background knowledge about when it is appropriate to apply a concept. The point about it being a nonconscious application is misleading. When (and if) one is able to discern what background theories or knowledge is driving her intuition is a matter of her ability to introspect and her history with regard to questions and case of

the sort under discussion.<sup>51</sup> Being theory-informed is just being theory-driven. It is just that some have more to drive the intuition (and more of what's doing the driving) accessible to them. Since there is no clear cut way in which to determine when one has a sufficiently large and developed stock of background theories and knowledge in which to drive her intuitions, I conclude that there is no substantive distinction between theory-informed and theory-driven in the nature of an intuition.

Now, while my "theory" of knowledge may drive and inform my intuitions about whether particular cases are cases of knowledge, some of my intuitions are not going to be entailed just by the claims in the theory and the facts about the particular case. Some intuitions may extend beyond the theory. Some intuitions that extend beyond my theory may drive my theory as I now adopt additional theoretical principles to explain the cases I have intuited to be cases of knowledge (or not of knowledge). This is the case in the original Gettier situation. In the Gettier case, S formed the intuition that Smith does not know which goes beyond the previously held background theory of knowledge. That intuition drives S's theory as she adopts further epistemic principles to explain the intuition that she has formed. So the relationship between intuitions and theories is two-way.

I must make one final note about the arguments that Goldman, Pust, Audi, and others are sometimes making. More often than not it is the case that by saying that

---

<sup>51</sup> Perhaps this point can put another way. Suppose an agent's conceptual structure is hard-wired. It is plausible that agents are wired such that they are forced to discern and classify the world in certain sorts of ways. If this is the case (and it is plausible to suppose it is), any intuition that p (where p is something relating to the hard-wired conceptual structure) will be caused directly from the hard-wiring itself. The classificational scheme will discern the world as such (since it is hard-wired). There will also be other background information concerning the conceptual structure that will play into the formation of the intuition. The hard-wiring and background information will "drive" or causally result in the agent having the intuition. This would not be a conscious application since the agent has no direct introspective access to the conceptual structure or the background information. Yet, the intuition is the direct result of this.

intuitions are theory-informed and not theory-driven it is meant that intuitions should not, in an evidential sense, be theory-driven. That is, we should not count the intuitions of those philosophers with a theoretical “axe-to-grind” as having any sort of evidential weight. But this is changing the issue. This is an argument about what philosophers should treat as their data and not a claim about the nature of intuitions. It is a claim about what should be treated as evidence. This is a different question and does not affect my argument. Whether there is anything that can be treated as basic evidential sources is a different question than asking what the structure of philosophical intuitions is. Perhaps it is the case that no intuitions can be used as evidence for philosophical theories due to how they are structured. Perhaps we need to rethink how we attempt to defend philosophical theories on the basis of the structure of intuitions. But, these are questions of the evidential status of intuitions and not of their structure. So, I maintain that appealing to the supposed need of non-theory-driven intuitions for philosophical analysis fails to establish that my conclusion about the structure of intuitions being theory-laden in both senses is mistaken.

## 2.6 Degrees of Conviction

It is usually the case that intuitions are treated as convictions. It should be noted that while convictions may be beliefs, what at issue here is the level of strength the intuition has and not whether the intuition is a belief or not. When one has an intuition, she comes down on the matter at hand (Audi 1997, 40). There is a certain “firmness” that is associated with the having of an intuition. Such claims are usually made in order to make a distinction between intuitions and mere hunches or guesses. When one intuits that *p*, it *seems* that *p*. This seeming is a felt sense of conviction and can only be

dislodged by a conflicting intuition of equal conviction-weight or conflicting with a firmly held theory. Rawls was most explicit about this requirement. He states:

It is required that the judgment be felt to be certain by the person making it. This characteristic may be called “certitude” and it is to be sharply distinguished from certainty, which is a logical relation between a proposition, or theory, and its evidence. This test is justified on the ground that it seems more profitable to study those judgments which are felt to be correct than those which seem to be wrong or confused even to those who make them (1999, 6).

From this, and other such claims, it would seem that *real* intuitions (intuitions that will matter in philosophical analysis) are ones that have a high degree of conviction attached to them.

While there is, phenomenologically speaking, a felt conviction to the having of an intuition, it is a mistake to take them to have such a high degree of firmness. For example, consider various cases in which S (say, a freshman college student) forms an intuition. Suppose that she forms an intuition that an instance of modus ponens is true. In this case, the intuition that if p, then q and p entails q will be felt with a high degree of conviction. S would clearly understand the case as being one of modus ponens and hence the intuition would be more or less a firmly held conviction. Yet, suppose that S is presented with the Gettier case. Here she may form the intuition that Smith does not know, but that intuition is not going to be held as firmly as her intuition that x is a correct instance of modus ponens. Furthermore, consider S being presented with a Twin Earth example where there is a molecular duplicate of Earth (Twin Earth) where the liquid called ‘water’ is not H<sub>2</sub>O, but a different liquid with the formula XYZ (though XYZ is indistinguishable from water under normal circumstances). Her intuition as to whether ‘water’ has different meanings on each world is not going to be as firm as either the modus ponens case or the Gettier case. She will not be convinced as to whether the given

concept applies in this case as the other concepts applied in the other cases. Yet, we would want to say that she does in fact have an intuition in the Twin Earth case. So, we have three different intuitions with three different degrees of conviction.

What these examples show is that intuitions come with degrees of convictions or have varying degrees of conviction. The degree of conviction is determined by the agent's ability to *see* the truth of the propositional content of the intuition. The more the agent understands the content of the proposition (the concept involved), then the more conviction her intuition will have. Now some, for example Rawls, maintain that we should only be concerned with those intuitions that are "profitable" in the sense that they are felt to be correct. Yet, since there is going to be no exact point where one can say that the intuition is firm enough to be "profitable", we should not disallow intuitions with low levels of conviction. We should instead treat all intuitions as legitimate and allow them a role in philosophical analysis.<sup>52</sup>

## 2.7 The Fallibility of Intuitions

As we have seen, the felt certitude of intuitions comes in varying degrees. This fact points to a further feature of intuitions – they are fallible. In what follows, I first provide a general philosophical argument for the fallibility of intuitions and second will discuss some empirical reasons as to the degree to which intuitions are fallible.

### 2.7.1 A Philosophical Argument for the Fallibility of Intuitions

Consider any paradox. A philosophical paradox is a set of propositions that are all intuitively true to the agent, but cannot all be true (Pust 2000, 44). If this is a correct account of a philosophical paradox, then we have one of two options - we can say that some of the intuitive seemings are not 'real' intuitions or we can say that the intuitions

---

<sup>52</sup> Albeit they will have different roles with different weights, but this will be addressed in the next chapter

are fallible. If we accept the first disjunct, then we have rejected the very phenomenology of intuitions themselves. Paradoxes provide the perfect example of intuitive seemings. If we reject the idea that there are real intuitions at work in paradoxes, then we have no grounds for the existence of intuitions at all. Thus, it would seem that we should accept that intuitions are fallible.

This may seem too strong to some. Someone may maintain that intuitions are still infallible. If one takes intuitions to be infallible, then she may still take the phenomenology of intuitions as an indication of their existence. Yet, if one goes this route, then it would have to be the case that the phenomenology of intuitions could be mistaken as well. The problem here is that we would then need to defend a distinction between real and apparent intuitions, but such a distinction does not seem to be worth making. It is not advantageous to defend the reservation of the term ‘intuition’ for cases where the proposition is true.

Further support for the fallibility of intuitions comes from there being numerous other examples of intuitive responses that had a felt conviction to them, but have turned out to be mistaken (BonJour 1998, 111-112). For example, various claims of mathematics and logic have been regarded as intuitively self-evident which have been shown to be in error. Consider also all the various examples in a priori, rationalist metaphysics. It cannot be the case that all of them are true since, taken as a conjunction, all would lead to a contradiction. Finally, consider errors that agents make in everyday calculations. It is, unfortunately, very easy to make errors in basic calculations even though those calculations are intuitively “obvious” to us. Such examples show that we cannot abandon the idea that intuitions are fallible.

These considerations lead to one last point about fallibility and intuitions – if we treat intuitions as fallible, then we do not need to invoke a truth condition in the analysis of an intuition (Pust 2000, 44). If intuitions are infallible, then the intuited proposition cannot be false. Yet, we have seen various examples that show how the intuited proposition can be false. Hence, intuitions are fallible. As such, we need not maintain that the intuited proposition be true. This is not to say that there is not a felt weight to the proposition. Rather it is merely to say that the proposition does not have to be true.

### 2.7.2 Empirical Reasons for the Fallibility of Intuitions

Contemporary cognitive and social psychology is loaded with literature on the problems with intuitions. Various researchers have illustrated numerous ways in which subject's intuitions are mistaken. While some philosophers disregard these findings, I believe it is valuable to note a few examples since, as Jonathan Weinberg has pointed out, our intuitions must come from somewhere and it becomes of importance to investigate the mechanism(s) that produces our intuitions. Furthermore, the mechanism(s) itself will not be a matter for philosophical investigation since it is not available via introspection. So, we must look to cognitive psychology. In what follows I would like to illustrate two such problems with intuitions – the overconfidence phenomenon and the fundamental attribution error.

While it is obviously the case that we, as humans, recognize (or at least should recognize) that we have made mistakes in our reasoning in the past, we are confident that we will not make such mistakes in the present or the future. The problem is that we do. As it turns out, when subjects are presented with various challenging questions, they are usually confident and not correct (Myers 2002, 98). This is known as the

“overconfidence phenomenon”. They have a very high felt certainty about their answer, but are more often incorrect. Furthermore, they are appalled at how poorly they do. Even when the subjects are told to watch how they answer or to admit when they do not truly know, they still do not reduce their level of overconfidence. While there are many accounts to explain why humans have such overconfidence, they are beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>53</sup> What is important is that the overconfidence effect is real. It is important to recognize that humans form intuitions about subjects that they are supposedly familiar about and attach high levels of epistemic certainty to them without truly *having* that high-level of certainty. We just think we have better intuitions than we do. This shows the fallibility of our intuitions in that we form intuitions, ones with supposed high levels of certainty, and more often than not they are incorrect.

The fundamental attribution error is a mistake in the attribution of cause when people are considering the behavior of others. That is, people tend to attribute observed behavior to character dispositions as opposed to the features of the situation. Consider an experiment by Napolitan and Goethals as told by Myers:

The researchers had college students talk individually with a young woman who, in accordance with the researchers’ instructions, acted either aloof and critical or warm and friendly. Beforehand, they informed half of the students that the woman had been instructed to act in a given way (either friendly or aloof). They told the other half that she was acting spontaneously. The effect of being informed that the woman was just playing a role? Nil. If she acted friendly, they inferred that she really was a warm person. If she acted unfriendly, they inferred that she really was a cold person. They discounted the situation that mandated her behavior and instead attributed her warmth or coldness to her inner disposition (2002, 110-111).

---

<sup>53</sup> For one such account, see Kahneman and Tversky (1973 and 1982).

In this example, the error comes from the subjects intuiting the woman's character incorrectly.<sup>54</sup> The situational context of her actions influenced the subjects' intuitive judgment despite the fact that they were told to the contrary. Another example of the fundamental attribution error, perhaps closer to the hearts of those in academia, is the attribution of being introverted to students who sign up for early morning classes, where extroverts take classes in the late afternoon and evenings, because of the behavior that they exhibit. Faculty members who make such judgments are committing the fundamental attribution error.

What accounts for the fundamental attribution error? One possibility is it is perspectival (Hogarth 2001, 154). What we find as salient in the judgment changes as to whether we are considering ourselves or others. When we are considering the behavior of others, we focus on their personalities and disregard the situational factors that are work. When we are considering the behavior of ourselves, we focus on the situational factors and not our personalities. As Hogarth states it, "[P]ersonality drives the behavior of others, but situation drives our own" (2001, 154). So, our intuitions would seem again to be fallible.

One thing that is interesting about the research about such factors as the overconfidence phenomenon and the fundamental attribution error is not that humans' intuitions are fallible, but that our intuitions are fallible to such a high degree. In studies,

---

<sup>54</sup> It is important to note that while these actual experiments may simply seem like inferences from observed behavior and not actual intuitions, the fundamental attribution error will play into any such thought-experiment or counterexample equally as well. The Napolitan and Goethals experiment is just a real world example of the error itself. One such discussion of this error in moral philosophy is Harman (1998-9). There Harman discusses whether the psychological fact of the fundamental attribution error shows virtue ethics to be untenable. Harman argues that since subjects make such errors in personality assessment, we have reason to question the existence of character traits themselves. Here it is the case where one's assessment as to the character of another in some circumstances is one of the other having an intuition that the other is or is not virtuous.

our intuitions have not fared well. We commit the fundamental attribution error quite often. We often are overconfident about cases we have no reason to be. This is not to say that we are not accurate in our intuitions ever, it is just to say that we must recognize the widespread inaccuracy of intuitions across people (both experts and non-experts in the relevant fields) and situations. So, I believe that the empirical data on intuitions does provide evidence that our intuitions are not only fallible, but fallible more than we would think.

## 2.8 Do Intuitions Involve an Apparent Necessity?

Many writing on the status of intuitions maintain that intuitions are such that the truth of the proposition is (or seems) necessary. It is not just that we intuit that *p* is true; we intuit that *p* is *necessarily* true. Perhaps no one is more adamant about this point than Bealer. He claims that “when we have an a priori intuition, say that if *P* then not not *p*, this presents itself as necessary: it does not seem to us that things could be otherwise; it must be that if *P* then not not *P*” (1993, 165). Others such as Plantinga, BonJour, and Pust all share this sentiment about a priori intuitions.

What is important to note is that this apparent necessity is a feature of *a priori* intuitions. This is meant to distinguish philosophical intuitions from other non-philosophical types of intuitions. To illustrate consider Pust’s characterization of a philosophical intuition:

At *t*, *S* has a rational intuition that *p* IF AND ONLY IF (a) at *t*, *S* has a purely intellectual experience, when considering the question of whether *p*, that *p*; and (b) at *t*, if *S* were to consider whether *p* is necessarily true, then *S* would have a purely intellectual experience that necessarily *p* (2000, 46).

What is interesting about this account is that, according to Pust, it has the virtue of capturing the majority of intuitions that are to count as genuine philosophical intuitions

while distinguishing them from contingent intuitions (such as physical intuitions) by the appeal to the subject's disposition to intuit that *p* is necessary.

So, what is meant by "genuine philosophical intuitions"? Bealer maintains that those topics that philosophers can genuinely analyze by appealing to intuitions are metaphysical (substance, causation, freedom, mind, etc.), epistemological (justification, knowledge, explanation, evidence, truth, etc.), logical, and mathematical (1987, 289). Why these topics? Bealer claims that philosophers are interested in the way that things *must* be. As he claims, "[i]t is a requirement on a satisfactory philosophical theory that it should hold necessarily" (1987, 289). So, any intuition is going to have to have some access to this necessity. That is, philosophers must appeal to a priori intuitions that have this apparent necessity.

Bealer's argument should, I believe, be unsatisfying to philosophers. While it is surely the case that there are times in which philosophers will make use of such a priori intuitions, it is also the case that they will make use of other non-a priori intuitions. Bealer's analysis rules out significant areas of philosophy such as moral philosophy and aesthetics (1993, 131 (fn. 18)). He expresses uncertainty as to whether there can be genuine intuitions in such areas since it is unclear as to whether we truly have intuitions about categorical evaluative propositions. But, as Pust points out, areas such as epistemology employ evaluative intuitions and if Bealer allows for this, then he should allow for evaluative intuitions in moral philosophy (2000, 37).

Furthermore, it would seem that Bealer rules out anything that is not engaged in a form of rationalism. Any philosopher working from a naturalistic framework would never be able to appeal to intuitions, at least not philosophical intuitions. But what is the

argument for this? The problem here is that the cart has been put before the horse. What is being appealed to is the fact that genuine intuitions are a priori intuitions, but in order to justify this we must be able to rule out those areas of philosophy that make some use of non-a priori intuitions such as aesthetics which would seem to demand experiences of actual works of art. Yet, to rule out such areas of philosophy, one must assume that the only genuine intuitions are a priori intuitions. Thus, I maintain that Bealer has not established that all and only a priori intuitions are genuine intuitions.

Consider the following two propositions from the Gettier case:

- (1) Jones does not know that either Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona.
- (2) If the description of the Gettier case is true, then Jones does not know that either Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona.

While (2) can be considered a necessary truth, (1) is not. If we limit intuitions to those Bealer allows (intuitions that necessarily p), then we seem forced to accept the intuition in the Gettier case to be that of (2). Yet, we are not forced to accept this. It is plausible to allow the intuition not involve a seeming necessity and take the intuition to be of (1). The intuition in (1) would here be a theory-informed intuition taking the subject's background epistemological beliefs into account. In fact this does seem more plausible on the face of it. Rarely is it the case that we are consciously aware of the full description of the case at hand (or the circumstances of the case) when one forms an intuition. That is, rarely do we entertain the descriptions that are needed that are required for an intuition of type (2) rather than (1).

So, what other types of intuitions are legitimate? Besides a priori intuitions, theory-laden intuitions that are mediated by empirical knowledge are genuine. Such intuitions could be metaphysical intuitions laden with metaphysical and/or scientific

background theories, moral intuitions laden with developed moral background theories, epistemological intuitions laden with developed epistemological theories, etc. Since intuitions are theory-laden in a robust sense, we ought to allow any intuition to count as an intuition to which philosophers can appeal. While I do not have a substantive argument for the allowance of non-a priori intuitions as genuine philosophical intuitions, I do believe that those against such a proposal do not have substantive arguments either.

## 2.9 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have developed an account of what intuitions are. This account maintains intuitions are:

1. Psychological states;
2. Propositional attitudes, but not beliefs;
3. With the content being a proposition containing a kind, concept, or predicate;
4. Where the agent has a sufficient understanding of the kind, concept, or predicate involved;
5. Are theory-laden in a robust sense (being both theory-informed and theory-driven);
6. Are held as convictions;
7. Are fallible; and
8. Need not involve a *seeming* necessity.

I believe this account captures the positive elements of others' accounts, such as Bealer, Pust, and BonJour, while further capturing elements not addressed such as intuitions being theory-laden.

There is a further upshot to this account of intuitions as opposed to those of Bealer, Pust, Goldman, Rawls, Audi, Cohen, etc. My account of intuitions is neutral across the various types of philosophical analysis discussed in chapter one. Since I allow for not only a priori intuitions, but also theory-laden intuitions, all of the types of analysis earlier discussed are, at this point, allowed as being possibly legitimate for philosophers.

To put it another way, I have developed a general account of intuition that encompasses those presented in the various accounts of philosophical analysis.<sup>55</sup>

With this account of what intuitions are and the assessment of the fact that intuitions are used extensively in philosophical analysis, we are now poised to address the question of what epistemic weight intuitions have. It is this question that I will now address. I must note that while I do believe that this is the correct account of intuition, it is not necessary that every element be defended in the following chapters. There are various elements that will become essential to the arguments I advance, but, overall, the following chapters will not be completely contingent on the truth of every feature of the account of intuition I have defended.

---

<sup>55</sup> This is not to say that all forms of philosophical analysis presented in chapter one are going to be as viable given the general account of intuitions developed and defended here. As will be demonstrated in chapter four, one method will be most able to use intuitions – explication.

## Chapter Three – The Epistemic Status of Philosophical Intuitions

*“Some philosophers think that something’s having intuitive content is very inconclusive evidence in favor of it. I think it is very heavy evidence in favor of anything, myself. I really don’t know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything.” – Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity*

*“Philosophical intuition is epistemologically useless...[o]nce we are in a position to identify artifacts and errors in intuition, philosophy no longer has any use for it.” – Robert Cummins, “Reflections on Reflective Equilibrium”*

### 3.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to assess the various positions and arguments that philosophers have and have given for the epistemic status of intuitions in light of the conception of intuitions defended in the last chapter. It must be made clear that I am taking the account of intuitions developed in chapter two to be the correct general account of intuitions and the positions and arguments considered in this chapter will be assessed in light of that account. Furthermore, this chapter will be concerned with the question of whether the following is true:

( $\Phi$ ) If S intuits that p, then S is prima facie justified in believing that p.

This is what will be meant by the “epistemic status” of intuitions.

I must also make clear that the main consideration for the epistemic status of intuitions will be whether they are reliable. In other words, I am assuming that S’s intuitions are a source of prima facie justified beliefs for S only if S’s intuitions are reliable. This assumption will worry many epistemologists. Many have objected to such reliability worries for other epistemic principles (e.g., sense perception). However, I find that reliability concerns are the most important given that in order for an intuition to justify a belief that intuition must be produced reliably by the intuition-producing

mechanism. As was discussed in the last chapter (section 2.2.1), the evidentiary status of intuitions is externalistic and dependent on the contingent facts of reliability. Given that I am taking the account developed in the last chapter to be the correct general account of intuitions, I take reliability concerns to be the main concerns for the epistemic status of intuitions.

The positions on the epistemic status of intuitions will be broken down into three broad camps – traditionalists, skeptics, and the moderates. Traditionalism concerning the epistemic status of intuitions maintains that intuitions are essential to philosophical analysis and that one's having an intuition that  $p$  provides epistemic support for one's being justified in believing that  $p$  or for one to know that  $p$ . Such a position is maintained by Bealer (1987, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, and 1999), BonJour (1998), Cohen (1986), and others. While there are slight differences between these various advocates of traditionalism, the main thesis is that  $\Phi$  is true where 'intuition' is cashed out in terms of a priori intuitions. Furthermore, traditionalists maintain intuitions are not theory-laden. So, what characterizes the traditionalists position is that  $\Phi$  is true and intuitions are a priori and non-theory-laden.

Skepticism concerning the epistemic status of intuitions maintains that intuitions are epistemologically useless. In other words,  $\Phi$  is false. There is something either about the intuition-producing mechanism, the context in which the intuition was formed, or the lack of ability to calibrate our intuitions that leads the skeptics to the conclusion that intuitions in philosophy have no epistemic weight and should be excluded from

philosophical analysis.<sup>56</sup> It must be noted that most of the skeptics' arguments for the falsity of  $\Phi$  is due to their concern with the nature of intuitions as cashed by traditionalists. Most of the skeptics' worries about the epistemic status of intuitions are worries about the epistemic status of a priori intuitions. Skeptics have not concerned themselves with an account of intuitions as was developed in chapter two.<sup>57</sup> This position has become increasingly popular in recent years stemming from the work of Stich (1990), Harmon (1977), Hintikka (1999), among others, and currently being developed by Weinberg (APA), Cummins (1998), and Hales (2000, 2006).

The moderate position holds intuitions ought to and do count as evidence in support of some claim (contra the skeptics), but we need to rethink how this happens in light of empirical considerations and how much support intuitions can give (contra the traditionalists). Moderates take  $\Phi$  as true, but the account of intuition is more or less cashed out in terms of the account developed in chapter two. They do reject the epistemic status of a priori intuitions, but do not believe  $\Phi$  to be false. This position has been developed by those such as Kornblith (1998, 2004) and Levin (2004).<sup>58</sup>

In this chapter I will assess two arguments in support of the epistemic status of intuitions – the self-defeat argument and the epistemic autonomy 'argument' – and will show that both of these arguments are problematic. Then I will assess three arguments for the skeptical position – the calibration argument, a generalized argument concerning

---

<sup>56</sup> This position is often associated with naturalism. I choose to eschew this term and its implications since assessing the merits of naturalism is beyond the scope of this chapter. I do not take it that the skeptics' position hinges on the truth or falsity of naturalism.

<sup>57</sup> They have not concerned themselves with the account of intuitions developed in the last chapter as far as I am aware. The literature on intuitions is increasing at an explosive rate and at this point the skeptics have concerned themselves with a priori intuitions.

<sup>58</sup> Kornblith is often associated with the skeptical position, but as I will demonstrate, he does provide a way in which intuitions can and should be used in philosophy. So, while he is skeptical of traditional ways of conceiving the epistemic status of intuitions, he does not accept the radical conclusion that they are epistemologically useless.

the unreliability of intuitions, and Hales' "problem of intuition" – and show the premises of these arguments are true, but the conclusion – intuitions are epistemologically useless – does not follow and ought to be weakened. In this way I will develop my case for the moderate position. I will show that intuitions can and ought to be treated as having epistemic weight, but only once we have addressed the skeptical worries.

### 3.2 A Sample of the Supposed Epistemic Status of Intuitions – The Gettier Case

In the Gettier case, the situation is such that Smith is justified in believing the proposition that "Jones owns a Ford" since he has evidence in the form of his memories that Jones has always owned a Ford, was offered a ride in the Ford, etc. Yet, as it turns out, Jones has recently sold his Ford and is currently driving a rented Ford. Hence, the proposition is false. Now, we are to further suppose that Smith constructs the proposition "Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona" and as it turns out Brown is in Barcelona. Smith has no evidence for the second half of the disjunction but is nonetheless justified in believing the disjunction (due to the closure principle). So, we have a case where Smith has a justified, true belief but does not know.

As discussed earlier, there are essentially four features to our assessment of this case: (1) an account of knowledge (JTB account), (2) some background assumptions (the closure principle), (3) a description of a possible situation given the background assumptions, and (4) the intuition that Smith does not actually know. As is clear, it is (4) that is being treated as doing the epistemic work here. It is the intuition that Smith does not know that is treated as evidence for the claim that the JTB account of knowledge is incorrect. The intuition is treated as being able to have the epistemic weight for testing our epistemic norms.

As Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich have pointed out, any such epistemic norm testing has essentially three parts (2001, 432). First, the epistemic intuitions must be taken as data or inputs. In the Gettier case, the input or datum is the intuition that Smith does not know. Second, the output must be an epistemic normative claim. The normative claim here is that such evidence as Smith has does not lead to knowledge. Third, the output must be dependent upon (at least in part) the intuitions taken as inputs. It is this third part that is the most crucial. The normative claim is dependent upon the intuition. The fact that philosophers have the intuition that Smith does not know is what does the justificatory work which leads philosophers to the conclusion that the JTB account of knowledge is incorrect. It is the intuitive premise that drives the analysis.

### 3.3 Traditionalism about the Epistemic Status of Intuitions

Traditionalists maintain that intuitions have a solid, important position in philosophical analysis. Intuitions (as conceived of as a priori intuitions) can and should be appealed to in constructing, refuting, and refining philosophical theories. In other words, intuitions have substantive evidential weight. But why? What is the argument as to why intuitions have the epistemic status the traditionalists claim they do? In this section I will look at two arguments given by traditionalists. The first, given by Bealer, maintains that if we do not allow intuitions to act as evidence, then we end up in an epistemically self-defeating position. The second, given by BonJour, maintains that intuitions (“rational insight”) are epistemically autonomous and are in need of no further metajustification. I will then consider some worries about each of the positions and find them both unsatisfying. Hence, traditionalism about the epistemic status of intuitions is *prima facie* questionable.

I must note again that both Bealer and BonJour have different conceptions of what an intuition is than was defended in the last chapter. They conceive of intuitions as a priori intuitions. For expository sake, I will *present* the arguments with their conceptions of intuitions. However, when presenting objections to these arguments I will be appealing to the conception of intuitions defended in the last chapter. I do not intend to beg the question against the traditionalists. What I intend to show is that their arguments fail given their conceptions of intuitions and for the correct account of intuitions which was developed in chapter two. It will become clear that one of the key problems with the traditionalists' arguments is a reliance on a mistaken understanding of the nature of philosophical intuitions.

### 3.3.1 The Self-Defeat Argument

One argument in defense of traditionalism comes from the rejection of empiricist theories of knowledge. Those theories reject intuitions (as conceived as a priori intuitions) as basic evidential sources. The argument, which I will call the self-defeat argument is characterized by Bealer in the following way:

Whoever engages in reflective epistemic appraisal of their beliefs and theories will end up in an epistemically self-defeating position unless they accept intuitions as evidence. Since all of us philosophers, in connection with our pursuit of critical understanding, must engage in such epistemic appraisal, we cannot rationally avoid the thesis that intuitions are evidence (2000, 7).

From this, we can characterize the argument as:

1. If philosophers do not accept (a priori) intuitions as evidence, then their accounts of epistemic appraisal will be self-defeating.
2. Philosophers, pursuing critical understanding, must not have accounts of epistemic appraisal which are self-defeating.
3. Therefore, philosophers must accept (a priori) intuitions as evidence.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Again, it must be understood that I am *presenting* the argument as Bealer does with his conception of intuitions – as non-theory-laden, a priori intuitions.

How does Bealer justify premise one? To this end, Bealer has given a number of arguments. The main two arguments for premise one are the starting-points argument and the epistemic norms argument (2000, 7). Let me address each in turn.

The starting-points argument begins by asserting that empiricism maintains three theses:

- *The Principle of Empiricism* – A person’s experiences and/or observations comprise the person’s prima facie evidence.
- *The Principle of Holism* – A theory is justified (acceptable more reasonable than its competitors, legitimate, warranted) for a person if and only if it is, or belongs to, the simplest comprehensive theory that explains all, or most, of the person’s prima facie evidence.
- *The Principle of Naturalism* – The natural sciences (plus the logic and mathematics needed by them) constitute the simplest comprehensive theory that explains all, or most, of a person’s experiences and/or observations (1992, 99; 2000, 5).

Bealer claims there is an evident use of intuitions in justificatory procedures. For example, Bealer notes that intuitions play a significant role in both belief-formation processes and following rules (e.g., rules of inference) (1992, 104). It is possible for one to have no belief about a question, but to have a clear-cut intuition. Furthermore, one will usually form a belief associated with that intuition as soon as one has (or forms) the intuition. Also, deciding whether to use one particular rule over another is going to be a matter of appealing to one’s intuition as to which rule applies in this particular instance. Given these roles, there arises a problem for the empiricist. In order for the empiricist to answer various questions such as what does and does not count as an observation, a theory, as justified, an explanation, etc, the empiricist must begin by using their intuitions about what does and does not count as an observation, a theory, as justified, an explanation, etc. Empiricists “in their actual practice” take their intuitions about such matters as prima facie evidence for their theories (1992, 105). Yet, as Bealer argues,

such appeals to intuitions contradict the principle of empiricism. The principle of empiricism would seem to only allow for observations and experiences to count as prima facie evidence. So, in practice, empiricists “are not faithful to their principles” (Bealer 1992, 105).

While this may seem problematic for the empiricist, it is not the only substantive argument. According to Bealer, no matter what the empiricist does in attempting to account for this discrepancy, she faces a dilemma. The dilemma has to do with the starting points of the empiricist’s theories. For sake of argument, “starting points” will refer to basic epistemic classifications such as what counts as an observation, a theory, etc. The dilemma concerns whether one’s intuitions concerning starting points are reliable or not. If one’s intuitions regarding starting points are not reliable, then this lack of reliability will be reflected in the theory that results from such starting points making the theory highly unreliable.<sup>60</sup> If the intuitions regarding starting points are reliable, then whatever it is that makes the intuitions reliable would also make our intuitions about what does and does not count as prima facie evidence reliable.<sup>61</sup> If these intuitions are reliable, then it follows that intuitions are in fact prima facie evidence. And if intuitions are in fact prima facie evidence, then the principle of empiricism is false. Either horn of the dilemma leads one to a comprehensive theory that is highly unreliable and such a theory would not be justified, so we have no reason to accept empiricism (1992, 107). So, if

---

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that Bealer does not give a specific argument for this point. What he does is to propose this half of the dilemma and then move on to possible ways one might respond. He seems to treat it as an obvious point that the errors in one’s intuitions will be reflected in the comprehensive theory that results from these error-prone intuitions (1992, 106).

<sup>61</sup> Again, Bealer does not give an explicit argument for this point (1992, 107). He merely treats it as an obvious consequence and does not give any argument for the entailment.

philosophers do not want an account of epistemic appraisal which is self-defeating, then they must take intuitions to count as basic evidential sources.

The epistemic norms argument begins by maintaining that there are three features of our use of intuitions – consistency, corroboration, and confirmation (1999, 248).

According to Bealer, a person’s “concrete-case” intuitions are, for the most part, consistent. It is not the case that they are always consistent, but rather they are consistent in the way that our observations and phenomenal experiences are. And, since we would not “throw out” observation and phenomenal experience merely because they are occasionally inconsistent, we ought not to throw out intuition. Next, while it is the case that people’s intuitions clash, there is impressive corroboration by others of agent’s logical, mathematical, conceptual, and modal intuitions (1999, 249).<sup>62</sup> Again, it is not a matter of perfect corroboration, but it is enough (analogous to the perceptual case) to warrant intuition as a source of evidence. Third, intuition is rarely, if ever, disconfirmed by our experiences or observations. This is due to the content of the intuitions being independent of the contents of our experiences and observations (1999, 249).

Given these three features, if one were to attempt to reject intuitions by means of the standard justificatory procedure, she would have to first, formulate her simplest comprehensive theory on the basis of the sources of evidence that she is not questioning. Then, if the resulting theory does not deem the omitted sources to be reliable, then they cannot be adequate sources of evidence. According to Bealer, “[t]he standard

---

<sup>62</sup> It is not mere neglect that Bealer excludes moral and aesthetic intuitions from this category. According to Bealer, it is not clear that we have genuine “concrete-case” evaluative intuitions. Yet, even if they were genuine intuitions, there is wide-spread conflict amongst them and this would lead to their losing evidential weight. Non-evaluative intuitions on the other hand are different in that there is not wide-spread conflict and they are unquestionably genuine intuitions (Bealer cashes this out in terms of moral and aesthetic concepts not being “genuine concepts”). I must note that this line of reasoning is not developed in Bealer’s writings. It is not clear that he has an argument for this, he merely claims it (1999, 266-267, footnote 21).

justificatory procedure permits us to apply the present method against a currently accepted source of evidence if and only if it is intuitive that the source is not as basic as the sources of evidence being used to challenge it" (1999, 250). The "mechanism of self-criticism" that Bealer is operating here is that to evaluate a source of evidence as legitimate or not requires that one evaluate it from the simplest comprehensive theory based on other accepted (i.e., basic) sources of evidence (1999, 249). Vision, tactile sensations, auditory sensation, etc. are considered basic sources of evidence. If one wanted to reject intuition she could do so only if we had intuitions to the effect that intuition is not as basic as experience or observation. Yet, we do not have such intuitions. For example, in the Gettier case, nothing more is needed than the intuition that Smith does not know (1999, 250). The intuitions in the case are as basic as any evidence can be. We have no reason to reject intuition as part of the standard justificatory procedure. It is not exactly clear how Bealer intends this argument to justify premise one of the self-defeat argument. I take it that he is intending to demonstrate that in order to have an account of epistemic appraisal (of evidence) which is not self-defeating we would need to have intuitions that intuition is not a basic evidential source as is experience or observation. Since we do not have these intuitions, we cannot say that intuitions are not basic evidential sources.

So, now we have the two arguments in place which are to warrant the claim that one's theory will be epistemically self-defeating unless they accept intuitions as evidence. Views like radical empiricism, according to Bealer, fall victim to this problem. Since philosophers must engage in epistemic appraisal, appeal to epistemic norms, and have highly reliable theories, we must accept intuitions as basic evidential sources.

### 3.3.2 Worries about the Self-Defeat Argument

In assessing Bealer's position we need to understand that he takes intuitions to be non-theory-laden, a priori intuitions. It is this adherence to an incorrect view of intuitions that ultimately plagues Bealer's self-defeat argument. What Bealer has attempted to establish is that all philosophy is rationalistic in character and requires the use of non-theory-laden, a priori intuitions. But once we look at the argument in light of the correct account of intuitions developed in the last chapter we see that Bealer's argument fails.<sup>63</sup>

To begin, Bealer accuses the empiricist of utilizing intuitions when establishing what is and is not to count as an observation, theory, justification, explanation, etc. However, this is mistaken. As was demonstrated in the last chapter, the correct account of intuitions is those of a theory-laden sort and an empiricist is able to make use such intuitions. What the empiricist is denying is that philosophers ought to be using a priori intuitions. So, Bealer is incorrectly assuming that the only legitimate intuitions are those of an a priori sort and accuses the empiricists of using these, when in fact the empiricist is using a different form of intuitions altogether.

Specifically, the account of intuitions Bealer is using and thus is demanding that the empiricist use something that is not available to her. When Bealer uses "intuition" he is referring to "a priori intuition". He is explicit about this in various places (1993, 102; 1998, 207-214; 2000, 2-4). But does his argument establish that the use of a priori intuitions alone is what is needed for establishing the epistemic worth of intuitions? I believe the answer is no. If we accept Bealer's line of reasoning, all we are left with is the demand that philosophers must make use of intuitions in their justificatory

---

<sup>63</sup> When I am referring to the account of intuitions developed in chapter two I will just use 'intuition(s)'. When I am specifically referring to the traditionalist's account of intuition I will use 'a priori intuition'.

procedures, not that they must make use of a priori intuitions. As I argued in the last chapter, intuitions are theory-laden in a robust sense (in being both theory-driven and theory-informed). My conception of intuitions does not in any way conflict with any of the principles of empiricism. Empiricists can appeal to intuitions given that the background theories at the heart of the intuition are grounded in experiences and/or observation. Bealer maintains (in the starting-points argument) that empiricists must either accept that intuitions are either reliable or not. If they are reliable, then they constitute prima facie evidence for their theories, hence the principle of empiricism is false. But if they are not reliable, then they will result in highly unreliable theories. Both are supposed to be unacceptable. Yet, this argument only goes through if we assume, with Bealer, that the intuitions we are talking about are a priori intuitions. Once we recognize that the set of philosophically legitimate intuitions is wider than Bealer believes, then the reliability of the intuition becomes contingent upon the type of intuitions that is at work. For example, if the intuition at work is theory-laden, then its reliability is dependent upon how developed the background theory at work is. For an empiricist, this background theory will be empirically informed and hence she will not face the dilemma Bealer claims she does. So, Bealer's justification for premise one fails.

The appeal to intuitions other than a priori intuitions – such as theory-laden intuitions – shows also how the epistemic norms argument fails. The reason why our intuitions are not “thrown out” for, say, occasionally being inconsistent is due to the recognition that it is the various background theories at work in the intuitions which show the occasional inconsistency. Since various background theories will generate often conflicting intuitions, we can account for inconsistency by recognizing the origins of the

inconsistency and account for such a discrepancy. Furthermore, it may be the case, as Bealer claims, intuitions are *independent* of the contents of our experiences, but this is not to say that they are not informed and driven by the background theories which our experiences helped to construct. Bealer's argument again fails.

In criticizing Bealer's position I am not claiming that intuitions need not play a role in philosophy. What I am demonstrating is that Bealer has made a problematic assumption (that all genuine intuitions are a priori intuitions) and this assumption plagues all of his arguments. I believe that the empiricist is not in as bad of a position as Bealer paints. The empiricist owes a substantive account of how knowledge is a natural kind, but such an account is plausible. Furthermore, once we recognize and accept that intuitions are theory-laden, we can see that there are other avenues available to the empiricist. Such a defense of traditionalism should be found wanting.

### 3.3.3 The Epistemic Autonomy 'Argument'

BonJour has argued that intuitions (or "rational insight") should be construed as epistemically autonomous. Intuitions should be seen as depending on nothing beyond themselves for their justification (1998, 146). Like Bealer, BonJour's conception of intuitions is of the a priori variety. But if it is, shouldn't we worry about his position give the conception of intuitions defended in chapter 2? Yes. If so, then why worry about it? What is worth discussing is the way in which BonJour goes about defending his position. He presents his position as such:

The foregoing is not intended as an argument...to show that conferring this foundational status on apparent rational insight is likely to lead to believing the truth. What it does show, I believe, is something like this: apart perhaps from direct observation, narrowly construed, we have no conception at all of what a standard of epistemic justification that did not appeal to apparent rational insight would even look like...A skepticism that holds that the only standard of epistemic

justification that we can understand is nonetheless incorrect, not conducive to finding the truth, remains dialectically untenable. But a fundamental standard of justification that is intuitively plausible, dialectically defensible, and to which there is no apparent alternative, though it may not be all that we could ask for, is almost certainly all that we can ever hope to have (1998, 148-149).

So BonJour is maintaining that epistemic (and I would assume all philosophical) analysis requires the acceptance of intuitions as justified, basic evidential sources. The question on the table is whether this is a reasonable defense of traditionalism. Such an account is unreasonable if there is an alternative which is both plausible and defensible.

His reasoning for the epistemic autonomy of intuitions starts from the empiricist demand for a metajustification for thinking that the acceptance of beliefs based upon intuition is likely to lead to the truth. The empiricist's demand is supposed to lead to a dilemma. If one accepts a claim on the basis of intuition, then she must be appealing to a premise which contains a further intuition as part of the justifying reason for the justification. This is problematic due to there being no way in which to justify the premise since it is, in part, what is at issue. If one attempts to justify such a premise empirically, then one is abandoning any claim to a priori justification.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, if any part of the metajustification is dependent on an empirical premise, the justification itself (of the original claim) would be empirical as well. The acceptance of this premise leaves the (rationalist) defender of the positive epistemic status of intuitions with a problem. Any attempt to provide a metajustification either provides a circular metajustification or becomes empirical. Both of these results are unacceptable for the (rationalist) defender. So, according to the empiricist, we ought to reject intuitions as reliable indicators of the truth.

---

<sup>64</sup> As was noted in the first chapter, BonJour notion of intuition (or rational insight) is purely a priori in character. Any such empirical premise to support the evidential status of intuitions would undermine the a priori status, hence would undermine his rationalism.

To counter such a dilemma, Bonjour argues that demand for a metajustification itself is misconceived and ultimately question begging (1998, 145). According to Bonjour, such a demand assumes that intuition has no epistemic value in and of itself, but rather picks out a class of propositions that the metajustificatory premise tells us are likely to be true. The reason for accepting a proposition, on this view, is not because the proposition is (metaphysically or logically) necessary, but because it has a feature (“any subjectively identifiable feature will do”) that there is some independent metajustification for regarding it as a reliable indicator of truth (1998, 145). Yet, this is a mistaken account according to Bonjour. This simply disallows intuition as a basis of justification. Bonjour maintains such a refusal offers no further rationale for it and is thus question-begging.

Suppose one considers the following proposition – “Nothing can be red and green all over at the same time”. When one considers this proposition the reason for accepting it is that she “sees”, “grasps”, or “intuits” that it must be true in any possible world (or that she is unable to “see”, “grasp”, or “intuit” how this could be false). This, according to Bonjour, is itself an intuitively excellent reason for accepting the proposition. It is not the case that one needs a further metajustificatory premise. Furthermore, if one says that this intuitive reason is mistaken, then it needs to be shown and not merely assumed (which, Bonjour maintains, is the case when a demand for a metajustification is required). Thus, intuition ought to be considered epistemically autonomous. Intuition should be viewed as needing nothing further for its justification.<sup>65</sup> As long as the

---

<sup>65</sup> Bonjour does recognize that intuition is fallible. As such, he maintains that the only way in which to “overturn” such a justification is by further a priori reflection (such as considerations of coherence or by some empirical considerations).

conditions for a genuine intuition hold, we should require nothing further in the form of a metajustification to maintain the acceptance of a proposition based upon intuition.

### 3.3.4 Worries about the Epistemic Autonomy ‘Argument’

There would seem to be a few worries about Bonjour’s line of reasoning. The first worry is that it seems possible to construct a case where we have necessarily true beliefs and yet fail to have knowledge due to the intuition-producing mechanism being triggered in an unreliable way. It is possible to construct a case where the intuition being produced is entirely contingent upon how the intuition was produced and not epistemically valuable by one’s merely having it (which is what Bonjour demands). Consider a case developed by Tidman (1996, 162). Suppose you are transported to an environment wholly different from earth near Alpha Centauri.<sup>66</sup> In this environment elephants emit a strange radiation that causes humans to hold some a priori judgment they would not otherwise hold. Specifically, the radiation causes the person to affirm the next proposition that she reflects upon. Now, as a result of the radiation the person comes to believe that it is not possible for one to have different parents than one has. Further suppose that the person comes across a copy of Saul Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* and reads it near a herd of the radiation emitting elephants. Finally suppose that, with Kripke, this necessity claim is true, but that apart from the radiation the person would have been agnostic on the claim. What does such a case show us? This case is one where the person has a true a priori intuition, but lacks knowledge. She lacks knowledge since the a priori judgment was not caused by her grasp of the proposition. It just happens to be the case that the person was near the elephants reading Kripke. What this shows is there needs to be some non-contingent correlation between the intuition-producing mechanism

---

<sup>66</sup> This case is a variation on Plantinga’s elephant/trumpet case (1986, 12-13).

and the circumstances of the situation and the truth (Kornblith 2000, 83). Since it is conceivable to have such a situation, we are forced to accept that the knowledge-conferring status of even intuitive a priori beliefs is contingent upon, most plausibly, how the mechanism is working and how the environment is situated. This is not to say that we need to assume that is the knowledge-conferring status of a priori intuitions depends on the mechanism and the environment, then a priori intuitions only produce justified beliefs when combined with the information that the mechanism is working in a certain proper way and the environment is of a certain suitable sort.<sup>67</sup> What is simply needed is the explanation of the correlation between the mechanism and the circumstances. Bonjour's demand that we need no further justificatory support for the intuition is mistaken.

The second worry is that the reasoning Bonjour gives does not establish that a priori intuitions that p themselves warrant our acceptance of p. Bonjour argues that a priori intuitions have some feature that is such that intuitions which have this feature are likely to be true. The fact that I intuit that p is itself a good reason for the acceptance of p. But we are left facing a problem. What is needed is an initial reason to think that this intuition that p is one of those with this special feature (Tidman 1996, 164). Suppose that I have an a priori intuition that p. According to Bonjour, the fact that I intuit that p is reason for me to accept p; that your belief that p is evidenced by your act of intuiting. But, the mere fact that I a priori intuit that p cannot by itself indicate that it is true. Since it is possible that my a priori intuition is mistaken, I do not have an independent reason for believing that this particular a priori intuition is one of the true set. I am not in a position to be justified in accepting the a priori intuition without having evidence (or a

---

<sup>67</sup> Though I do maintain that this is what is ultimately needed. However, I need not defend this for this criticism of Bonjour.

reason) to think that this particular intuition is one of the good ones. In this way, intuitions' evidential status is contingent upon our ability to discern whether they are produced in a legitimate way. Bonjour is mistaken in maintaining that no further justification is needed for the acceptance of a priori intuitions.

While there may be other problems with Bonjour's position, I believe that these two problems illustrate a central worry about treating intuitions as neither contingent upon the intuition-producing mechanism nor the environment in which it is formed. To attempt to show that intuitions are epistemically autonomous one would have to turn to a posteriori matters in order to do so. But this obviously flies in the face of the very position being defended. Hence, the epistemic autonomy 'argument' cannot be defended.

### 3.3.5 Summary of the Criticisms of the Traditionalist

What I have tried to show is that traditionalists make use of an incorrect conception of intuitions and this is what initially plagues their accounts. Even if we allow that there may be some a priori intuitions, this does not help the traditionalist in that there are other types of intuitions (those developed and defended in chapter two) to which philosophers may make appeal. In fact, however, given that intuitions are of a theory-laden sort, the traditionalists are mistaken at the outset. So, the traditionalists are wrong in that they use an incorrect conception of intuitions and even if we grant them their conception of intuitions, their arguments still fail.

### 3.4 Skepticism about the Epistemic Status of Intuitions

Sitting across from the traditionalists at the intuitions table are those who maintain that intuitions play no (or at best a very, very minimal) role in philosophy. This position, often stemming from an empiricist epistemology, maintains that, on any conception of

their nature, intuitions cannot be treated as evidence for anything or as epistemically useful. Such attacks have come from Harman on moral intuitions (1977), Goldman on metaphysical and epistemic intuitions (1992), Cummins on epistemic intuitions (1998), and Stich on all intuitions (1990, 1993, and Stich and Laurence 1994). While the specific arguments concerning individual areas of philosophy vary slightly, there do seem to be a few general arguments put forth by the skeptics. In this section I will look at two – the Calibration argument, a generalized form of the skeptical argument addressing the unreliability of intuitions, and Hales’ “problem of intuition”.<sup>68</sup> What I hope to show is that each of these arguments does not hold and that the skeptics’ position on intuitions is untenable. It must be noted at the outset that in this section ‘intuition’ will refer to intuitions in general and not merely a priori intuitions. I will understand intuitions as developed in chapter two unless otherwise noted.

### 3.4.1 The Calibration Argument

The calibration argument is essentially an attack on the reliability of intuitions. While this has been discussed by various philosophers, the argument is perhaps put forth most straightforwardly by Cummins (1998). Cummins argues that if we are to accept intuitions as epistemically legitimate (that if S intuits that p, then S is prima facie justified in believing that p), then we must be able to show how intuitions are reliable on the basis of some epistemological access to the target in question independent of intuition itself. His thesis is essentially that the epistemic legitimacy of intuitions is true only if S is

---

<sup>68</sup> I acknowledge that I will not be discussing the criticisms of perhaps the most discussed skeptics – Stephen Stich. The reason for this is due to Stich’s criticisms to be more focused on philosophical methods using intuitions and not the reliability of intuitions themselves. This is not to say that Stich’s concerns are should not be considered. I will in fact be addressing Stich’s concerns on intuition-based philosophical methods in the next chapter. Furthermore, the calibration argument has become a topic of considerable literature, but I believe that Cummins gives perhaps the most straightforward version of the argument and so I will be focusing on his version.

justified in believing that her intuitions are reliable and is justified in that belief by some faculty or faculties other than intuition. But what faculties could calibrate intuition? The question here is whether it is *possible* to calibrate intuitions. Cummins does note that those in favor of the use of intuition do not attempt to calibrate intuition. Yet, even if philosophers could calibrate intuitions, they would not. The reason for this, according to Cummins, is that philosophers “could have no possible use for intuition in a context in which the relevant theory was well enough settled to form the basis of a credible calibration test” (1998, 118). The argument can be formulated as follows:

1. A belief-forming technique, process, or source is epistemologically legitimate only if it can be calibrated.
2. Philosophical intuition either can or cannot be calibrated.
3. Intuitions regarding domain D could be calibrated only if we had an independently justified theory of D.
4. If we had an independently justified theory of D, then we would have no epistemological need of intuitions to justify a theory of D.
5. Thus, if philosophical intuition can be theoretically calibrated, then it is epistemologically unnecessary for the justification of philosophical theory (from 3 & 4).
6. Thus, philosophical intuition is either epistemologically unnecessary or epistemologically illegitimate (from 1 & 5) (Pust 2000, 105 fn. 6).

“Legitimate” here is referring to the technique’s, process’, or source’s ability to generate beliefs that can be counted as providing evidential weight or that can be used as a basic evidential source. To illustrate this argument with an analogy, Cummins points out that when Galileo pointed his telescope at the moon and observed mountains, he needed to calibrate it against some artifact that he knew – namely mountains on earth. We wouldn’t have trusted Galileo’s telescope without such an independent reason for thinking it to be reliable. But, there is no way to do this with intuition and we should be skeptical of any method that cannot be calibrated.

### 3.4.2 Worries about the Calibration Argument

Cummins has presented the traditionalist (or anyone who wishes to keep intuitions as basic evidential sources) with a dilemma. If intuition cannot be calibrated, then philosophers should not have any faith in it. If it can be calibrated, then philosophers should not use them and simply focus on the theory itself. Cummins takes this dilemma to be a problem for those who want to preserve the use of intuitions in philosophy. I believe he is correct if he is attacking the traditionalist. But, the question remains as to whether Cummins' argument truly works against all conceptions of intuitions (specifically the one defended in the last chapter).

I take it that the first three premises are acceptable. Is it the case that intuitions may only be considered epistemologically legitimate only if they can be calibrated? I do not think it is legitimate to challenge this requirement. I take it as *prima facie* plausible to demand that we have shown that a belief-forming process is reliable if we are to say it is epistemologically legitimate. Furthermore, I take it that we can only calibrate intuitions if we have some independently justified theory of the content of the intuition in question. That is, we can say our intuitions are reliable only if we have a justified theory of the content. So, I accept Cummins' first three premises.

It is the fourth premise that I want to question. Cummins argues that four is true on the following grounds: Intuitions are “generated” either by explicit or tacit theories.<sup>69</sup> If they are generated by explicit theories, then they cannot play the justificatory role

---

<sup>69</sup> Cummins uses “generated” (1998, throughout) as being synonymous with “are the result of” (1998, 118) and “are applications of” (1998, 119). It is not clear that this is an adequate usage. In any event, he seems to imply that the sources of our intuitions are either explicit or tacit theories. It is in this sense that I will use the term “generate”. Furthermore, Cummins does not give precise definitions of “explicit theory” or “tacit theory”. As I understand it, an explicit theory is one which is learned and is developed in some formal sense. A tacit theory can be either innate or acquired, but is not developed in any formal sense.

necessary for reflective equilibrium.<sup>70</sup> For this claim, he argues that if intuitions are generated by explicitly held theories, then their epistemic status reduces down to the epistemic status of the theory in question (1998, 119). That is, intuitions then, while perhaps being legitimate, have no independent justificatory weight. So we are left with tacit theories. The problem here is that one's tacit knowledge and theories will change over time. This changing over time will result in wildly inconsistent intuitions. Such intuitions are going to be recognized as liable to result in error. Cummins' position here is questionable. His essential worries are that they will be biased, inaccurate, inconsistent, and sporadically generated since they will be contingent on what environmental cues are present. Now, while all this is legitimate to worry about, it is not the case that this damns intuitions. Yes, it is the case that theory-laden intuitions run the risk of being inconsistent over time, be biased due to training and prejudice, etc., but it does not follow that merely because this is a possibility it is the case that all fall victim to it. Cummins' mistake is that he assumes that intuitions are all fixed with the same structure and as such will survive or fail together. This is not the case. The justificatory status of intuitions comes in degrees and is contingent upon the knowledge the person has, the access to that background knowledge, etc. If these features are in place, then the worry of wildly inaccurate intuitions is quelled and we must then determine whether S's intuition is reliable given S's background knowledge and situation. So, Cummins' premise four is misleading in that it may be the case that there is some independent justification for the theory (in the form of the background theory or "tacit theory" that the subject holds), but where it is still the case that the intuition is needed to answer some

---

<sup>70</sup> I should note that one of Cummins' overall goals is to reject reflective equilibrium as a legitimate methodology for philosophy.

further question in that domain. Since the theories drive and inform the intuition, the intuition is still needed to help in justifying other beliefs about the domain.

While I think Cummins' worry about intuitions is important, I think he takes it to be overly devastating. He is right to demand a way to show that intuition is reliable. As was argued earlier with regard to BonJour's epistemic autonomy argument, anyone who wants to maintain the epistemological legitimacy of intuitions (that intuitions are indicative of the truth) must provide a story as to how intuitions can be shown to be reliable. Yet, he is wrong to think that just because background theories can sometimes yield inconsistent or inaccurate intuitions this pervades all intuitions. It is possible to set up conditions for showing when we can and cannot trust intuitions. This will be the project in section 3.5.

### 3.4.3 The Unreliability of Intuitions

While the calibration argument tangentially addresses the issue of intuitions' reliability, there is a more direct argument concerning the unreliability of intuitions. That is, the skeptic may claim that we have good reason to believe that intuitions are in fact unreliable. And if they are unreliable, then they are not epistemically legitimate.<sup>71</sup> To be more explicit, this argument stems from the issue of from where our intuitions come. Our intuitions must come from somewhere. Any questions concerning the reliability of the intuition-producing mechanism (IPM) will not be a matter of philosophy since the IPM operates unconsciously and as such will not be available to introspection. So, questions concerning the reliability of IPM (Readers will have forgotten by now what an IPM is.) will be an empirical matter. It is, in this sense, that these concerns are not skeptical hypotheses; rather they are real possibilities stemming from cognitive patterns

---

<sup>71</sup> For sake of consistency, I will use 'legitimate' in the same way as in the previous section.

that frequently occur (Weinberg APA, 4). The key premise that makes this skeptical argument get off the ground is that we have empirical evidence that IPM is unreliable. Hence, the skeptic concludes, we ought not to trust intuitions (i.e., intuitions are epistemically illegitimate).

What supports the key premise? Why should we think the IPM is unreliable? Often the support for the key premise comes from the hypothesis that intuitions are produced by some tacitly accepted theory (Cummins 1998, 122; Weinberg APA, 4). At the bottom of the IPM is a tacitly accepted theory concerning the domain in question. This tacitly accepted theory will often be biased, we will have no good reasons for thinking it true, or even have reasons for thinking it false and its role in intuition will taint the intuition in such a way that it fails to be an adequate evidential source. To elaborate this point, I will address four ways that Cummins and Weinberg illustrate this concern.

The first concern is one of circularity. Various philosophers from Rawls to Goldman to Weinberg maintain when a philosopher is in the “grip of a theory”, this theory-grip will taint the intuitions of that philosopher letting the philosophical theory they hold influence their view of their intuitions. Whenever a philosopher has held a theory for some time, that philosopher will internalize the theory. Once the theory is internalized, whenever the philosopher attempts to give her intuition, she is actually just citing the already held theory.<sup>72</sup> The circularity charge looms in that the philosopher is citing her intuitions as evidence for her theory when all the while her intuitions are not “genuine” intuitions (rather they are simply reports of the held theory). Weinberg

---

<sup>72</sup> It must be noted that neither Goldman and Pust (1998) nor Weinberg (APA) give any empirical argument for the truth of this claim. They treat it as an obvious phenomenon. There are obvious counterexamples to such a claim. BonJour is an example of someone who jumped ship, so to speak, from defending coherentism to defending foundationalism. Other examples might be those such as Hilary Putnam and Frank Jackson. Despite such outliers, the claim seems *prima facie* plausible.

maintains that we can see this in action by observing philosophers whose intuitions become stronger the more often they hold and defend a particular theory (APA, 5). For example, the longer one is a foundationalist, the stronger one's foundationalist intuitions become.

The second way an IPM can be seen as unreliable is with the issue of overinterpretation. This is the problem of a philosopher reading too much into her intuitions. Suppose that a philosopher has an intuition that *p*. Further suppose that she holds that *p* is correct to some high degree. If she maintains that because she has the intuition that *p* is correct *p* is, say, necessarily true, then she is overinterpreting the intuition. To say that some claim is necessary simply due to one having an intuition is an instance of overinterpretation. Another way of looking at overinterpretation is when one mistakes the lack of intuition that, say, evil demons are impossible for the intuition that evil demons are possible.

The third concern is that if intuitions are theory-gripped, then the intuition will not have the a priori status is required for being an adequate source of a priori knowledge.<sup>73</sup> Any intuition from an IPM would not be truly a priori in any epistemic sense. Consider David Chalmers' zombie argument (1996, 94). Chalmers argues that we can know a priori that no reduction of the phenomenal to the physical is possible. This claim is supported by the intuition that it is metaphysically possible to have a molecular duplicate of someone who lacks phenomenal experience. Such a being would be a phenomenal zombie. Now, if phenomenal zombies are possible, then we have a counterexample to

---

<sup>73</sup> This point does not directly affect my position as it is directed at traditionalists. The key point being made, and the reason for including it here, is that it illustrates how there are empirical matters underlying intuitions.

any physicalistic reduction of the phenomenal to the physical. Weinberg's assessment is that:

I will not deny that we have something like that intuition. My worry, however, is that what might be driving the intuition is our present lack of knowledge as to how any physicalistic reduction might go. Note that the intuition is basically that two propositions are consistent with each other: one proposition stating our completed science...and the proposition that a zombie exists. But,...might those who intuit the possibilities of zombies be mistaking the metaphysical possibility of such beings with the for-all-we-know scientific plausibility of such beings (APA, 6).

What Weinberg is illustrating is the worry that if our intuitions are gripped in such a way, then it is possible that the intuition is formed in such a way as to be based on a misunderstanding of the empirical matters at issue. Since such empirical matters underlie the intuitions about various cases it does seem to be illegitimate to say that the intuitions are genuine a priori intuitions. They would in this sense be disautonomous.

The fourth concerns whether it is the case that our tacit theory is adaptive or innate. According to Cummins, it is plausible that we have innate theories particularly in the areas of physics, moral philosophy, and social philosophy (1998, 123). Yet, even though it is completely plausible to maintain that we have various innate theories, we cannot conclude that they are a good basis for philosophy. We would not want to say that our innate tacit theory of physics is a good basis for physics. And if we would not want to say this, then we should not say that innate philosophy is a good basis for philosophy. As Cummins states, "We have cultural institutions like science and philosophy largely to *overcome* the limitations of our innate endowment" (1998, 123). In this way, we should not treat our innate tacit theories in philosophy as being true.

What of the adaptive tacit theories? Cummins argues that some tacit theories are adaptive since it is the case that they have survived. Whether a theory is good for us is a

matter of our design and the types of situation and problems we face. The importance of avoiding error is contingent upon the situation one is in (in terms of the task at hand and the environment) (Cummins 1998, 123). The tacit theory is more likely to be driven by effectiveness rather than accuracy. Furthermore, not only are the intuitions generated going to be inaccurate, but they are also going to be inconsistent over time. Since one's tacit theories will change over time as will what parts of the tacit theory are accessible (since the tacit theory's accessibility is contingent upon what the environmental situation is), the intuitions produced will be inconsistent. While this may not seem like much of a worry, Cummins points out to fix this problem would require the calibration and ranking of intuitions. Yet, as we saw earlier in this chapter, the calibration of intuitions is a further problem for treating them as reliable. Moreover, if we could calibrate and rank the intuitions, we would then see that they are largely artifacts of tacit theories and often in error. So, whether the tacit theories underlying the intuitions and the IPM are innate or adaptive we are led to problems. As Cummins states, "If you know enough to start fixing problems with philosophical intuition, you already know enough to get along without it" (1998, 124).

#### 3.4.4 The Legitimacy of the Unreliability Criticisms

There is something to note at the outset when considering these worries. The calibration argument attempted to support a global skepticism which maintained all intuitions were epistemologically illegitimate. Questions concerning the unreliability of philosophical intuitions stemming from empirical evidence do not result in such global skepticism; rather they are a type of selective skepticism. In this sense, for one to support the epistemological use of intuitions in analysis, one must address the very real

possibilities of such unreliability. Furthermore, since many of my responses to the previous arguments (both for and against the epistemic status of intuitions) relied heavily on the fact that intuitions are theory-laden in a robust sense, it is important to recognize that such empirical evidence for the unreliability of intuitions needs to be addressed.

In response to the first three unreliability worries (theory-grip, overinterpretation, and disautonomy), I believe that a developed account of the epistemic status of philosophical intuitions can account for such worries. This will be the focus of the next section. The fourth worry (the innate/adaptive theories leading to unreliable intuitions) I believe is misleading. Cummins claims if we were to have an innate theory of, say, epistemology, that it would not be a good basis for philosophy. Yet, this assumes the innate theory would have no initial plausibility. This is incorrect. If we do have innate theories, then they may not serve to warrant all our beliefs about matters philosophic, but they are substantial enough to give us give us prima facie reason to see our intuitions as pointing to some theories rather than others. One way in which to see this point is to notice that many philosophers (rightly or wrongly) are attempting to capture our folk concepts via analysis. If our goal is to cash out our folk concepts, then, assuming that we do have an innate theory, we should give some weight, albeit minimal weight, to our intuitions.

What of the possibility of adaptive theories? I agree that if our tacit theories are adaptive, then they are contingent upon the situation we are in, but I disagree that our intuitions would then be driven by effectiveness rather than accuracy. It is surely plausible to say that our theories have survived due to their being indicative of the truth. If they are prima facie indicative of the truth, then we are not forced to accept the

conclusion that they are epistemologically illegitimate. It is true that our adaptive theories change over time and are at various instances inconsistent, but this is not a sufficient justification for our not appealing to them. It would then be the case that at those times of inconsistency we can ascribe some epistemic weight to them. So, whether or not our tacit theories are innate or adaptive does not establish that intuitions based upon them are epistemologically illegitimate.

While I believe that Cummins is incorrect about his assessment of the unreliability of intuitions, we must take the first three worries about the reliability of intuitions into account.

#### 3.4.5 Hales' "Problem of Intuition"

While most of the skeptical arguments against the use of intuitions in philosophy have come from an empiricist perspective, Steven Hales presents a different type of argument against the use of intuitions from a relativist perspective (2000; 2006). It should be noted that Hales' target at the outset are those traditionalists who side primarily with rationalism (Bealer and Bonjour), but at various points he does apply his argument to moderates as well (specifically Hilary Kornblith) (2006, 30). So Hales' argument can be seen as not only applying to those who maintain that all philosophical intuitions are only a priori intuitions, but also to the account of intuitions developed in chapter two.

Hales begins his argument by questioning when philosophers can establish that intuition justifies "at least some propositions at least some of the time" (2006, 26). He puts the essential question this way: "[I]s the proposition "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" true?" (2006, 26). It is in answering this question negatively that the "deep problem of intuition arises most acutely" (2006, 26). The problem of

intuition is formulated as follows (where P means “the method of intuition justifies some propositions”):<sup>74</sup>

1. If a proposition is epistemically justified, then it is justified either a priori or a posteriori (premise).
2. If a proposition is epistemically justified a priori, then its justification depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions (premise).
3. If P is epistemically justified, it is not justified a posteriori (premise).
4. P is epistemically justified (premise).
5. Nothing is self-justifying (premise).
6. If P is epistemically justified, then it is justified a priori (from 1 and 3).
7. If P is epistemically justified, then its justification depends on the method of intuition justifying some proposition (from 2 and 6).
8. The justification of P depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions (from 4 and 7).
9. Therefore, P is not epistemically justified (from 5 and 8).
10. P is and is not epistemically justified (from 4 and 9).<sup>75</sup>

The first five premises of this argument make up an inconsistent set. Hales believes that this situation leaves philosophers with two options. On the one hand, philosophers can give up the a priori, accept a naturalistic position, and abandon the method of using intuition.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, one can accept a modest foundationalism which maintains that P is epistemically justified on the basis of the method of intuition itself.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.4.6 Worries about the “Problem of Intuition”

In evaluating Hales’ argument, let us take each of the first five premises individually. Premise one simply states that if a proposition is epistemically justified, then it is justified a priori or a posteriori. This premise would only be rejected by those

---

<sup>74</sup> It should be noted that Hales does not give an explicit answer to the question of what is required for P to be true.

<sup>75</sup> This formulation is directly from Hales (2000 and 2006).

<sup>76</sup> As it stands, it seems as if Hales has only addressed a priori intuitions, however Hales himself sees this as rejecting intuitions wholesale. I grant that from the argument itself it looks as if he has not provided an argument against non-a priori intuitions. This concern will be addressed later.

<sup>77</sup> Hales goes on to reject such foundationalism in favor of a form of relativism, but this aspect of his project is beyond the scope of this work. What is important for our purposes is Hales’ challenge to the use of intuition in its forcing philosophers to either reject the use of intuitions or justify intuition by appeal to something other than intuition.

who are willing to give up all conceptions of the a priori and accept some form of radical naturalism. Hence, it would only be rejected by those radical naturalists who would say it is “a posteriori or bust” (Hales 2006, 29). This is hasty. I agree with Hales that denying premise one and accepting a radical form of naturalism is a “tactical error” in that the problem of intuition is a tool that the radical naturalist can use to their advantage. There is no immediate problem in accepting premise one.

Hales’ defense of premise two is conceptual. Rationalism, according to Hales, is committed to the use of intuition (“That’s just what rationalism does”) (2006, 29). Non-rationalists, on the other hand, are logically committed to the truth of premise two. Since it is a conditional and if the a priori requires the use of intuition for the justification of some propositions, then the denial of the antecedent yields the conditional true. So, premise two is true.

Premises four and five are also unproblematic to accept. Premise four states that “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” is epistemically justified. If this premise is false, then it spells doom for intuition-driven philosophy. This is of course not a good reason for maintaining that premise four is true, but it does make it *prima facie* acceptable. Premise five, “Nothing is self-justifying”, is the (supposed) rejection of foundationalism.<sup>78</sup> There has been a long standing debate over premise five which is beyond the scope of this paper to address. I must note that Hales maintains it is the rejection of premise five that is the only avenue available for those who wish to continue doing intuition-driven philosophy. As he states:

I have already argued that philosophers who are not radical empiricists are committed to premises 1 and 4, and that there are excellent reasons to accept

---

<sup>78</sup> I say “supposed” since there are some foundationalists who maintain that no belief is self-justifying.

premises 2 and 3. I believe the only plausible way out is to reject premise 5 (2006, 32).

So far I have accepted Hales' position on premises one, two, four, and five.

What of premise three? Premise three states if the proposition "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified, then it is not justified a posteriori. Hales thinks this can only be rejected by naturalists of a certain persuasion.<sup>79</sup> For the naturalist, "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" roughly means "the method of intuition is a reliable way of acquiring true beliefs" (2006, 30). To determine this, one would need to be able to determine the reliability of intuition in some a posteriori manner. Hales finds such the proposal of showing a posteriori that intuition is reliable problematic since to do so would require that "philosophy has developed in such a manner as to avoid conflicts with science" (2006, 167). Concerning this claim, Hales states:

[T]here has been a lot of wild and woolly philosophy based on pure reason – "The World Spirit", windowless monads, solipsistic idealism, the indivisible absolute mind, modal realism. If these things avoid conflict with science, it is only because scientists are too busy laughing to care. It was really only with the British empiricists that any philosophers stopped claiming epistemological priority and started putting scientific discovery first. In other words, it has been a rather recent development (2006, 168).

So, Hales maintains premise three is true.

This line of reasoning misses the point. An account of how P is justified a posteriori would not come trying to defend philosophy as avoiding conflicts with science, but from a adherence to empirical analysis having a role to play in philosophical (especially epistemological) analysis. Psychology and cognitive science can (and, in my

---

<sup>79</sup> He has in mind Hilary Kornblith and his proposal that epistemologists should not be concerned with the concept of knowledge, but knowledge itself (since he maintains knowledge is a natural kind). We can bracket Kornblith's natural kind position since it is tangential to my overall critique of Hales' argument.

mind, should) play a role in the evaluation of the reliability of the method of intuition. Once we recognize intuitions have background content, we can bring empirical analysis to bear on a variety of issues from concept formation, thought experiment framing problems, the extent to which context plays a role in determining knowledge ascriptions, etc (Goldman 2002, 47). This is what so-called “experimental philosophy” would be seeming to undertake in recent philosophical literature. Of course, there are many controversies as to how exactly this is to be done, but merely because philosophers do not have the methodological bugs worked out is not a reason to maintain premise three is true. If premise three cannot be supported, then Hales’ “problem of intuition” fails.

### 3.5 The Moderate Stance on the Epistemic Status of Intuitions

The moderate stance on the epistemic status of intuitions represents, in my mind, a genuine middle-ground between the traditionalists and the skeptics. Moderates are distinguished from traditionalists in that they do not rely on a priori intuitions. Contra the skeptics, moderates maintain that if S intuits (given a non-a priori intuition conception of intuition) that p and S meets certain further conditions (which will be spelled out in this chapter), then S is prima facie justified in believing that p. The moderate stance on intuitions, in a nutshell, maintains that intuitions are useful to philosophical analysis but they need to be constrained by various empirical and epistemic considerations. Such a view has been defended by Levin (2003) and Kornblith (1998).<sup>80</sup> In what follows I will present the various reasons as to why this is the correct account of the epistemic status of

---

<sup>80</sup> It is important to note that Kornblith maintains that intuitions can and should count in philosophy if we treat the targets of analysis as natural kinds. If we treat knowledge as a natural kind and as such investigate it accordingly, then the intuitions we have based on that can be used. I have no intention to follow Kornblith down this path. I attribute this position to Kornblith only because of his insistence that intuitions can be used once they are seen to be empirically informed and not because the moderate stance is committed to knowledge being a natural kind.

intuitions. Based on what was argued in chapter two, I will show how informed intuitions can be used in philosophy. I will also show how the epistemic status of intuitions is contingent upon the expertise of the person. Finally I will show that this account of intuitions accounts for the unreliability worries raised earlier.

### 3.5.1 Informed Intuitions

As already stated, the moderate stance maintains that intuitions are epistemologically legitimate given that they are constrained in certain ways. As was argued in chapter two, intuitions are theory-laden in a robust sense. Since intuitions are theory-laden, the background theories (or at least the classificational schemes) at work must be assessed when we consider the legitimacy of the intuition. Consider a rather simplistic example. Suppose when faced with a Gettier case, a student in a philosophy class intuits that Smith does not know. On the traditionalist view, this is an a priori intuition. The student reflects on her concept and intuitive categories and intuits the case as one of Smith not satisfying the concept of knowledge. But, this is incorrect. As we saw there is no substantive argument for treating her intuition in this way. In fact we have good reason to think that her intuition is informed. When the student intuits that Smith does not know, she is classifying the case as one that does not satisfy her concept. Her ability to do this comes from her already held folk beliefs about what a belief is, what truth is (in a rough way to be sure), and what it means for one to be justified. But this type of conceptual background knowledge is not all that is at work in the situation. Not only will she be appealing to her folk background theories of belief, truth, and justification, but she will also be appealing to her folk psychological theories about people in such situations making judgments. She will appeal to what she already believes

about how people form beliefs, acquire evidence, make inferences, etc. When a novice in epistemology is presented with a Gettier case she will not only appeal to her epistemological theories, but also her folk theories about how minds work, how human judgment making works, how language works, how perception works, etc. It is her being able to classify each of these elements and her appealing to such schemes that allows her to be able to make the intuition in the first place. If she did not have such folk background theories in place, she would not have been able to have the intuition. But, what is important to notice is that it is not only that the student utilizes her folk conceptual background theories, but also she employs her folk understanding of the empirical matters (psychological or other cognitive-scientific) that underlie epistemological processes. This presents us with an illustration of how one's intuition is informed by and/or the result of both philosophical and empirical background theories. So, we can further see how the traditionalist is demanding too much. It is not the case that we can demand the intuition to be purely a priori, non-empirically informed as the traditionalist maintains. We must see it for what it is, empirically and conceptually informed and contingent on such information.

The traditionalists may respond that in saying that intuitions are informed I have sacrificed way too much. By giving up the purely a priori status of philosophical intuitions I have given up the a priori completely. This is not the case. I do not take it that in order to have a priori knowledge or be a priori justified one must have a priori intuitions. It still seems possible to have a priori knowledge or be a priori justified without there being a priori intuitions.<sup>81</sup> I am not claiming that if an intuition is informed

---

<sup>81</sup> Various philosophers have attempted to work out such accounts of the a priori. One such example is Goldman (1999). According to Goldman, the underlying source of all a priori warrant are the appropriate

by a folk background theory, then it cannot be a priori in any sense. What I am denying is that the intuition is a priori intuition in the traditionalist sense. It may be the case that once I form an intuition that *p*, that intuition may go on to result in further beliefs being justified a priori. It is the traditionalist's demand that intuitions are a priori and not the a priori altogether that is being rejected.

By what role does the background theory play into the epistemic force of the intuition? If intuitions are contingent on the background theories that inform and drive them, then how is it that the intuition can serve as a premise in an argument or as indicative of the truth of some claim? The simple answer to this question is that the stronger and more developed the background theory, the more epistemic weight we can ascribe to the intuition. Consider our case above, *S*'s intuition concerning the Gettier case is laden with her folk theories concerning epistemology and psychology. Yet, her background theories are not very developed (say, they are very elementary). If this is the case, then it seems *prima facie* plausible to maintain that her intuition does not have a lot of epistemic force. As she goes on and learns more in her philosophy class, her intuition

---

features of human cognitive architecture (1999, 14). Goldman's account of the a priori comes from a two-stage reliabilist theory. The first stage is the "standard-selection" stage. At this stage various belief-forming processes are evaluate in terms of their reliability. This is a social stage. Over the course of a community's evolution various belief-forming processes are individuated and evaluated in "some rough-and-ready fashion" (1999, 10-11). When a process is evaluated as having a high proportion of true outputs, then it is said to be a warrant-conferring process. Once a process is evaluated as being warranted-conferring, then it is selected as an approved epistemic standard. The second stage is the "standard deployment" stage. Here members of the community judge whether individual beliefs are arrived at via the approved processes. This does not only apply to beliefs about the actual world, but also beliefs about possible worlds. The approved processes are applied "rigidly" to any world in which the process operates. In this way members of the community can judge hypothetical beliefs (as raised by the use of counterexamples). So where does the a priori fit in this model? There is one family of approved processes that is a likely candidate – reasoning or calculational process (1999, 11). Any beliefs that are formed by purely mathematical or logical reasoning would be a priori warranted. Since mathematical and logical reasoning would count as approved warrant-conferring processes, but do not involve direct observation, they would seem like the best candidates for sources of a priori warrant. The point here is not to defend Goldman's account of a priori warrant. It is merely to show that a plausible account of a priori warrant can be given without the appeal to a priori intuitions. I do not take it that by rejecting the traditionalist's account of intuition one is sacrificing either a priori knowledge or a priori justification (or warrant).

on the Gettier case would increase in epistemic force. As one's background theories become more sophisticated and verified given the best evidence available for those domains, her intuitions would count, epistemically speaking, for more.

One may respond at this point that the moderate stance is plagued by a problem of corruption. As one learns more with respect to some domain, her intuitions will become corrupted by the influence of the tacit assumptions about that domain. This is the problem of theory contamination discussed in chapter two. As one learns more about some domain, her theories develop which enable her to explain the truth of what it is that she intuits. This increase in understanding gives her intuitions further evidential weight. We should not think of this as a form of corruption or contamination. Corruption would seem only to occur if it was the case that once one had a background theory it was immune to any revision. But this is not the case. One's background theories will change over time in relation to new evidence.

This gives us the rough basics of the moderate view. First, the moderate view takes intuitions as being informed (conceptually, empirically, and methodologically). The moderates and the traditionalists agree that if an intuition is theory-laden, then it is not a priori. However, the moderates maintain that all intuitions are theory-laden and as such none are a priori. This distinguishes the moderate stance from the traditionalists (i.e., the intuitions at work are not purely a priori intuitions). Second, the epistemic force of the intuition is contingent upon the development, complexity, length of time in the target domain, etc., of one's background theory. The more epistemically justified one's background theories are the more evidential weight we should grant the intuition since it is more likely that the background theories are true. In this way the moderate stance

differs from the skeptics' position in that while it rejects purely a priori intuitions, it does not render intuitions epistemically illegitimate.

### 3.5.2 Intuitional Degrees – The Hierarchical Status of Intuitions

The moderate view's insistence on the fact that the epistemic weight of intuitions be contingent upon one's background theory raises certain worries. Can we grant epistemic weight to all intuitions (whatever one's background theory)? Whose intuitions carry the most evidential weight? What do we do when two people's intuitions with the same level of developed background theory clash? Let me attempt to spell out this aspect of the moderate stance so as to quell the worries.

In saying that intuitions' epistemic weight is contingent upon one's relevant background theories and their development, I am saying that intuitions' evidential weight comes in degrees. For sake of argument let us consider the epistemic weight of intuitions on a scale between 0 and 1. At the bottom are the intuitions of the pure novice. The novice is someone who has no or very minimal exposure to the concepts and relevant background theories of the domain in question. If someone is at such a level, then we would want to say that her intuition counts for very little (say a 0.1). The pure novice's intuition during the first day of philosophy class would have such a low epistemic value since her concept would not be well-developed and she would have no developed background theories.

Why is it that we should ascribe a 0.1 to this person's intuition rather than a 0? The reason I think that all intuitions do count for something is because at least the ultra-novice's intuition tells us what we should also be looking for with regards to "our" folk concept. If the goal of analysis is to capture our folk concepts of, say, knowledge, then

such a person should be allowed to play into the game. Her intuition may not count for much, but it should at least count. Furthermore, even though we are trying to determine the “folk” concept, we should not grant too much evidential weight to the intuition. Since the ultra-novice’s intuition will largely be informed by an under-developed and unverified background theory, we should not be willing to take her intuition as indicating a clear understanding of her intuition or any form of a “considered” intuition.

If it is the case that our ultra-novice’s intuition has an epistemic weight of 0.1, then as she goes on through her philosophy class (assuming that the level of instructorship is adequate) the epistemic weight of her intuition would increase to say 0.2.<sup>82</sup> Now, as she progresses through her philosophical training she would surely study more and more epistemology (as all good philosophy students should do). As she studied her epistemology more and more, her epistemological background theories would become more confirmed and the classificational schemes she would employ would become more astute and more developed. At such a stage her intuitions concerning Gettier cases would have an evidential weight of say 0.3 or 0.4. We can see how this story is going to go. As our heroine goes on through graduate school, her intuitions’ epistemic weight would increase to say 0.6. As she works out her views on epistemological matters they would increase further. So on and so forth. The idea here is simple. As one is trained further and further in a domain and one’s background theories become more and more developed and justified, we can treat her intuitions’ as having

---

<sup>82</sup> If it were determined that the level of instructorship in the class was inadequate, then the epistemic weight would not increase. Though this would perhaps be hard to establish in actual cases, I believe it is a consequence of my position that any inadequate training in the target domain would not increase the epistemic weight of the person’s intuition(s).

more and more evidential weight. And we should take the intuitions' of those people who have more and more training as being more evidence conferring.<sup>83</sup>

This description of the epistemic weight hierarchy implies we ought to take the intuitions of experts in a domain as more evidence conferring than those of the novice. While this is, I believe, an intuitively plausible description it does raise a host of social epistemological questions. The literature on experts and expertise in epistemology is large and ever increasing. While I do not have the space to attempt to develop an entire social epistemology concerning experts, I would like to provide some preliminary sketches as to what this would amount to concerning the intuitions issue. First, while I recognize that it may be easy to say that people fall into various places on the epistemic weight scale due to the amount of expertise in the domain, it is hard to say that one falls exactly at, say, 0.9. To say that someone is an expert requires more than just being able to say that she has studied this domain the longest of the group. As an initial proposal, someone is an expert in domain D, if she has:

1. An understanding of the specialized vocabulary of D.
2. Access to the volume of relevant background knowledge about D matters.
3. An ability, upon being requested by others, to explain why one's intuition in D is such and such.
4. An ability, upon being requested by others, to explain why one's intuition in D is indicative of the truth.

A few clarifications – I take condition 3 to amount to the person being able to give an explanation in light of the domain in question. This explanation would be couched in terms of the best theories available and with best arguments possible. For condition 4, the person would need to be able to explain why her intuitions are indicative of the truth

---

<sup>83</sup> There is an obvious analogy here with the natural sciences. We treat the intuitions of scientists as having more epistemic weight the more that person has been working in that discipline. While I see an analogy here, I do not intend to argue this way as the scientist studies natural kinds and the philosopher may or may not study natural kinds.

given reasonable assumptions in related domains. For example, an expert in morality in meeting condition 4 would need to explain any metaphysical or epistemological assumptions which underlie her moral intuitions. This does not require her to be an expert in those domains, however she would have to know and be able to articulate those assumptions. I do not take these 4 conditions as necessary and sufficient. Rather I take them to be an initial explication of expertise and a way for inquirers into the domain to discern who is an expert.

Being more precise, if the expert has extensive knowledge of some domain, then she is an expert with regard to that domain. Let us call such a person a factual expert. But this surely will not suffice for a lot of cases. It may be the case that the expert has extensive knowledge about the domain, but has gained her knowledge from questionable sources or is unable to gain new knowledge about the domain (Pappas 1994, 8). For example, someone may have read all her information from questionable, though not completely incorrect, websites online. So while a factual expert may still be considered an expert, this is a very low-level of expertise.

We may develop this initial conception into a more robust conception by considering that there is a distinction between an expert's factual knowledge and her practical knowledge. A factual expert has extensive factual knowledge about the domain. A practical expert knows how to use her knowledge about that domain. In this sense, one may have factual expertise, but not practical expertise. But we would expect that an expert is someone who is not only a factual expert, but also a practical expert. If one can make practical use of her knowledge, then she must also already be a factual expert (Pappas 1996, 240). It is important to note that this practical knowledge is more than the

mere ability to apply or use the current knowledge about the domain. In order to be a practical expert, one must also be able to use that knowledge to acquire new knowledge about the domain (Goldman 2004, 145).

But this is still inadequate. We do not normally consider one an expert simply because she has extensive factual knowledge about some domain and can use that knowledge. She must also be able to acquire new knowledge about the domain that layperson(s) cannot. She must be able to employ strategies in acquiring knowledge that laypersons simply do not have (Pappas 1994, 10). Such experts would be able to employ classificational schemes, make various inferences, solve problems, and so forth in ways that laypersons cannot. Furthermore, such an expert would be able to do all this on an intuitive level. In a sense, the strategy expert has “internalized the rules” and as such can apply them almost unconsciously (Stark 1998, 3). Where laypersons would have to follow a certain set of prescribed procedures, the expert would be able to mentally calculate these procedures with a speed not had by the laypersons. So, in addition to conditions 1-4 above, someone is an expert about a particular domain, D, if:

5. She has extensive factual knowledge about D,
6. She has practical knowledge about D,
7. She is able to employ strategies for acquiring new knowledge about D that laypersons do not possess.

In no way do I mean this to be the final word on what constitutes expertise in a domain. I grant there may be other factors that need to be considered.

But there is an immediate worry here. What of two experts’ intuitions conflicting? For example, what if Alvin Goldman says p and Laurence Bonjour says not p (as has happened in the past concerning epistemological matters)? We would unquestionably want to say that they are both experts. Is it the case that we treat them

both as having the same epistemic weight or do we appeal to another source to determine the weight? I am inclined to accept the former stance. It seems plausible to initially set both intuitions on the table and treat them as having the same epistemic weight. While one may think this leaves us in a stalemate, we can recognize that sometimes intuitions cannot resolve the day. If we have two experts that disagree, then we must turn to other arguments that do not concern these specific intuitions as well as turning to the intuitions of other experts in the field along with the intuitions of those at lower levels. The point here is that the relevant background knowledge is not indicating the truth of  $p$  in any direct way (or at least we do not have obvious evidence for  $p$  over say not- $p$ ). This hold-off only arises when we have an even split between the experts. There may be other avenues to solve this multiple-experts problem.<sup>84</sup> For example, appealing to philosophic track records may be one way of assessing the matter. Or, it may be that we need to appeal to “meta-experts” (experts who can vouch for the expert’s expertise) (Goldman 2002, 146). While such approaches are not without their worries and problems, I believe it is safe to say we can come up with a way in which to solve the conflicting-experts problem.

The moderate about the epistemic weight of intuitions does owe us a developed social epistemology. But that is a further project and one that is well underway by others. It has been my goal here to show how the epistemic weight of intuitions comes in degrees and how people with more background knowledge in the domain are to be treated as having intuitions with greater evidence-conferring power. While some of the details on the experts problem may be left open, I do not take them to be damning to the moderates' overall position.

---

<sup>84</sup> See Goldman (2002, 146-159) for examples.

### 3.5.3 Responding to the Unreliability Worries

The three remaining unreliability worries (theory-grip, overinterpretation, and disautonomy) can be explained away by the moderate position. First, the theory-grip concern is essentially a non-starter. Yes, it is true that some philosophers may be theory-gripped to the point where they are merely reporting their background assumptions and treating their intuition as having the weight. But this objection only holds once we assume that intuitions cannot be of the moderate view and once we assume certain facts about what counts as an adequate analysis (e.g., that reflective equilibrium cannot include any type of theory-laden considered judgments). Since the moderate allows for theory-laden intuitions and allows for the background theory to play a major role in determining whether the intuition has substantive evidential weight, the moderate can say that the difference between theory-grip and theory-laden is a matter of semantics and it ultimately does not prove to be problematic.<sup>85</sup> The moderate says that even though the intuition is theory-laden, the intuition is still a reliable indicator of how things are.

What of overinterpretation and disautonomy. While I recognize that they are real phenomena and they are going to be very difficult to discern, I believe that by placing more epistemic weight on experts we reduce the probability that this will arise. That is, experts are less likely to overinterpret their intuitions since they have better access to their background knowledge, have a better understanding of the concepts and vocabulary used, and are better able to apply this background knowledge. The same seems to be true

---

<sup>85</sup> It also may be the case that our developed social epistemology may be able to identify such theory-gripped philosophers and if so, then we can adjust the weight of their intuitions accordingly. But again, this is for future research.

for disautonomous intuitions. They seem to arise as the result of faulty access to the target domain and/or due to incomplete background knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

Again, there is no way to eliminate such errors. All we can hope for is that the hierarchical epistemic status reduces the probability of such errors arising. While this does not directly answer the worries, it does put them into perspective.

### 3.6 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have developed a case for the moderate position on the evidential status of intuitions. By seeing the failures of the traditionalist's arguments, we see that there is an empirical element in the evidential status of intuitions. The failures of the skeptic's arguments show that intuitions can still be taken as evidence once we recognize the correct account of intuitions. Hence, we have reason to accept the moderate position.

Now that we have an account of the nature of philosophical intuitions and their evidential status, we are in a position to assess the methods of philosophical analysis discussed in chapter one. It is that task I now turn.

---

<sup>86</sup> This is not to say that either Weinberg or Chalmers are not experts or have incomplete knowledge, but the matter at hand there was one of the completed science and neither has access to that. I am in no way being derogatory to either.

## Chapter 4 – Philosophical Analysis in Light of Theory-Laden Intuitions

*“Philosophy, to be any good, must be analytic; but conceptual analysis is not the whole of philosophy.” – J. L. Mackie Truth, Probability, and Paradox*

### 4.1 Introduction

The first goal of this last chapter is to assess each philosophical methodology – conceptual analysis, explication, and reflective equilibrium – in light of some of the current objections in the literature concerning philosophy’s use of intuitions. Since the literature on this topic is vast and has recently been growing at an exponential rate, I will only attempt to look at a few key objections to philosophical analysis and the use of intuitions. Specifically I will look at two versions of the problem of disagreement – an empirical version (given by Stephen Stich, et al.)<sup>87</sup> and a philosophical version (given by Harold Brown), the so-called “charge from psychology” objection, and will end with some brief comments on Hilary Kornblith’s recent worry that traditional intuition-based philosophy cannot capture the “ambitions of philosophy”. I will show that these objections do not out-and-out doom intuition-based philosophy.

The second goal of this chapter is to show that one methodology is more promising and potentially fruitful as a method of philosophical analysis than the others. By looking at the conception of intuitions defended in this work and the objections of intuition-based philosophical methods, I will develop a defense of *practical explication*.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> As I noted earlier, Stich’s concerns are focused on intuition-based philosophical methods and not simply the reliability of intuitions. For that reason I will be focusing on Stich’s criticisms in this chapter. However, many of the criticisms from Stich, et al. come from concerns of the reliability of intuitions. And as such, it will look as if there is considerable overlap between the arguments presented in chapter 3 and in this chapter. However, my focus here is the viability of philosophical methods and not simply the reliability of philosophical intuitions.

<sup>88</sup> The phrase “practical explication” is borrowed from Edward Craig (1987; 1990). I am much indebted to Craig’s thoughts on philosophical methodology and much of what follows is inspired by Craig’s work. However, there are significant differences between Craig’s view and my own. I choose to keep the name as so to acknowledge my inspiration. Similar methods have also been advocated by Justin C. Fisher

Practical explication, I will argue, can incorporate the account of intuitions defended in chapter two, and can avoid or incorporate the morals to be drawn from the problems of disagreement and the charge from psychology. Thus, when philosophers are forced to make the extremely difficult philosophical choice, there is good reason for which philosophical methodology should remain.

## 4.2 Revisiting the Methods

Before looking at each of the objections, I will briefly revisit each of the methodologies to restate their tasks and goals as traditionally conceived and illustrated in chapter one.

### 4.2.1 The Task and Goals of Conceptual Analysis

Conceptual analysis is essentially the method of attempting to establish a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the elucidation of some concept. While robust conceptual analysis (RCA), modified robust conceptual analysis (MRCA), and modest conceptual analysis (MCA) differ with respect to the strength of the method (the types of truths it yields) and the target of analysis (concepts as mental entities, things in the world, or our folk concepts), they all agree that the method is one of taking our intuitions to count as evidential sources (though they differ as to the certainty of such attitudes). So, on the face of it, they are similar in method while differing in the details.

### 4.2.2 The Task and Goal of Explication

Explication as a method is the attempt to revise a concept by making it more precise. The vague or everyday concept – the “explicandum” – is replaced with a more

---

(2006), Sally Haslanger (1999), and Jonathan M. Weinberg (2006). Again, I maintain that there are considerable differences between my proposal and theirs particularly given my defense being rooted in the conception of intuitions defended in chapter two.

precise concept – the “explicatum”. The explicatum is intended to be an improvement over the original concept. The requirements governing when the explication is successful are:

1. The *explicatum* is to be *similar to the explicandum* in such a way that, in most cases in which the *explicandum* has so far been used, the *explicatum* can be used; however close similarity is not required, and considerable differences are permitted.
2. The characterization of the *explicatum*, that is, the rules of its use, is to be given in an *exact* form, so as to introduce the *explicatum* into a well-connected system of scientific concepts.
3. The *explicatum* is to be a *fruitful* concept, that is, used for the formulation of many universal statements.
4. The *explicatum* should be as *simple* as possible; this means as simple as the more important requirements in 1, 2, and 3 allow (Carnap 1950, 7).

When these four conditions are met, the explication is said to be adequate.

Again, the intuitions at work in explication are intuitive judgments that reflect people’s understandings of the terms and the concepts involved. For instance, to start an explication one must have an everyday concept or a concept from an early stage of scientific development and provide “informal explanations” or have “examples” in order to get a “clear enough” idea of what she is going to be explicating (Carnap 1950, 4).

Here we can see that intuitions are underlying the start of the explication method. But we also turn to our intuitions in evaluating whether the explication is successful in meeting the four conditions.

While conceptual analysis attempts to provide a *correct* or *right* analysis, explication is not in the same business. Some have confused this point. Michael A.

Bishop characterizes the task of explication as:

In order for an instance of conceptual explication to succeed, the extensions of the target term and its classical account must be identical with respect to all clear instances and non-instances of the target term. On this view, [the JTB account of knowledge] is a successful explication just in case anything that is a clear case of

knowledge is also a clear case of justified true belief, and anything that is a clear non-instance of knowledge is also a clear non-instance of justified true belief (1992, 268).

Bishop's account of explication rests on a literal reading of similarity. It is not the case that to explicate a concept one must provide an analysis where the explicandum is to be coextensive with the explicatum. This is to demand too much from the method of explication. Explication attempts to simply reduce the vagueness in some concept. As Carnap puts the point:

Strictly speaking, the question of whether the solution is right or wrong makes no good sense because there is no clear-cut answer. The question should rather be whether the proposed solution is satisfactory, whether it is more satisfactory than another one, and the like (1950, 4).

Or consider how Quine puts the matter:

We have, to begin with, an expression or form of expression that is somehow troublesome. It behaves partly like a term but not enough so, or it is vague in ways that bother us, or it puts kinks in a theory or encourages one or another confusion. But also it serves certain purposes that are not to be abandoned. Then we find a way of accomplishing those same purposes through other channels, using other less troublesome forms of expression. The old perplexities are resolved (1960, 260).

Both Carnap and Quine seem to agree that the goal of an explication is not the production of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of some concept, but rather the adequacy of use of the concept. The explicandum will be too vague for one to use so it will need to be made more precise. So the goal is adequacy of use or revision of a vague concept, not providing a *correct* analysis. As Carnap put the point, "close similarity is not required, and considerable differences are permitted" (1950, 7).

#### 4.2.3 The Task and Goal of Reflective Equilibrium

Reflective equilibrium is the method of attempting to find a balance between people's intuitions, principles which are believed to govern judgments concerning some

domain, and other theoretical considerations people believe apply to the decision to accept or reject the intuitions or principles. The balance is achieved by the mutual adjusting of the set of intuitions and the principles (or theory) being proposed. This adjustment amounts to the reflective assessment of whether it is the intuitions or the principle (or theory) which needs to be revised. Once this narrow reflective equilibrium is achieved, one must widen it to include other judgments, theories, and principles she already accepts, as well as arguments for alternative principles.

The goal of reflective equilibrium is a better understanding and perhaps revision of our concept. Some maintain that the goal is for one to capture an individual's concept, but traditionally it is to capture a shared, common concept.

#### 4.3 The Problem of Disagreement

There is no question that philosophers disagree. Any introduction to philosophy student can attest to this fact of disagreement. But does the simple fact that philosophers disagree entail anything about the viability of their method which is usually conceptual analysis? There have been two recent attacks on intuition-based philosophical methods concerning the issue of disagreement.<sup>89</sup> One attack has come from philosophers interested in experimental philosophy. These philosophers maintain that recent psychological research shows intuitions vary with respect to a variety of background factors such as socio-economical status, cultural upbringing, and training in philosophy. Given these factors which impede the reliability of intuitions, traditional conceptual analysis is not viable. As was noted earlier, this criticism is similar to that brought up against the reliability of intuitions in general. However, the focus here is not specifically

---

<sup>89</sup> The problem of disagreement has been primarily directed at conceptual analysis in the literature. Be this as it may, the problem can be applied to any intuition-based philosophical methodology.

on the reliability of intuitions, but on the viability of intuition-based philosophical methods. So while many of the criticisms and argument may be familiar, the goal and focus is different. A second attack comes via a philosophical route. Harold Brown has argued that intuition-based philosophical methods (specifically, conceptual analysis as it is traditionally conceived) are problematic due to an assumption made by the analysts that the concepts that they are analyzing are shared amongst the philosophical community.

These attacks result in one of two conclusions – the strong conclusion that intuition-based philosophical methods ought to be abandoned in favor of a more naturalistic methodology or a weaker conclusion that intuition-based philosophical methods ought to be reconfigured to account for rampant disagreement. The discussion of the viability of intuition-based philosophical methods will begin by evaluating both of these conclusions in light of the empirical and philosophical arguments in support of them.

#### 4.3.1 The Problem of Disagreement – Empirical Version

Let us begin with an obvious observation – people’s intuitions about various cases differ. Anyone who has taught a philosophy course can attest to this observation. When presenting students with various cases such as the Trolley Case, Judith Jarvis Thompson’s Violinist Case, the Gettier Cases, Cartesian Evil Demons, etc., instructors witness a wide array of differing intuitions. Some researchers, including philosophers themselves, have attempted to establish such facts. Machery, et al., have argued that semantic intuitions vary from culture to culture (where Westerners are more likely to subscribe to a causal-historical theory of reference than East Asians) (Forthcoming).

Haidt, et al. have argued that moral judgments vary culturally as well as socio-economically (1993). Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich have made the same argument concerning epistemic intuitions (2001). To illustrate the extent of such disagreement and what the data states, I will focus on the work of Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich (henceforth, WNS).

Before presenting the data WNS collected, it is important to illustrate their target as they see it. The target they attack is what they call “Intuition Driven Romanticism” (2001, 432). Intuition Driven Romanticism is the view that knowledge of the correct epistemic norms is in us (“implanted within us in some way”) and we need but only introspect to arrive at them (2001, 433). Furthermore, Intuition Driven Romanticism affords intuitions the central role. According to WNS, an epistemic intuition 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” (2001, 432). In characterizing the method, WNS claim:

[A]n Intuition Driven Romanticism strategy can be viewed as a “black box” which takes intuitions (and perhaps other data) as input and produces implicitly or explicitly normative claims as outputs (2001, 434).

This would seem to coincide with all forms of conceptual analysis I discussed previously. Yet, the examples of those who use such a method fall away from several of the forms discussed. WNS cite as proponents of Intuition Driven Romanticism Alvin Goldman and Nelson Goodman. Aside from the fact that I have placed Goodman’s methodology into the category of reflective equilibrium and not conceptual analysis, it would seem that WNS are targeting conceptual analysis alone.

Yet, it would seem that WNS' target (and those others who are attempting to address the analysis/intuition question empirically) is broader than simply attacking conceptual analysis. Instead WNS seem to want to take on all intuition-based philosophical methods. As they claim, "The challenge we are to raise is...a problem for [Intuition Driven Romanticism] accounts no matter what goes on within the black box" (2001, 434). I take this to mean that for WNS it does not matter whether the form of analysis is addressing mind-independent or mind-dependent concepts, whether the goal is necessity or not, whether the method is meant to be fallible or not, etc. Essentially, WNS are attacking, or at least seem to want to attack, all forms of analysis which rely on intuitions as inputs. So, the lessons to be learned from their research (if there are any) will apply to all intuition-based philosophical methods.

In their research, WNS attempt to test four hypotheses:

(H1) *Epistemic intuitions vary from culture to culture.*

(H2) *Epistemic intuitions vary from one socio-economic status to another.*

(H3) *Epistemic intuitions vary as a function of how many philosophy classes one has taken.*

(H4) *Epistemic intuitions depend, in part, on the order in which the cases are presented.*<sup>90</sup>

WNS's methodology in testing H1 was to present variations on classic thought experiments in epistemology to Westerners (Europeans and Americans) (Ws), East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans) (EAs), and people from the Indian sub-continent (SCs). In testing H2, they presented the same cases to people of low socio-economic status (LSES) and high socio-economic status (HSES).<sup>91</sup> WNS's conjecture

---

<sup>90</sup> It must be noted that it is only for H1 and H2 that WNS give data. They believe that H3 and H4 might be true, but do not give any empirical results on whether these are substantiated.

<sup>91</sup> Socio-economic status was determined by whether the subjects went to college. If the subject had reported they never went to college, they were placed into the LSES category. If the subjects reported they had attended college for one or more years, then they were placed into the HSES category. This distinction is obviously problematic, but I will avoid such methodological criticisms here.

was that if it turned out that *any* of H1-H4 were true, then “it would pose a serious problem for the advocate of [intuition-based philosophical methods]” (2001, 438). If it is the case that H1-H4 are all true, then “it is hard to believe that any plausible case can be made for the claim that the normative pronouncements of [intuition-based philosophical methods] have real normative force – that they are norms that we (or anyone else) should take seriously” (2001, 438).

In testing H1, WNS presented students at Rutgers University with variations on the Gettier Case, Fred Dretske’s Zebra Case, and Keith Lehrer’s Mr. Truetemp Case. I will focus only on the Gettier Case since it has been the one most discussed in the previous chapters. Their version of the Gettier Case was as follows:

Bob has a friend, Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American Car. Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it?

What they found was as follows:

	Really Knows	Only Believes
Westerners	25%	75%
East Asians	55%	45%
Indian Sub-Continent	65%	35% <sup>92</sup>

The data collected by WNS shows there is some significant differences in the responses between the cultural groups. Moreover, it is only the Westerners that responded according to the standard philosophical literature.

So, what do WNS draw from this research? According to WNS, in light of the data, the conceptual analyst must respond that such differences do not lead to different

---

<sup>92</sup> I must note that these numbers are approximate percentages of the responses. The numbers are taken from the graphs in Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich (2001, 443).

normative conclusions. There are essentially three conclusions that this research (like that done by WNS) reaches:

1. Those using intuition-based philosophical methods have been largely ignorant of the effects of culture.
2. Those using intuition-based philosophical methods have mistakenly assumed that their intuitions are typical or widely shared.
3. Those using intuition-based philosophical methods have not taken into consideration that intuitions probably reflect indoctrination and training.<sup>93</sup>

From this, WNS and others maintain that intuition-based philosophical methods are inherently problematic in that it ignores these essential features of the method's evidential source – intuitions.

It may be objected that WNS have looked at the wrong sort of intuitions in that they are not associated with necessity or reflection (rather they are non-reflective or “one-off” intuitions. On the other hand, those using intuition-based philosophical methods may bite the bullet and say that different people (or cultural groups) ought to pursue different normative goals. Obviously the later option is unacceptable for anyone using intuition-based philosophical methods that is not ready to endorse some form of epistemic relativism. Concerning the first option, it is not clear that WNS have nothing to say about intuitions with a clear modal strength to them (what WNS call “strong intuitions”). If people's intuitions on, say, Gettier Cases are strong intuitions, then WNS's data provides some prima facie reason for believing that Gettier intuitions are not universally shared. Here, the advocate of intuition-based philosophical methods would have to give a story as to why non-philosopher's intuitions about Gettier Cases are not

---

<sup>93</sup> In “Folk Intuitions on Free Will”, Shaun Nichols notes that in the unpublished data collected by Gary Bartlett it has been shown that undergraduate philosophy students develop the intuitions of the professor teaching the course. This was tested by administering a set of epistemic thought experiments at the beginning of the course and again at the end of the course. On key issues, the student's intuitions became more and more like those of the professor teaching the course. Since this data is unpublished I mention it only in passing and not as conclusive.

strong intuitions in light of WNS's data. Furthermore, it is not clear the subjects in WNS's study did not reflect on the cases. It is not implausible to say that there was some minimal reflection on the part of the subjects before responding. Yet, even if the advocate of intuition-based philosophical methods wants to say the subjects in the study did not reflect *enough* or in *the right way* (whatever this amounts to), it is now her job to show that people who do reflect enough do not exhibit the same patterns as those studied by WNS. This amounts to it being an *empirical* question as to whether the advocate of intuition-based philosophical methods has a response to WNS.

#### 4.3.2 The Problem of Disagreement – Philosophical Version

Despite the direct appeal to empirical data, there is another way in which to see the problem of disagreement. The philosophical version of the problem of disagreement is based upon the question of why is it that those who engage in intuition-based philosophical methods disagree so much. This differs from the empirical version of the argument only in the sense that it is not based on actual collected data. On the face of it, this is not much of a worry and easily explained, but Brown maintains there is a deeper point that cannot be explained by traditional intuition-based philosophical methods.

According to Brown, the following is central to the project of intuition-based philosophical methods:

(S) All members of a conceptual community share a set of concepts (1999, 34).

The reason for S being central is that intuition-based philosophical methods are a matter of seeking an explicit account of a concept's content where this content is something already known in some implicit manner. Such implicit knowledge guides our intuitions which in turn guide our analyses. Furthermore, this is not simply a matter of

autobiography. The contents of the intuitions are taken to be shared by a wider community. This view of intuition-based philosophical methods leads to three theses:

- (A) Philosophers seek analyses of concepts that are held to exist in their minds.
- (B) These concepts generate intuitions that provide the basis for analysis.
- (C) Analysts who disagree are typically attempting to analyze the same concept (Brown 1999, 37).

Theses A and B are nothing new here. They are held by both MRCA and MCA.<sup>94</sup> C is another way of stating S. If A, B, and C are central theses of intuition-based philosophical methods, then it would seem that advocates of such methods are committed to S.

So, what is the problem here? The problem is that there has been, throughout the history of philosophy, much disagreement on the correct analysis of philosophical concepts. If one is engaged in intuition-based philosophical methods attempting to capture the concept that she and others are holding, then there should not be so much disagreement. Since they would be attempting to capture the same intension of the term denoting the concept, we should see less disagreement than we do. The problem, as Brown sees it, is that there is something amiss in the analysis itself. Intuition-based philosophical methods themselves cannot account for such disagreement. If intuition-based philosophical methods are committed to S and S is true, then there should not be such disagreement. But, according to the traditional conception, intuition-based philosophical methods are committed to S. To put it another way, the best explanation of the range of disagreement is by one denying S, however conceptual analysts are committed to S. Thus, according to the conceptual analysts, there should be no (or at best less) disagreement.

---

<sup>94</sup> RCA would reject A in that it maintains concepts are mind-independent entities. This rejection of A will not ultimately matter for the point being made here.

To begin, let us consider the status of S. On the face of it, the traditional philosophical enterprise (i.e., MCA and MRCA) would seem to support/require S. But this seems mistaken. If one tracks the history of some debate in philosophy, they see the debates over analysis are often based on the philosophers having *similar*, but not *identical*, concepts in mind. If we look at the debates surrounding concepts like ‘knowledge’, ‘art’, ‘good’, ‘truth’, etc, we see the disputants often did not have the same concept in mind when rejecting another’s analysis.<sup>95</sup> Thus, it would seem that we have prima facie evidence against the truth of S.

But I think there is something more going on in the problem of disagreement than the simple denial of S.<sup>96</sup> I grant that while many philosophical disputes may have been based on the disputants having similar, but non-identical, concepts, this is not the only reason why there is such disagreement. The way to see the disagreement is in light of the different background theories that are at work in each of the disputants intuitions. Even if the disputants have identical concepts in mind, they may have different intuitions about those concepts and different background theories underlying those different intuitions. But even if we did suppose that if two people have different background theories and different intuition, then they cannot have different concepts, we see that the disagreement is at a lower level than is present by Brown. It may not simply be a disagreement at the level of the concept, but at the level of the background theories the two are employing.

Once we see that the disagreement is deeper than just at the level of the concept itself, we

---

<sup>95</sup> We can think of the debates over the concept of ‘knowledge’ pre- and post-Gettier (see Shope 1983 for perhaps the best survey of the literature). Furthermore, as was noted earlier there are those who when talking of knowledge are talking of a natural kind and not a concept at all (e.g., Kornblith).

<sup>96</sup> Brown treats the falsity of S to be sufficient to start his defense of the claim that “members of a conceptual community often associate different, although similar, concepts with a given term” or what he calls “conceptual variation” (1999, 40). I am not here interested in defending conceptual variation; rather I am interested in attempting to diagnose why there is a problem of disagreement at all. Given this goal, I will not discuss Brown’s attempt to defend conceptual variation.

can see why there is such disagreement. To put the matter more broadly, while some versions of philosophical analysis may assume we all have the same concept, others need not make this assumption. Those which do make such an assumption are going to be faced with a serious problem.

#### 4.3.3 Intuition-Based Philosophical Methods and Disagreement

Some philosophers might take the empirical evidence against intuition-based philosophical methods as showing that intuition-based philosophical methods are not able to yield truths. But is this the case? Is it possible to salvage intuition-based philosophical methods in light of both the empirical and philosophical problems of disagreement and in light of the account of intuitions and their epistemic status defended earlier? I believe that it is. I hope to show how there is an intuition-based philosophical method which is broadly empirical at base and how it can accommodate the account of intuitions defended earlier. So, there is an intuition-based philosophical method that is viable once we recognize the method needs to be more informed.<sup>97</sup>

Before explain this ‘informing’, there are two preliminary points that need to be made concerning the WNS research. First, what the WNS research, in part, illustrates is that there needs to be an empirical element underlying intuition-based philosophical methods. In order to say the proposed analysis captures our intuitions or that there are no counterexamples to the proposed analysis of which all forms of philosophical analysis maintain, we must be careful to designate whose intuitions we are appealing to when we

---

<sup>97</sup> I realize there is a certain vagueness here. I am attempting to develop my account of practical explication in light of responding to these objections. I will thus be discussing intuition-based philosophical methods in general to begin and develop along the way.

are theorizing.<sup>98</sup> If a philosopher is proposing an analysis that is meant to capture “our” intuitions, then the philosopher must be careful to address who the “we” are and how this analysis captures the actual intuitions of the “we”. In this sense, intuition-based philosophical methods have a broadly empirical basis. It is an empirical question as to what the intuitions are of various groups as well as whether a proposed analysis captures the actual intuitions of that (or all) group(s).

The second point about intuition-based philosophical methods in this light is that the account of what an intuition is and its epistemic status defended earlier fit with this model. The disagreement between cultural groups as to knowledge ascriptions can be easily explained by the fact that different individuals indoctrinated in various cultures are having that culture’s classificational scheme informing their intuitions. What are being tracked by the data are the different background theories at work. So, my account of intuitions explains why WNS found the results they did.

The WNS study does not illustrate the out and out demise of conceptual analysis. What it does illustrate is that we need to rethink intuition-based philosophical methods. The fact that there are some empirical reasons to think that there is disagreement in intuitions along cultural and socio-economic lines gives us a prima facie reason to recognize the underlying empirical base of intuition-based philosophical methods. Furthermore, my account of intuitions coincides with this empirical perspective. The account of intuitions developed here explains the data in a way that the traditional (e.g., Bealer’s account) account of intuitions does not.

---

<sup>98</sup> One may say that I have set aside those forms of analysis which are not concerned with simply trying to capture our intuitions. However, even forms of analysis such as RCA which maintain that concepts are in the world will be concerned with proposing analyses which are immune to counterexamples and as such concerned with capturing “our” intuitions, or perhaps better stated as “the” intuition.

So the position at this point is this: We have good reason to reject those philosophical methods that are traditionally understood as having no empirical underpinnings such as MCA, MRCA, and RCA. However, other forms of intuition-based philosophical methods do not fall victim to such problems once we accept the conception of intuitions developed in chapter two and take our project to be the development of accounts of concepts which capture our intuitions (and are immune to counterexamples). Our project may be understood as that of seeking the principles that characterize our intuitions in reflective equilibrium or as seeking to explicate our concepts. We are thus able to keep intuition-based philosophical methods given that they can accommodate the conception of intuitions developed in chapter two and allow the method to be empirically informed.

To articulate this “informing” of intuition-based philosophical methods, it will serve useful to develop the account in comparison with another. For this purpose I will address Frank Jackson’s (1998).<sup>99</sup> According to Jackson, the goal of conceptual analysis is “elucidating concepts by determining how subjects classify possibilities” or “the elucidation of the possible situations covered by the *words* we use to ask our questions” (1998, 33 italics in original). The method, as with any form of an intuition-based philosophical methodology, is to consult one’s intuitions about possible cases. Jackson maintains this to be the method since “my intuitions about which possible cases to describe as cases of K-hood, to describe using the term ‘K’, reveal my theory of K-hood” (1998, 37). The bottom line here is that one’s intuitions reveal her folk theory about the

---

<sup>99</sup> Jackson’s version of conceptual analysis is perhaps the most extensive defense seen in recent years. It is for this reason I choose it. But it must be noted that Jackson’s version of conceptual analysis is a form of modest conceptual analysis. This is not to gloss over RCA or MRCA. I will address those in relation to informed conceptual analysis later.

philosophical concept under discussion. Each person's intuitions reveal her own theory and when those intuitions coincide, they reveal the folk theory.

While this is Jackson's basic project, there is something going on here that needs to be made explicit. Jackson maintains we can generalize our intuitions. This is made clear when he discusses the Gettier cases:

"Everyone who presents the Gettier cases to a class of students is doing their own bit of fieldwork, and we all know the answer they get in the vast majority of cases. *But it is also true that often we know that our own case is typical and so can generalize from it to others.* It was surely not a surprise to Gettier that so many people agreed about his cases" (1998, 37 italics added).

How does Jackson know this? How does he know that he can generalize his own intuitions? He maintains that sometimes we need to do "serious opinion polls" when necessary (1998, 36). If it appears that people may not have the same intuition about a particular case, then we should engage in empirical polling and determine what intuitions people do have.

On the surface, Jackson's account stares in the face of the problem of disagreement. Jackson's assumption that one can generalize her intuitions is problematic given the data on cultural and socio-economic variation in intuition reports, and the fact that there is little consistency on philosophical thought experiments. And this is rightly so. One cannot assume generalization given the fact that disagreement is a real phenomenon concerning conceptual analysis or any intuition-based philosophical method.

In salvaging intuition-based philosophical method, I think we should follow Jackson's lead. Let us start with the individual. Of what does an intuition inform us? First and foremost, all things being equal, intuitions reflect what one believes about some

kind, concept, or predicate. This is Jackson's starting point and it should be ours as well. Furthermore, one's intuitions about which possible cases fall under which categorization reveal one's theory about the subject matter. But it is here that we need to stop and evaluate Jackson's proposal. There is an element of intuitions argued for in chapter two which are relevant here - intuitions are theory-laden in a robust sense (theory-informed and theory-driven). So while one's intuitions reveal her theory about the concept, we must realize that that intuition is being driven and informed by other background theories. Here we see that Jackson's assumption that we can generalize from our intuitions to folk intuitions is mistaken. My intuitions about the concept can only be generalized if the folk and I share the same background theories and classificational schemes. To develop a folk theory, we must discover whether there is such a meta-level theoretical agreement. But this is a tall task for the advocate of intuition-based philosophical methods. It is an empirical matter to determine whether there is such meta-level agreement.

To fix the situation we must then get empirical. What is needed is to embrace the disagreement and to attempt to account for it. In this respect I agree with Brown – we must give up the adherence to the assumption that all members of a conceptual community share a set of concepts. Does this entail that we should follow Jackson's suggestion that we should do opinion polling when necessary? The answer is yes. We must determine a common ground for doing conceptual analysis and then appeal to our intuitions to determine whether the case at hand satisfies the analysis.

#### 4.4 The Charge from Psychology

There is a slightly different empirical argument against intuition-based philosophical methods that is worth addressing at this point. This objection is perhaps

most clearly presented by William Ramsey and I will, following Sandin, call it the “charge from psychology” objection (Ramsey 1998; Sandin 2006, 28). In setting up the argument, Ramsey maintains there are a number of psychological presuppositions of intuition-based philosophical methods. First, in order for an intuition-based philosophical analysis to proceed there is going to have to be “fairly strong and widely shared” intuitions that the analysis does (or does not) hold (Ramsey 1998, 164). It is assumed then that agents do in fact have these intuitions or “intuitive categorization judgments.” A further assumption is that there will be an overlap in people’s intuitions. A counterexample would not be a counterexample, according to Ramsey, if people did not agree upon it. Furthermore, there will be more than a mere overlap, but a convergence of our intuitions. As Ramsey states:

“[L]urking in the background of this enterprise is the assumption that our intuitions will nicely converge upon a set whose members are all and only those things that possess some particular collection of features” (1998, 164).

So, Ramsey maintains that advocates of intuition-based philosophical methods will expect to find such precise correspondence between intuitions and “simple clusters of properties” (1998, 165). Essentially, Ramsey’s conception of intuition-based philosophical methods is:

[W]hat the philosophical practice of conceptual analysis does need is the assumption that our intuitive judgments about categorization and class membership can yield a definition for abstract concepts that (1) takes the form of a small conjunctive set of essential properties and (2) coheres with all relevant intuitions and allows no counterexamples (1998, 170).

So what is the objection? It is simply that these psychological presuppositions are false. More to the point, psychological research shows that people’s concepts are not structured in the way that the advocate of intuition-based philosophical methods assumes.

To establish this, Ramsey turns to prototype theories. Put simply, prototype theories maintain that categorization judgments are not black-or-white. In fact, they are dynamic in that some instances are judged to be better examples of the concept than others. For example, for the concept ‘bird’, ‘robin’ will be a better example than ‘ostrich’.

One might respond, so what? What has this to do with intuition-based philosophical methodologies? The point Ramsey is making is that *if* prototype theories are correct, then there will always be a counterexample to an analysis. The reason for this is that the range of conceptual categorization is much greater than is allowed for by the analysis. Take a counterexample that is intended to reject some necessary condition. All that is needed is to create an example which excludes the relevant property but the remaining properties have enough weight to instantiate the desired intuition. And, according to Ramsey, this is generally easy to do. For sufficiency conditions, it is a matter of the context sensitivity of the judgment. If the salience of features is context sensitive, then it is possible to construct examples where the circumstances dictate that all alleged features or properties are present but fail to instantiate the intuition. To demand of an analysis that it admit of no counterexamples is too great a request. So, intuition-based philosophical analysis is doomed to failure.

#### 4.4.1 Can Intuition-Based Philosophical Methods Avoid the Charge?

Is Ramsey’s diagnosis correct? There would seem to be two straightforward ways of addressing this question. The first is to maintain, as Sandin does, that the two presuppositions of intuition-based philosophical methods are in fact true. Sandin maintains that there is “considerable” (though not complete) overlap between people’s intuitions (2006, 30). Furthermore, Sandin argues that there are pragmatic reasons for

accepting the intuition-based philosophical methodology even if Ramsey is correct that there will always be counterexamples to any proposed analysis.<sup>100</sup> I find both of these lines wanting. First, whether people's intuitions overlap is an empirical question. Moreover though, it would seem that we now (ala WNS) have reason to believe that this empirical claim is false. Second, arguing that we should accept intuition-based philosophical methods (even though defective) for pragmatic reasons yield a methodology that is *not* conceptual analysis. In fact, Sandin points to Carnap's conception of explication as a way to account for Ramsey's objections. Yet, as I have pointed out earlier, conceptual analysis and explication are different methodologies. So, such a move is advantageous to those only willing to give up conceptual analysis (of which I am).

The second way to address the question is to accept Ramsey's claims. We can allow, for sake of argument, that Ramsey is correct in that people's intuitions do not overlap. But, we can explain this away. Once we accept that intuitions are theory-laden, we can see why there is this lack of overlap. The reason why there is little overlap is due to different people coming to the table with differing background theories and classificational schemes. The same is true for whether people's intuitions converge on the same set of properties. So given the account of intuitions developed here, we can explain why Ramsey's premises can be accepted.

But we should not be too hasty to follow directly to his conclusion. Simply because people's intuitions do not overlap or converge on the same set of properties does not entail the failure of intuition-based philosophical methodologies, only certain forms

---

<sup>100</sup> Sandin has in mind conceptual analysis, but it will also apply to any intuition-based philosophical method.

of intuition-based philosophical methodologies. If we follow the initial suggestion presented earlier in this chapter, we can start our analysis by evaluating whether the lack of overlap is because people are operating from different background theories or classificational schemes or if it is due to the same background theories and classificational schemes yielding different intuitions. So, once we look at intuition-based philosophical methods in terms of the correct account of intuitions, we do not see its demise, but rather a call for reevaluation – particularly an empirical reevaluation.

#### 4.5 Evaluating Reflective Equilibrium

So far the focus has been on conceptual analysis with foreshadowing toward a version of explication. What then are the prospects of reflective equilibrium? Does reflective equilibrium fall victim to the problems discussed above? The simple answer is yes. Since the objections above pertain to all intuition-based philosophical methods, the objections would hold for reflective equilibrium. But more needs to be said.

As Stephen Stich has pointed out, there are various presuppositions to the method of reflective equilibrium, two of which are important for our concerns:

1. Agents ordinarily invoke only one notion of the target concept (that there is only one such target concept).
2. The target concept is coherent in that a set of necessary and sufficient conditions can be given (1990, 88).

These two assumptions can be challenged by both the problem of disagreement and the charge from psychology. It needs to be remembered that in order to avoid accusations of circularity, reflective equilibrium needs to make use of non-theory-laden, pre-theoretical intuitions. But as it was argued in chapter two, this is unfounded. Moreover, both versions of the problem of disagreement illustrate that assumption one is unwarranted. It cannot be assumed that there is only one target concept. If we take the research from

WNS and others to be correct in that agents do not share the same concept, and if we take Brown to be correct in that there may be underlying reasons as to why S (all members of a conceptual community share a set of concepts) is false, then we have no reason to accept assumption one. In fact we have reason to think that assumption one is false.

Assumption two shares the same fate. If Stich is correct in his account of the presuppositions of reflective equilibrium, we cannot say that the target concept is coherent given the widespread disagreement. Furthermore, if the method demands necessary and sufficient conditions, then, due to the charge from psychology, there will always be a counterexample to the proposed analysis.

It may be claimed that assumption two is too demanding. Reflective equilibrium is more like explication than conceptual analysis in that it is an attempt at the understanding of a concept and not the production of necessary and sufficient conditions. If this is the case (and I am sympathetic that it is), then we must understand that reflective equilibrium will need to be revised substantially. First, we must take into consideration the fact that intuitions are theory-laden in a robust sense and that the problems of disagreement show assumption one to be mistaken. This, however, does not show the method futile. What is needed is to revise reflective equilibrium into a method by which we will take our theory-laden intuitions and find a balance with our empirical theories and the philosophical principles at issue. This makes reflective equilibrium look more like explication. And this is not a bad thing. Reflective equilibrium thus becomes more revisionary. This is what I think Rawls did have in mind by constantly talking of ‘explicating’ our concepts.

This leads reflective equilibrium into a dilemma. Either it seeks to provide necessary and sufficient conditions (as Stich maintains), hence it ought to be rejected as an adequate method of philosophical analysis. Or, we revise reflective equilibrium to function more like explication; hence we give up Rawls' conception of intuitions (or considered judgments) and accept the theory-laden account of intuitions. Once we give up maintaining reflective equilibrium as akin to conceptual analysis, we see that we can incorporate the morals drawn from the objections to intuition-based philosophical methods above and build a better philosophical method – one akin to explication.

#### 4.6 A Methodological Proposal – *Practical Explication*

I have suggested that we should make intuition-based philosophical methods essentially empirical (at least at bottom). I need to say what I think this should look like. The method of analysis I will propose is *practical explication*. This method will be a synthesis of MCA and explication, but with a pragmatic or practical aspect to it.

While I maintained earlier that we should look to Jackson's model as a starting point, the model I propose has more to do with Alvin Goldman's model, than Jackson's.<sup>101</sup> While it is nearly impossible to determine whether a group of people share the same conceptual scheme, classificational scheme, or background theories, we can (I believe) safely assume that there is agreement as to what should count as good and bad epistemic practice. These practices will vary slightly from group to group or culture to culture, but there will be quite a few that will not.<sup>102</sup> For example, everyday perceptions would count (I would assume) as a good epistemic practice across all groups. So the

---

<sup>101</sup> The model I am referring to is given in "Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology" (1992).

<sup>102</sup> One such practice that will vary will be practices in religious epistemology. I do not intend to address the differences in religious epistemology – say the differences between knowledge of the Christian God and knowledge of the Tao. I maintain there are marked differences between various religions' epistemic practices and will leave the matter there.

visual system would be considered as holding across all groups. The same could be said for other cognitive faculties. Epistemic practices rooted in cognitive faculties could be assumed to be good practices. The same would not be true however of, say, testimony. Since what counts as good testimonial evidence varies from group to group, we would need to stipulate our classificational schemes before we assessed a case.

The proposal is then this: First, we would need to determine which epistemic practices are deeply rooted and assumed as good across all groups. Those falling in this category would not need further stipulation. If any epistemic practice varied from group to group, then we would need to determine (empirically) the classificational schemes and background theories as to why there is such a variation. Once we recognize such differences, then we can perform an analysis assuming that particular classificational scheme or background theory. In this way, we can determine whether a case satisfies the concept *given* a particular classificational scheme or background theory. Philosophical analysis thus becomes a contingent enterprise. It is contingent upon the empirical evidence warranting the possible variation in background theories underlying the intuitions.

This appeal to epistemic practices does change the epistemological focus slightly.

Consider again how Quine talks of explication:

We have, to begin with, an expression or form of expression that is somehow troublesome. It behaves partly like a term but not enough so, or it is vague in ways that bother us, or it puts kinks in a theory or encourages one or another confusion. But also it serves certain *purposes* that are not to be abandoned. Then we find a way of accomplishing those same *purposes* through other channels, using other less troublesome forms of expression. The old perplexities are resolved (1960, 260, emphasis added).

Quine's emphasis on purposes illustrates what practical explication has as a goal. The method of practical explication first asks for what purposes does the concept of, say, knowledge do for us and what roles does it serve? Here we would first focus on what our concept is in the sense of how beneficial it is to us. Another way of putting the point is that what we mean when we say "S knows that p" is what would it mean to best maintain 'knows' usefulness.

While this may seem unconventional as an approach to philosophy, it is not necessarily new. I take it J. L. Austin has a similar point in mind when he claims:

"If you say you *know* something, the most immediate challenge takes the form of asking 'Are you in a position to know?': that is, you must undertake to show, not merely that you are sure of it, but that it is within your cognizance" (1979, 100).

Here the primary question is not "What is knowledge?"; rather it is "*How* is it that you know?" To answer this, one must answer what the use of the concept of knowledge is, what role it serves in our everyday lives, and what practices are best for this use. Once such questions are answered, then philosophers can go on to ask what a concept having such and such roles in accordance with such and such practices looks like. It is at this point that philosophers would ask the question "What is X?"

It should be noted that traditionally explication has been concerned with theoretical explication and not practical explication (Craig 1990, 8). Given this, one may ask whether it is appropriate to employ Carnap's four conditions – similarity, exactness, fruitfulness, and simplicity. I believe we can take these as *prima facie* conditions.

Depending on the practical interests we have in the concept other conditions may arise.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> For example, as scientific and computer tools change we may need to modify our conditions since our epistemic practice in certain domains would change.

Yet, for our everyday epistemic lives (and other philosophical domains as pertaining to our lives), I believe Carnap's four conditions will serve us well.

Intuitions play two roles in this proposal. First, our intuitions initially give us an insight into the concept in question. Second, we can appeal to intuitions as determining whether a case satisfies a particular analysis once we have determined the relevant classificational schemes and background theories being employed. Intuitions are hence indicative and epistemically weighty.

To illustrate, consider the Gettier case. Initially one proposes the JTB analysis of knowledge – S knows that p if and only if p is true, S believes that p, and S is justified in believing that p. To test this analysis, philosophers would need to establish which epistemic practices are considered to be legitimate. Once they come to an agreement on this, we can test the analysis in light of counterexamples. Suppose we test via the Brown/Barcelona case. If people's intuitions (given their shared background theories and classificational schemes as to what constitutes legitimate epistemic practices coincide) converge that the case does not amount to one of the subject having knowledge, then we can maintain that the analysis has failed. If no such counterexample is forthcoming, then we can say that the analysis has succeeded.

Once we accept the account of intuitions developed here and the reevaluation of conceptual analysis in light of its empirical basis, we can see how we can account for the proposed objections. The objections from disagreement and the charge from psychology objection can be accounted for and explained by a correct account of the intuitions at work in analysis.

While the method of practical explication I have been attempting to develop may avoid the problems discussed, it may be maintained that I have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. In defending philosophical analysis against the objections, I have eliminated all the competition – RCA, MRCA, MCA, and reflective equilibrium. I think this is only partly true. Both RCA and MRCA assume that intuitions are traditional a priori intuitions. In chapters one and two I showed that it is incorrect to view philosophical analysis as using a priori intuitions exclusively and in fact there is more of a case for philosophers to make use of theory-laden intuitions as that is the correct conception of intuitions. Furthermore, any philosophical method which makes exclusive use of a priori intuitions is wrought with problems. Those problems include RCA and MRCA assuming our having shared concepts and/or our all being able to gain access to a single objective property which was shown to be problematic by Stich and others. So, I would accept that I have thrown out both RCA and MRCA. But what of MCA? How is MCA different than the contingent version articulated here? The version articulated here is a reworking of MCA. MCA provides us with our starting point. MCA allows for the account of intuitions I developed earlier. MCA also attempts to provide a shared folk theory about the concept in question. From this starting point, we can modify it in light of the account of intuitions developed earlier and add the empirical assessments on the counterexamples to determine if the analysis is correct. In this way, we are not throwing out MCA, rather we are reworking it much as was done with reflective equilibrium.

#### 4.7 Practical Explication and the Ambitions of Philosophy – A Few Brief Remarks

According to Hilary Kornblith, philosophy's ambitions are to find truths which transcend the "merely local and contingent truths about the actual world" (2006, 23). He

paints a picture of the philosopher as trying to provide the content of our philosophical concepts. In characterizing the ambitions of philosophy, he provides a quote by David

Lewis:

One comes to philosophy already endowed with a stock of opinions. It is not the business of philosophy either to undermine or to justify these pre-existing opinions, to any great extent, but only to try to discover new ways of expanding them into an orderly system. A metaphysician's analysis of mind is an attempt at systematizing our opinions about mind. It succeeds to the extent that (1) it is systematic, and (2) it respects those of our pre-philosophical opinions to which we are firmly attached (1973, 88).

What this quote is being used to show is that (1) the method of philosophy starts with our intuitions and moves to our attempt to systematize them and (2) the ambition of philosophy is to provide us with the truths about our philosophical concepts. Kornblith argues intuition-based philosophical methods do “not do justice to the ambitions of philosophy” (2006, 23). Supposing that this is the ambition of philosophy, how does practical explication fare?

In fact, I maintain practical explication fares quite well indeed – with a proviso. I agree that the ambition of philosophy is to discover truths about the world. These truths will need to be arrived at, contra Kornblith, by way of our intuitions about our concepts. However, once we incorporate the correct account of intuitions and accept that we need to arrive at those truths via the method of practical explication, we can achieve that to which philosophy has aspired. Kornblith's skepticism of traditional philosophical methods is largely due to their mistaken conception of intuitions. Incorporating empirically-informed background theories, accepting intuitions as theory-laden, and weighting intuitions appropriately gives us the tools to avoid the pitfalls of the traditional methodologies while keeping the goals.

By asking what our concepts do for us, determining adequate practices, and then addressing the question “What is X?” we do not fall victim to the worries raised to intuition-based philosophy. In fact, practical explication gives the philosopher a more powerful and less problematic methodology from which to do philosophy.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Audi, Robert, *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Austin, J. L., *Philosophical Papers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, edited by J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Bealer, George, "The Philosophical Limits of Scientific Essentialism", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 1, Metaphysics, 1987, 289-365.
- Bealer, George, "The Incoherence of Empiricism", in S. Wagner and R. Warner (eds.), *Naturalism: A Critical Appraisal*, Norte Dame University Press, 1993, 163-196.
- Bealer, George, "A Priori Knowledge and the Scope of Philosophy", *Philosophical Studies*, 81, 1996a, 121-142.
- Bealer, George, "On the Possibility of Philosophical Knowledge", *Philosophical Perspectives* 10, Blackwell Publishing, 1996b.
- Bealer, George, "Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 201-239.
- Bealer, George, "A Theory of the A Priori", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13, Epistemology, 1999, 29-55.
- Bishop, Michael A., "The Possibility of Conceptual Clarity in Philosophy" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1992, 29, 267-277.
- BonJour, Lawrence, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Harvard University Press, 1985.
- BonJour, Lawrence, *In Defense of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Brown, Harold I., "Why Do Conceptual Analysts Disagree?", *Metaphilosophy*, 30, 1/2, Jan./April, 1999, 33-59.
- Butchvarov, Panayot, *The Concept of Knowledge*, Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Carnap, Rudolf, *Logical Foundations of Probability*, University of Chicago Press, 1950.
- Carruthers, Peter, *Human Nature and Human Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Casullo, Albert, "The Coherence of Empiricism", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 81 (2000), 31-48.

- Chalmers, David, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Cohen, L. J., *The Dialogue of Reason*, Clarendon Press, 1986.
- Craig, Edward, "The Practical Explication of Knowledge", *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society* (1986/87).
- Craig, Edward, *Knowledge and the State of Nature*, Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Cummins, Robert, "Reflection on Reflective Equilibrium", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 113-127.
- Daniels, Norman, *Judgment and Justification*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- DePaul, Michael R., *Balance and Refinement: Beyond Coherence Methods of Moral Inquiry*, Routledge Press, 1993.
- DePaul, Michael R., "Why Bother with Reflective Equilibrium?", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 293-309.
- DePaul, Michael R. and William Ramsey, *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998.
- Fisher, Justin C., "Pragmatic Conceptual Analysis", Online Philosophy Conference, [http://experimentalphilosophy.typepad.com/online\\_philosophy\\_confere/2006/05/justin\\_fisher.html](http://experimentalphilosophy.typepad.com/online_philosophy_confere/2006/05/justin_fisher.html)
- Fumerton, Richard A., "The Paradox of Analysis", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 43, Issue 4 (June, 1983), 477-497.
- Gettier, Edmund, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis*, 23 (1963): 121-123, reprinted in *Empirical Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology, Second Edition*, edited by Paul K. Moser, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996, pp. 237-240.
- Gödel, Kurt, "What is Cantor's continuum problem?", 1964 (revision of the 1947 paper), in Benacerraf, P. and Putnam, H. (eds.), 1983, *Philosophy of mathematics: selected readings (2nd ed.)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldman, Alvin I., "Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology", in *Liaisons: Philosophy Meets the Cognitive and Social Sciences*, MIT Press, 1992, 155-175.
- Goldman, Alvin I., "A Priori Warrant and Naturalistic Epistemology", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13, Epistemology, 1999, 1-28.

- Goldman, Alvin I., *Knowledge in a Social World*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Goldman, Alvin I., "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?" *Pathways to Knowledge: Public and Private*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Goldman, Alvin I. and Joel Pust, "Philosophical Theory and Intuitional Evidence", in DePaul and Ramsey 1998, pp. 179-197.
- Goodman, Nelson, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast, Fourth Edition*, Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Graham, George and Terry Horgan, "Southern Fundamentalism and the End of Philosophy", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 271-292.
- Greenman, Martin A., "Intuition and the Limits of Philosophical Insight", *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 2, April 1987, 125–135.
- Hales, Steven, D., "The Problem of Intuitions", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2, April 2000, pp. 135-147.
- Hales, Steven D., *Relativism and the Foundations of Philosophy*, MIT Press, 2006.
- Hanna, Joseph F., "An Explication of 'Explication', *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Mar., 1968), 28-44.
- Harman, Gilbert, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1998-99, 99, 315-331
- Haslanger, Sally, "What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13, 1999, 459-480.
- Hintikka, Jaakko, "The Emperor's New Intuitions", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1999.
- Hogarth, Robin M., *Educating Intuition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Jackson, Frank, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defense of Conceptual Analysis*, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Kahneman, Daniel and Amos Tversky, "Intuitive Prediction: Biases and Corrective Procedures", *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, edited by Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 414-421.

- Kahneman, Daniel and Amos Tversky, "On the Psychology of Prediction", *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, edited by Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, Cambridge University Press, 1982, 48-68.
- Katz, Jerrold, *Realistic Rationalism*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000.
- Kornblith, Hilary, "The Role of Intuition in Philosophical Inquiry: An Account with No Unnatural Ingredients", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 129-141.
- Kornblith, Hilary, "The Impurity of Reason", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 81 (2000), pp. 67- 89.
- Kornblith, Hilary, "Appeals to Intuition and the Ambitions of Epistemology", *Epistemology Futures*, edited by Stephen Hetherington, Oxford University Press, 2006, 10-25.
- Kripke, Saul, *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Levin, Janet, "The Evidential Status of Philosophical Intuitions", *Philosophical Studies*, 00, 2003, 1-32.
- Lewis, David, *Counterfactuals*, Harvard University Press, 1973.
- Mackie, J. L., *Truth, Probability, and Paradox*, Clarendon Press, 1972.
- Miller, Richard B., "Without Intuitions", *Metaphilosophy*, 31(3), April 2000, 231-250.
- Moore, G. E., *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
- Myers, David, G., *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*, Yale University Press, 2004.
- Nichols, Shaun, "Folk Intuitions about Free Will", *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 6, 2006.
- Nichols, Shaun, Stich, Stephen, and Weingberg, Jonathan, "Metaskepticism: Meditations in Ethno-Epistemology", in S. Luper (ed.), *The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays*, Ashgate Publishing, 2001, 227-247.
- Pappas, George, "Experts, Knowledge, and Perception", in *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge*, Jonathan L. Kvanvig (ed.), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994, 239-250.
- Plantinga, Alvin, *Warrant and Proper Function*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman, *Word and Object*, MIT Press, 1960.

- Pust, Joel, *Intuitions as Evidence*, Garland Publishing Co., 2000.
- Ramsey, William, "Prototypes and Conceptual Analysis", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 161-177.
- Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Rawls, John, "Outline for a Decision Procedure in Ethics" (1951), *Collected Papers*, ed. by Samuel Freeman, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Rawls, John, "The Independence of Moral Theory" (1975), *Collected Papers*, ed. by Samuel Freeman, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Rescher, Nicholas, *Philosophical Dialectics: An Essay on Metaphilosophy*, State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Richard, Mark, *Propositional Attitudes: An Essay on Thoughts and How We Ascribe Them*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Sandin, Per, "Has Psychology Debunked Conceptual Analysis?", *Metaphilosophy*, 37, 1, 2006, 26-33.
- Sencerz, Stefan, "Moral Intuition and Justification in Ethics", *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 50, 1986, 77-95.
- Shope, Robert K., *The Analysis of Knowing: A Decade of Research*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Sosa, Ernest, "Rational Intuition: Bealer on its Nature and Epistemic Status", *Philosophical Studies*, 81, 1996, pp.151-162.
- Sosa, Ernest, "Minimal Intuition", in DePaul and Ramsey, 1998, 257-270.
- Stark, Herman, "Expertise and Rationality", *The Paideia Project*, <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/TKno/TknoStar.htm> (7 pages), 1998.
- Steup, Matthias, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, Prentice Hall Press, 1985.
- Stich, Stephen P., *The Fragmentation of Reason*, MIT Press, 1990.
- Stich, Stephen P., "Moral Philosophy and Mental Representation", in Michael Hechter, Lynn Nadel, and Richard Michod (eds.), *The Origins of Values*, Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1993.

- Stich, Stephen and Stephen Laurence, "Naturalism and Intentionality", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 19, Philosophical Naturalism, University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Swartz, Norman, *Beyond Experience: Metaphysical Theories and Philosophical Constraints*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
- Tidman, Paul, "The Justification of A Priori Intuitions", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVI, No. 1, March 1996, 161-171.
- Timmons, Mark, "On the Epistemic Status of Considered Moral Judgments", *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 29.
- Weinberg, Jonathan, "A Posteriori Concerns about A Priori Intuitions", presented to the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, used with permission from the author.
- Weingberg, Jonathan, "What's Epistemology For?: The Case for Neopragmatism in Normative Metaepistemology", *Epistemology Futures*, edited by Stephen Hetherington, Oxford University Press, 2006, 26-47.
- Weinberg, Jonathan, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, "Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions", *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 29, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring and Fall, 2001, 429-483.

## VITA

James Francis McBain Jr. was born July 9<sup>th</sup> 1971 in St. Louis, Missouri to Elizabeth I. McBain and James Francis McBain Sr. In 1994, he graduated from Truman State University with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Philosophy. In 1995, he graduated from University of Missouri-St. Louis with a B.A. in Philosophy. In 1996, he started his graduate studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia where he earned his M.A. in 2003 and his Ph.D. in 2008. He is currently an Assistant Professor at Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, KS.