

'Intuition', Intuitions, Concepts and the A Priori¹

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It's not news that the word 'intuition' sometimes seems to be used in significantly different ways by different philosophers (see e.g. Bonjour 2000, p. 102; Russell 2007, §4). Indeed, it's hardly news that *any* even slightly interesting word sometimes seems to be used in significantly different ways by different philosophers.

In this paper I shall attempt to put some structure on at least some of the apparently different uses of 'intuition'. This structure may be useful for understanding how certain importantly different features of the things described as 'intuitions' could be accidentally slurred over. In the first section, I argue that 'intuition'-hood is associated with four bundles of symptoms: a commonsensicality bundle, an a prioricity bundle, an immediacy bundle, and a metaphilosophical bundle.

Then in section II, I suggest that at least two different conceptions of intuition should be distinguished: one which is primarily associated with the commonsensicality symptom-bundle, and one which is primarily associated with the a prioricity symptom-bundle. I tentatively suggest that the word 'intuition' as used by philosophers is best regarded as ambiguous, having (at least) a commonsensicality sense and an a prioricity sense. I shall also suggest that 'intuitions' in *both* these senses are commonly associated with both the immediacy symptoms and the metaphilosophical symptoms, which might be expected to lead to some confusion and conflation. Section III discusses a much simpler view concerning the meaning of 'intuition' in philosophy, but offers grounds for thinking this view is mistaken.

Finally, in sections IV and V, I'll look at some of the attacks on 'intuition' as an epistemic source. Such attacks need to be carefully targeted on particular conceptions of intuition before they can be successfully (or even clearly) made out. I aim eventually to argue that *one* significant kind of philosophical 'intuition', related to a prioricity and conceptual truth, can be defended against a range of typical epistemological challenges.

I Four Bundles of Symptoms

First, let me clarify that I am interested in examining the kinds of core philosophical uses of 'intuition' that crop in many areas of philosophy and especially metaphilosophy. I am not here considering how the word 'intuition' is

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used in discussions of Kantian philosophy, intuitionistic mathematics, or intuitionistic logic; although these uses *may* be interestingly related to those on which I am focussing, this isn't the place to explore such relationships.

The core uses of 'intuition' in which I am interested appear to be (at least loosely) associated with certain bundles of symptoms. I don't mean to suggest here that any or all of these symptoms are or should be taken as *characteristic* or *definitive* 'intuitions' in any sense (though some are, by some philosophers). I am merely claiming that these symptoms are commonly associated with something's being an 'intuition', and/or 'intuitive'. (More on the differences between these two words later.)

Bundle one contains two symptoms. The first symptom in bundle one is that of being commonsensical, everyday and/or the opinion of the folk. One negative spin on that symptom include is that of Williamson's '[c]rude empiricists' (he does not say who they are), who 'regard "intuition" as an obscurantist term for folk prejudice ...' (Williamson 2007, p. 2). A more positive spin involves associating commonsensicality with the second symptom in bundle one: lack of theoretical contamination. Goldman (2005, p. 406) raises this second symptom to salience when he says that intuiting involves 'spontaneous application of [a] concept uncontaminated by an intuitor's prior theorizing, if any'.

I want to begin my discussion of bundle two by focusing on the a prioricity symptom. A strong connection between a prioricity and intuitionhood is suggested by such authors as Sosa (2009, p. 103: 'One project of analytic epistemology is a priori theorizing about the nature ... of human knowledge Any such practice gives prime importance to intuitions ...'), Goldman (see e.g. 2007, p. 19: 'Defenders of intuition-driven methodology hold that intuitions provide evidence, or warrant The warrant in question is commonly held to be of the a priori variety'), and Bealer (1995: 'Among our various theoretical beliefs, some are deemed to have a priori justification. This occurs for beliefs arrived at by ... (1) canvassing intuitions, ...').²

Given the association between 'intuitions' and a prioricity, one might expect to find that other symptoms associated with a prioricity are also associated with 'intuition'hood. And, indeed, the second symptom in bundle two is the necessity (or at least *felt* necessity) of the intuited subject matter. Bealer, for example, says that 'if x intuits that P, it seems to x that P and also that necessarily P' (1998, p. 207). Something similar is maintained by in BonJour (2000, p. 102), though BonJour prefers the term 'rational insight' to 'intuition', because (like me) he believes the latter term is used in different ways by philosophers and hence potentially confusing.³

² I should note, however, that Bealer explicitly claims that only *some* intuitions are the kind of 'rational' or 'intellectual' seemings that are connected with a prioricity.

³ BonJour identifies three senses of 'intuition': one on which it amounts to what he calls 'rational insight', one on which it means anything which is not arrived at through an explicitly discursive process and is hence (hopefully) pre-theoretic, and a third which is Kant's sense. I shan't discuss this interpretative hypothesis further here, though it should become clear how BonJour's first

The third bundle-two symptom, also strongly associated with a prioricity, is that of being either generated, or epistemically underwritten, or both, by conceptual competence and/or linguistic competence and/or understanding and/or conceptual analysis. Williamson (2007, p. 23) writes that '[l]inguistic or conceptual philosophers treat intuitions ... as the deliverances of linguistic or conceptual competence' (though he does not say who these philosophers are), and Papineau (2007, §2.4) says that '[t]he view that conceptual analysis plays no important role in philosophy might seem to be belied by the importance that philosophers attach to intuitions ...'. In a similar vein, Russell (2007, §3) suggests that: 'a person might have an intuition that a proposition like "bachelors are unmarried" is true based on understanding the concepts involved ...', and Ludwig (2007) states that he 'will use "intuition" to mean an occurrent judgment formed solely on the basis of competence in the concepts involved in response to a question about a scenario, or simply an occurrent judgment formed solely on the basis of competence in the concepts involved in it'.

Interestingly, Sosa (2009, pp. 104-5) has recently argued that focus on linguistic competence in connection with intuition is misplaced, and that understanding of propositions is what matters. He thinks that '[t]o intuit is to believe an abstract proposition merely because one *understands* it and it is of a certain sort ...' (Sosa 1998, pp. 263-4, my emphasis). I am inclined to agree, though given that my current purpose is simply to record the symptoms commonly associated with 'intuition'hood, the inclusion of an association with linguistic competence in bundle two is nevertheless appropriate.

The fourth and final symptom in bundle two is that intuitions are sometimes taken to be the upshot of some special faculty. Williamson (2007, p. 2) claims that '[o]ne apparently distinctive feature of current methodology in the broad tradition known as "analytic philosophy" is the appeal to intuition. Crude rationalists postulate a special knowledge-generating faculty of rational intuition.' (He does not say who the 'crude rationalists' are. But he is right that the association between intuition and a special faculty is sometimes made, if only by those who think it is a 'crude' one.)

My third symptom-bundle consists of two 'immediacy' symptoms, which I shall label 'immediacy₁' and 'immediacy₂'. Immediacy₁ is a matter of being direct in the sense of non-inferential, or (at least) of unclear inferential provenance. Nagel (2007, p. 793) is talking about this symptom when she says that '[t]he expression 'epistemic intuition' is sometimes used very broadly, as a label for any immediate (or not explicitly inferential) assessment of any claim of interest to epistemologists ...'. So is Goldman, when he says that '[a] phenomenological feature [rational intuitions] share is that they come from "I know not where".' (2007, p. 11). Similarly, we have Russell (2007, §4): 'Perhaps "intuition" is being used [by experimental philosophers] in a broader sense to mean "whatever

two senses relate to my symptom-bundles, and hence to the two notions of 'intuition' that I'm trying to pin down in this paper.

seems obvious to a person on reflection, where that seeming obvious is not based on inference" ... '.

It is not generally made clear, when intuitions are said to be immediate₁, whether intuitions are being said to be non-inferential in an epistemic or a psychological sense. (None of the authors mentioned in the previous paragraphs clarifies their remarks in this respect.) To be epistemically non-inferential, an intuition must not depend *epistemically* on previously justified premises. To be psychologically non-inferential, an intuition must not, as a matter of *psychological* fact, have been (implicitly or explicitly) derived by the subject from premises to which she was previously committed.

To say that intuitions are immediate₂ is to say that they are obvious and/or spontaneous and/or natural and/or compelling. The last-quoted passage from Russell 2007 shows that he associates immediacy₂ with intuitionhood. Nagel also writes of an intuition that it 'has a certain immediacy, like a simple perceptual judgment' (2007, p. 794). Levin describes modal intuitions as 'those clear, peculiarly compelling conceptions of what can or cannot be – ...' (2007, p. 253) and for Nichols, Stich and Weinberg, an intuition is 'a spontaneous judgment about the truth or falsity of a proposition' (2003, p. 246, footnote 3).

There are other, related, issues about the phenomenology of intuition into which I shan't delve too deeply here. Most notably, there is a debate about an intuition should be described as a kind of experiential state or 'seeming' (as Bealer 1998 believes) or not (as Sosa 2006 argues). I am yet to be convinced that anything in this vicinity is sufficiently consistently associated with intuitionhood (particularly in first-order philosophical practice, as opposed to metaphilosophical reflection) to count as a 'symptom' for my purposes.

Bundle four consists of three metaphilosophical symptoms of intuitionhood. First, it is sometimes said that intuitions are starting points and/or foundations for philosophical enquiry. Kornblith, for example, writes: 'Appeals to intuition play a foundational role in a good deal of philosophical theory construction' (2007, p. 28). A negative spin on the status of intuitions as starting points or foundations is offered by Liao (2008, p. 248), who puts things this way: 'When philosophers run out of arguments, they often appeal to intuitions'.

It is worth pointing out that this symptom is related to the immediacy symptoms of bundle three: for example, it could sound odd to call something foundational if it had been inferred from, or rests epistemically upon, something else; that makes it sound as if the 'something else' has a better claim to be foundational. Nevertheless, being explicitly metaphilosophical, it clearly is not the *same* as any of the immediacy symptoms, which don't concern philosophy in particular.

To say that intuitions provide starting points or foundation is not necessarily to say that they provide *incontrovertible* ones. Weatherson (2003) thinks philosophers should aim for the best trade-off between capturing intuitions about cases and systematic overall theories, and that this trade-off can involve denying some intuitive claims. (See also Weinberg et. al. MS, §1.1 on this point.)

Also worth noting is that global and local versions of this symptom may be distinguished. The global version says that intuitions considered en masse provide starting points for philosophical enquiry, also considered wholesale. A local version says that intuitions about particular things provide starting points for (some or all) particular philosophical enquiries. Adopting a local version of the starting point claim allows for the possibility that some of the intuitions which are starting points in (say) modal epistemology could be the upshot of other philosophical enquiries in (say) modal metaphysics.

The second symptom in bundle four is that reliance on intuitions is taken to be characteristic, or at least *distinctive*, of traditional Western analytic philosophy. Goldman (2007, p. 1), for example, writes: 'One thing that distinguishes philosophical methodology from the methodology of the sciences is its extensive and avowed reliance on intuition.' Weinberg et. al. (MS) write: 'That analytic philosophers typically – perhaps even stereotypically – rely on intuitions is hardly a claim in much need of defense.' There is, of course, a connection between it's being *analytic* philosophy that is supposedly so distinguished and some of the bundle two symptoms – most obviously, those involving conceptual competence or analysis. (See e.g. Stich 1988, p. 578.)

The third symptom in the fourth bundle is that intuitions are or provide evidence and/or warrant, particularly (although not necessarily exclusively) in philosophy. 'If something is intuitive, this tends to count in favor of a position, and if something is counterintuitive, this tends to count against the position' writes Liao (2008, p. 248; note that Liao is here merely reporting a typical practice). Goldman notes that '[t]he evidential weight accorded to intuition is often very high ...' (see e.g. 2007, p. 1). And Kripke advocates treating intuition this way: 'Of course, 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' (1981, p. 42).

II What's Up?

Obviously, one needn't assume that these symptoms go along together in the sense that something will either possess them all or lack them all. One needn't even assume that symptoms in any particular bundle go along together in that sense. But the potential for disconnects is especially clear across bundles. It is easy to see, for example, that a prioricity and commonsensicality differ significantly in extension just by considering theorems of advanced mathematics (a priori but not commonsensical) and truths like *Grass is green* (commonsensical but not a priori).

It is not uncommon to find a prioricity (and/or related bundle-two symptoms) regarded as characteristic of things called 'intuitions' by certain authors, while other authors characterise something called 'intuition' primarily by appeal to commonsensicality (and/or other bundle-one symptoms). All of Williamson's 'crude empiricists', 'crude rationalists' and 'linguistic or conceptual philosophers' (2007, pp. 2-3) are apparently doing this. I of course am not claiming these are

the *only* ways that things called ‘intuitions’ get characterized, only that they are two *common* and, perhaps even more importantly, *classic* ways. (At least, they are sufficiently classic to merit Williamson’s focus on – possibly somewhat caricatured – versions thereof at the outset of his discussion.) More recent, metaphilosophically sophisticated characterization attempts are interesting, but in my opinion these two broad approaches capture how many – perhaps even most – of the first-order philosophical appeals to ‘intuitions’ are intended. The following passage from Symons 2008 conveys a similar message:

Contemporary accounts of intuition oscillate between the folksy and the rarefied: Intuition is sometimes understood to be a peculiarly aprioristic faculty while elsewhere it is portrayed as the most ordinary, commonsense level of thinking; accessible to all of us. George Bealer describes intuition as a *sui generis* propositional attitude which, at the same time, serves as the source of all (non-stipulative) a priori knowledge. (2002, 73) Elsewhere, we find “intuition” and “commonsense” being used interchangeably. Saul Kripke, for example, contrasts intuitions with ‘philosopher’s notions’ and regularly identifies intuitive content as the kind of thing to which the folk would readily agree. (1980, 42)

(Page 41 of *Naming and Necessity* is also highly relevant to this claim.)

If this much is granted – i.e. that there are two quite different, but classic, ways of characterizing things called ‘intuitions’ – how should we diagnose this situation? Are there, perhaps, two quite different, but equally classic, types of *competing theory* of some one thing, intuition? This may be the approach that leads Williamson to discuss the view of the ‘crude empiricists’ that intuition is simply folk prejudice and that of the ‘linguistic or conceptual philosophers’ that it is the deliverance of linguistic or conceptual competence in the same breath, without suggesting that the two groups might be discussing different things.

This option strikes me as an uncharitable, however. It *could* be that one or other kind of characterization is straightforwardly incorrect. But it would be pretty surprising if careful, intelligent people were systematically mistaking the deliverances of conceptual competence for folk prejudice, or vice versa. More charitable interpretations of the divergence are available.

The first is that there is some ambiguity and/or other kind of contextual shiftiness in the term ‘intuition’ as used by philosophers. It could be that, as used by some philosophers, it refers to (approximately) the deliverances of common sense, while in the mouths of others it refers it refers to (approximately) the deliverances of conceptual competence. This is charitable in that neither tradition need be straightforwardly wrong about anything, on this view, except insofar as the different users find themselves *arguing* about whose account of ‘intuition’ is correct (i.e. tacitly or otherwise adopting the uncharitable interpretative hypothesis described above). Perhaps we would have to attribute further mistakes were each group to claim some kind of special status for ‘intuition’ that can only be played by one of the two candidates (being *uniquely* distinctive of or foundational for analytical philosophical enquiry, for example). But I’m not aware of any particular evidence that that is happening.

A test (an imperfect one, but a test nonetheless) for such shiftiness is whether or not one can hear as acceptable a sentence which would need to involve a shift in meaning in order to come out true. For example, evidence of the ambiguity in 'bank' can be given by pointing out that it can be acceptable to say 'The ducks are near the bank but not near the bank', where the first occurrence of 'bank' refers to a river bank and the second to a financial institution. Claims like 'This is an intuition although it is not an intuition' are difficult to make sense of in the absence of cues, but to my ears there is nothing wrong with 'This is something I rationally intuit, but I admit that it is not intuitive', and once cued with this latter sentence, the former sounds potentially acceptable (at least to me).

A second relatively charitable interpretation, which certainly wouldn't require the acceptability of this kind of sentence, is that 'intuition' is semantically general, and its extension includes (again, approximately) *both* deliverances of common sense and deliverances of conceptual competence. It could then be suggested that philosophers who might appear to be using 'intuition' to refer *only* to the deliverances of linguistic competence are in fact simply using the semantically general term but more-or-less deliberately ignoring some of the things that it covers, because they are not relevant to the discussion. Bealer is explicit that he thinks the extension of 'intuition' includes more than just the 'rational' intuitions which are of most interest to him.

On this type of view, *intuition* might be regarded as a kind of family resemblance concept, such that possessing enough of the symptoms in bundles one to four qualifies something as an intuition (where certain symptoms might be weighted or otherwise of particular significance), but it is difficult or impossible to give any neat and tidy necessary and sufficient conditions on intuitionhood.

It may be somewhat indeterminate which of the charitable hypotheses is correct, at least for many philosophical uses of 'intuition'. And I suspect that even if one or other hypothesis could be settled upon, a healthy amount of semantic indeterminacy should probably be attributed to the target word in any case. For example, some philosophers do not explicitly define 'intuition' but appear to be tapping into a bundle-two-driven conception, but without it being entirely clear just *which* bundle-two type symptoms are characteristic of intuition. (§2 of Markie 2008 uses 'intuition' in roughly this way. Markie intentionally doesn't give a precise definition: he is overlooking a tradition which isn't always precise on this point.) If we were to take such uses as different in meaning from other, bundle-one-driven, uses (as classically exemplified by e.g. Kripke 1981), as on the ambiguity/shiftiness hypothesis, it would still be reasonable to take the word's meaning as somewhat indeterminate with respect to *which* bundle-two symptoms are really doing the work.

I do not propose to concern myself much here with which of the two charitable hypotheses is correct. I in fact think the first is probably closer to the truth. I think in particular that some philosophers use 'intuition' in a bundle-one driven sense, whereby commonsensicality and/or related features are important for whether or not it counts as an 'intuition', but features related to a prioricity is irrelevant. And I think that some philosophers use 'intuition' in a bundle-two

driven sense, whereby a prioricity and/or related features are important but features related to commonsensicality are irrelevant. (Let me stress again, though, that I am not suggesting these are the *only* uses.) But formulating a correct semantic theory about philosophers' use of the word 'intuition' is not, however, my goal (interesting thought the pursuit of that goal would be).

I shall talk for the remainder of this paper as if the shiftiness hypothesis were correct, and 'intuition' has (at least) two different extensions. But readers should feel free to substitute my talk of (e.g.) *the bundle-one-driven sense of 'intuition'* with talk of *uses of 'intuition' which are best understood as (implicitly or explicitly) restricted to bundle-one-type intuitions, despite being semantically general.*

Towards the end of this paper, I will be defending intuitions in the bundle-two-driven sense against some now-standard objections to epistemic reliance on 'intuitions'. It may well be possible to defend intuitions in the bundle-one-driven sense against similar objections, but that is not part of my project. My aims are, firstly, to make clear that the best way to make progress in this rather murky territory is to divide the challenge to 'intuition' into a *series* of challenges targeted on particular conceptions of intuition, and then secondly, to begin the task of addressing those challenges as directed against the conception that interests me most.

One reason why one might expect a certain amount of unclarity confusion or conflation in this arena is that 'intuitions' in both the bundle-one-driven sense and the bundle-two driven sense could naturally be – and, indeed, are – associated with the symptoms in bundles three and four. One can see, for example, how being immediate₂ might be associated with being commonsensical or everyday. Often, when asked for an opinion on something one hasn't previously considered, on which common sense delivers a verdict, the commonsense answer is (the) one that seems natural and compelling. (Of course, not everything that is obvious or natural to someone who has undergone years of training and reflection will be commonsensical, and vice versa. So these are certainly not *the same* symptom.) Plausibly, it is also often not clear to someone who is in fact relying on common sense where his or her belief comes from (either psychologically or epistemically speaking). Common sense beliefs are likely to be ones we imbibe without particularly noting their provenance or thinking about their justification. So immediacy₁ is also predictably associated with 'intuition' in the bundle-one-driven sense.

In a similar vein, philosophical associations between immediacy₁ and a prioricity (and related bundle-two symptoms) are not hard to come by. At least some a priori knowledge or justification must be epistemically non-inferential according to those who follow Bonjour (1998) in thinking that an unacceptably radical scepticism is the only alternative to denying this. Nor is it unusual to hear the deliverances of a priori reasoning described as 'compelling' or 'natural' or in similar terms. One might think, for example, of Gödel's famous claim that the axioms of set theory 'force themselves upon us as being true' (Gödel 1947), or of the supposed connections between a prioricity and 'self-evidence' (see e.g. Audi 1998, pp. 101-3). Hence the association with immediacy₂ is predictable too.

Likewise, the claim that philosophers get (at least some of) their starting points, foundations and/or warrants from a priori sources is hardly an uncommon one. Certainly Plato and Descartes believed that a priori sources could provide both warrants and epistemic foundations. But then neither is it unusual, in contemporary philosophy at least, to hear it said that these same bundle-four symptoms are exhibited by the commonsensical or 'platitudinous'. The work of Jackson (see e.g. 1998) and Lewis (see e.g. 1972) demonstrates a clear commitment to this association.

I have so far been ignoring the issue of whether 'intuitions' are (taken to be) propositions, attitudes, acts or processes. My suspicion is that in order to accommodate the various uses that philosophers make of the word 'intuition', we had better allow that any of these things can count as 'intuitions', though (and again there is probably some indeterminacy here) it may be best to say that different senses of 'intuition' are in play when these different ontological categories are in its extension. This is not a dimension of difference that need particularly concern us here, however, since it does not impact upon the main distinction that I wish to draw between bundle-one-driven and bundle-two-driven senses of 'intuition'. I don't mean to foreclose the question of whether there is more than one sense of each kind, but for ease of expression I shall continue to talk as if there is exactly one of each.

To conclude this section, I would briefly like to draw attention to the difference between something's being 'an intuition' and its being 'intuitive'. The word intuitive seems to me much more closely related to 'intuition' in the bundle-one-driven sense (and to the bundle three symptoms) than it is to 'intuition' in the bundle-two-driven sense. That 'intuitive'ness is associated with one but not the other sense of 'intuition' is an important (though not, as far as I can tell, widely appreciated) piece of evidence that there are substantial differences between them.

III A Simple View

Before I move on, I should discuss a simple view about what 'intuitions' are which has not thus far impacted upon my discussion. I discuss it in order to explain why I don't think it *should* have an impact. I think the view is incorrect. The view in question is that an intuition is simply any old belief or disposition to believe. Something along these lines is suggested by some remarks in Lewis 1983, but a clear statement of it is given by Van Inwagen (1997):

Our "intuitions" are simply our beliefs—or perhaps, in some cases, the tendencies that make certain beliefs attractive to us, that "move" us in the direction of accepting certain propositions without taking us all the way to acceptance.

Sosa (1998), Williamson (2007) and Ichikawa (MS) are also sympathetic to this view. It is, in effect, a rather extreme version of the semantic generality hypothesis.

Why would one believe this? Well, one datum that can be offered in its support (see Ichikawa MS) is that all kinds of things can be labelled ‘intuitions’ or ‘intuitive’. Not only necessary things count; contingent claims are often classified as ‘intuitions’ (or the kinds of propositions p such that one can have an intuition that p). Dupré (1996) for example, describes: ‘... the natural intuition that humans are, sometimes, causally efficacious in the world around them.’ Nor are only a priori knowable claims so classified; Machery (2009) writes: ‘Many might even have the intuition that water is essentially H₂O: necessarily, something is water if and only if it is constituted by molecules of H₂O.’ The things classified as ‘intuitions’ may, similarly, be either general (*knowledge requires belief*) or particular (*Smith does not know that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket*⁴). The view that intuitions are simply beliefs or dispositions to believe accommodates this wide variety of applications of the term ‘intuition’ in a simple, unified way.

Allowing mere dispositions to believe to count as intuitions is an important element of the view, for sometimes it is tempting to categorize things as intuitive but fail to believe them (Basic Law V or naïve comprehension, for example). However, the corresponding problem in the other direction cannot be similarly handled. If one has a belief that one is *not* willing to categorize as an ‘intuition’, the view is in trouble. And it seems that philosophers do indeed talk this way. For example, here is Weatherson (2003): ‘It does not seem to be the case, in the relevant sense, that $643 \times 721 = 463603$. Unless one is rather good at mental arithmetic, there is nothing that 643×721 seems to be; it is out of the reach of intuition.’ Yet this arithmetical proposition is something that Weatherson believes.

To accommodate this kind of data about how philosophers use ‘intuition’, we might weaken the claim so as to allow that the inclusive sense of ‘intuition’ under consideration here is not the *only* one. But then the view loses its appealing simplicity and unificatory power.

Moreover, the supposedly motivating datum regarding the variety of uses of ‘intuition’ can be more conservatively accommodated by the view I am defending, on which there is at least one sense of ‘intuition’ on which neither necessity nor a prioricity is required of ‘intuitions’, and both general and particular propositions may count. The bundle-one-driven sense that I’ve described is such a sense. That sometimes necessity and a prioricity *are* thought to be required of intuitions (as in e.g. Bealer) need not be interpreted as philosophical error, but can be attributed to the fact that philosophers who claim this are just talking about something else.

For the remainder of this paper I shall be defending a particular account of ‘intuition’ in the bundle-two-driven sense against challenges to epistemic reliance on ‘intuition’. These challenges cannot be made out in the absence of a clear conception of *what it is that is being challenged*. Weinberg et. al. (MS) note that:

⁴ See Gettier 1963.

Those who would challenge intuitions risk finding themselves with ... a dilemma: operate without a clear definition of intuition and risk the charge of obscurity, or contend under the rubric of some precise formulation of intuitionhood, and risk being responded to with a chorus of “oh, well, *that’s* not what *we* had in mind”.

But this is no dilemma. The second choice may be perfectly reputable and appropriate, even if a smaller number of philosophers are then affected by one’s criticisms. There’s no mileage in being unclear (or worse, guilty of conflation or confusion) simply in the hope of making it *appear* that one’s criticisms are widely applicable. Weinberg et. al. do not think of themselves as taking the second choice, but they do say that for their purposes they will take intuitions to be (approximately) those things which play the role determined by the bundle-four symptoms.⁵

IV The First Challenge: Unclarity

The challenges to epistemic reliance on ‘intuition’ are many and varied, and I shall address only a sample of typical ones in this paper. These are the following:

- (1) The nature, workings, target(s) and/or source(s) of intuitions are unclear.
- (2) Why should we think intuitions are reliable, epistemically trustworthy, a source of evidence, etc.?
- (3) Intuitions exhibit cultural variation/intra-personal instability/inter-personal clashes.
- (4) There is no way to calibrate intuitions against anything else.
- (5) It is not naturalistically respectable to give epistemic weight to intuitions.

Challenges in the vicinity of (1) are discussed by e.g. Goldman 2007, Cummins 1999 and Williamson 2007, the third of whom expresses considerable disquiet about the situation (p. 215):

“Intuition” plays a major role in contemporary analytic philosophy’s self-understanding. Yet there is no agreed or even popular account of how intuition works, no accepted explanation of the hoped-for correlation between our having an intuition that P and its being true that P. Since analytic philosophy prides itself on its rigor, this blank space in its foundations looks like a methodological scandal.

(Note also the claim that using ‘intuition’ is (one of) analytic philosophy’s distinguishing features, and the presupposition that it supplies philosophical foundations.) These sorts of complaints may be reasonable, insofar as they are targeted on authors who want to rely on ‘intuition’ but have not defined it and

⁵ Interestingly, this puts another interpretative hypothesis on the table: the hypothesis that ‘intuition’ is a functional term, with some bundle(s) of symptoms characterizing the relevant functional role and, perhaps, various different kinds of thing serving as realizers of that role. Versions of the semantic generality view might look like this; they might characterize the role in terms of the bundle-four symptoms, and then say that the deliverances of common sense and the deliverances of conceptual competence both realize the role, so that both fall within the extension of ‘intuition’. I am grateful to a member of my audience at UBC for discussion of this sort of functionalist approach.

explained what it does and how it works. (Of course, it wouldn't be fair to demand e.g. a complete account of exactly which propositions which can be intuited, under the guise of seeking a characterization of intuition's 'targets'. But some idea of the *kinds* of things it can deliver is not too much to ask for.)

I have argued (in Jenkins 2008 and elsewhere) for an account of a priori knowledge and justification which, I think, helps make the requisite sense of intuition in the bundle-two-driven sense. I propose that conceptual examination can be an a priori way of learning truths about the world, because the concepts under examination can *encode information* about the world. That is to say, their structure and the relationships between them *mirror* the world's structure and the relationships between things in the world.⁶ This means that facts about the world can be read off our concepts, much as information about the world can be read off a map of the world.

Furthermore (or so I argue) this mirroring of the world's structure is not an accident. It occurs because our concepts are sensitive to our experience of the world, which in turn is sensitive to the structure of the world. (This is what I call the 'grounding' of concepts in experience.) Experience thus plays a crucial role in my account of the nature of intuition in the currently salient sense. It is only because of the crucial mediating role of experience that conceptual examination counts as a source of knowledge and justification. The knowledge and justification arrived at are thus fairly described as *empirical*. This to some extent problematizes the claim that the resulting knowledge and justification are a priori. If 'a priori' means simply 'non-empirical', nothing can be both empirical and a priori. However, I argue (see e.g. Jenkins 2008) that other common definitions of 'a priori' actually *do* allow for some knowledge and some justification to be both a priori and empirical, and that it is both more useful and quite in keeping with traditional thinking about the a priori to adopt one of these definitions.

For example, if we say that a priori knowledge is independent of empirical evidence (rather than independent of experience altogether), we can argue that knowledge secured through the examination of concepts which are empirically grounded is (admittedly empirical but also) a priori, since the role played by experience in grounding our concepts is *not an evidential role*. (Evidence is evidence for propositions. Concepts, and even conceptual schemes, are not propositions. See Jenkins 2008.) We also preserve other characteristic features of a prioricity: conceptual examination is sufficient for knowledge of certain propositions without empirical testing, and this knowledge is different in kind (not just different in degree, as e.g. Quine and Devitt would have it) from ordinary empirical knowledge.

⁶ I do not propose that this mirroring relation need be entirely straightforward; for example, I don't require that every predicate-like concept correspond to some worldly property. It might instead be that some of our predicate-like concepts are compounds of more basic concepts which *do* correspond to worldly properties, and that these more complex concepts encode (or contribute to the encoding in our conceptual schemes of) information about *those* properties. (See Jenkins 2008.) For the sake of clarity, I shall ignore such complications in what follows.

This is not the appropriate place for any detailed exposition of my views about the nature of a priori knowledge and justification. All I want to point out in the current context is that one can understand 'intuition(s)' in the bundle-two-driven sense as consisting in the act, process and/or deliverances of the examination of empirically grounded concepts. So my account of the a priori delivers up something to say in response to the challenge that the nature or workings of intuition are unclear. Plenty is said about the source(s), too: the proximal sources of intuitions are our concepts, and the distal source is experience. The targets are specified only insofar as the account is taken to apply to all a priori knowable propositions; the targets of intuition are those subject matters (including, I take it, mathematics, logic and some other parts of philosophy) that are knowable a priori. But, as I mentioned earlier, it's not reasonable to demand exact details as to the scope of intuition.

In my view, this line respects the a prioricity symptom of intuition, as well as the association with conceptual competence and/or analysis. Necessity is commonly associated with a prioricity and with being the kind of thing that can be learned through conceptual examination, so the necessity symptoms associated with intuition are also accommodated. (I explore these in Jenkins forthcoming.) There is no special faculty associated with conceptual examination on my view, so the final symptom from bundle four is being dropped. But I think that preserving the first three symptoms is easily enough for continuity with the tradition of bundle-two-driven thinking about intuition, and that the association with belief in a special faculty is a rather undesirable one, with which defenders of 'intuitions' who hope to be taken seriously (particularly by those who call themselves 'naturalists': see §5 below) would do well to break ties.

This way of understanding the nature of intuition in the bundle-two-driven sense could, I think, be of some help in moving forward the debate between Goldman and Kornblith concerning the scope and importance of intuition. Goldman (e.g. 2007) argues that philosophical reliance on intuition is a way of finding out about our concepts (though not about the things of which they are concepts), and that as such it is of significance to philosophers. (That Goldman has a bundle-two-driven conception of intuition is evinced by this assumed relationship between concepts and intuition, as well as ***)

Kornblith (2007), on the other hand, writes:

[O]ur concepts are not plausibly viewed as the target of philosophical understanding ... it is the extra-mental phenomena themselves which are the real targets of philosophical analysis: knowledge, justification, the good, the right, and so on, not anyone's concepts of these things. ... The standard philosophical procedure [i.e. reliance on intuition] cannot be redeemed by viewing it as an attempt to provide an understanding of our mental representations instead of the phenomena which they are representations of.

The structure of this debate suggests that we have to choose between thinking of intuition as a way of finding out about the world or a way of finding about our representations of the world (our concepts). Kornblith and Goldman agree that it can't be the latter (see e.g. Kornblith, Goldman) and disagree about its significance if it is merely the former.

My view is that intuition in the relevant sense can be a way of finding out about the world *via* the examination of concepts. So it is not the case that we face the kind of choice that forms the background to the Goldman-Kornblith debate. Our concepts don't float free from the phenomena which they represent; they are sensitive to the world because they are sensitive to experience.

One of Kornblith's reasons for denying that intuition is a way of finding out (much) about the world is that he thinks (many) interesting philosophical concepts, such as our concepts of knowledge, causality, and responsibility, stand for natural kinds. And natural kinds, he thinks, are not the sorts of things about whose deep natures one can learn by means of conceptual examination. This latter claim is a substantive one, with which I am not sure I agree. But I don't intend to argue that issue here. Nor do I intend to deny that (many) philosophically interesting concepts stand for natural kinds. Conceding both points to Kornblith may require us to allow that he is right about the limitations of the *scope* of intuition as a philosophically useful source of information. But my concern is not with intuition's scope, but with its nature.

Instead, I want to examine another strand in Kornblith's thinking, which if correct does threaten to undermine my account of the nature of intuition *qua* source of justification and knowledge. The question of whether or not philosophically interesting concepts pick out natural kinds is not actually crucial, according to Kornblith (2007):

It really doesn't matter, for present purposes, whether knowledge and other targets of philosophical analysis are natural kinds. ... [E]ven if the topics of philosophical interest typically correspond to ... socially constructed kinds, it remains true that the concepts of the folk, and the concepts of philosophers as well, need not accurately characterize these socially constructed categories. Just as any individual's concept of aluminum may contain substantial errors or omissions, any individual's concept of a semiconductor, or Chippendale furniture, or of socially constructed categories generally, may contain substantial errors or omissions. So the gap between concept and category does not disappear simply because we have moved from natural kind concepts to socially constructed ones. And once we recognize that our concepts, whether the concepts at issue are those of the folk or of theoreticians, may fail to characterize the categories they are concepts of, the philosophical interest of our concepts thereby wanes.

Kornblith is right to note, and I want my account to accommodate, the possibility of intuition's leading us astray. On accounts of intuition whereby it has something to do with the examination of concepts, i.e. accounts the kind Kornblith here attacks, the possibility of possessing concepts that 'contain errors or omissions' can be granted as one way in which intuition can go wrong. (In fact I think there are several; see Jenkins 2008.)

However, it is simply not true that the mere *possibility of error* removes the epistemic interest of concepts as a source of information about the world. The fact that there is a 'gap' between 'concept and category' is no more worrying than the fact that there is a 'gap' between how things *look* or *sound* to us and how they actually are. The fallibility of ordinary sense experience is not a reason to regard it as philosophically uninteresting, or to doubt that it is a (generally) reliable

epistemic source. What is required is not the *absence* of any *gap* whatsoever, but the *existence* of some sort of epistemically relevant *connection* between concepts and the things of which they are concepts. I believe there is such a connection, and that it is mediated by experience.

There is more to say about why we should think intuition actually *is* a reliable epistemic guide to the world (as opposed to why we should reject Kornblith's reasons for thinking it isn't). I shall come back to this question in the next section. First, however, I should note that I am not the only philosopher who explicitly ties an account of (some kind of) intuition to a corresponding account of a priori knowledge and justification. Bealer, for example, does the same. And indeed, Bealer has some resources to offer a response to Kornblith which is somewhat similar to the one I just described.

Bealer (e.g. 2000) argues that 'determinate possession' of a concept guarantees reliability (which he admits falls short of infallibility, but takes to be sufficient for justification) in the application of that concept across a range of cases. Indeed, determinate possession of a concept is so defined as to be possible only if one is so reliable. Hence he can address the challenge to explain the nature and the workings of intuition by saying that intuitions are reliable seemings which result from the determinate possession of concepts. And because (unlike me) he does not think experience plays any epistemic role in this process, he can straightforwardly say that this is also an account of how a priori knowledge and justification are possible.

My primary concern about Bealer's way of doing things is that he offers no satisfying account of how it comes about that we determinately possess any concept. Given how special determinate concept possession is on his view (so special as to guarantee reliability in a certain kind of judgment), failing to explain how we have it means that a key element of our success in securing a priori justification or knowledge is left unexplained.⁷ My appeal to experience in explaining how concepts come to be *grounded* is supposed to fill just this kind of explanatory lacuna.

V The Remaining Challenges

Even supposing that the nature of intuition and its deliverances is clear, it is fair to ask why we should believe that intuition so conceived is a reliable way of learning truths about the world. Relatedly, one can reasonably question the evidential status of intuitions (that is, one can reasonably ask whether having the intuition that *p* is any kind of evidence that *p* is true), and in general whether intuition so conceived will exhibit the metaphilosophical (bundle-four) symptoms.

Goldman (2007) raises challenges in this vicinity, in order to explain why he thinks intuition can only be a source of information about concepts (and not

⁷ For more details, see Jenkins 2008.

about the things of which they are concepts). In the following passage, he is challenging the view that intuition is a source of knowledge concerning Platonic forms in particular, but an essentially similar challenge could be raised for any claim to the effect that intuition enables us to secure knowledge and/or justified belief about a non-conceptual realm:

If someone experiences an intuition that the protagonist in a selected Gettier example doesn't know the designated proposition, why should this intuitional experience be evidence that the form KNOWLEDGE is such that the imaginary protagonist's belief in this proposition doesn't "participate" in this form? What connection is there ... ?

On my view, having an intuition that *p* is reliably correlated with, and is evidence that, *p*. In answer to Goldman's final question (or rather, to the equivalent question directed against my view rather than a defender of intuition as a source of knowledge of Platonic forms), I postulate empirically mediated connections between the world's structure and the structure of our concepts, which is what secures the reliability and evidential status of intuitions in the bundle-two-driven sense.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Jenkins 2008) one can run an analogue of the No-Miracles Argument in support of this view. The standard No-Miracles Argument (see e.g. Putnam, Boyd) runs along roughly the following lines:

1. Our best scientific theories are extremely useful/successful.
 2. This usefulness/success would be a miracle if the theories weren't true.
 3. We shouldn't believe in miracles.
- Therefore
4. Our best scientific theories are true.

My analogue runs as follows:

1. (At least some of) our concepts are extremely useful/successful.
 2. This usefulness/success would be a miracle if the structure of those concepts weren't mirroring elements of the world's structure.
 3. We shouldn't believe in miracles.
- Therefore
4. The concepts in question mirror the world's structure.

The usefulness of concepts may be regarded as at least partly determined by the role they play in enabling us to formulate and entertain the scientific theories mentioned in the Putnam/Boyd No-Miracles Argument.

If not all concepts can be covered by this argument (i.e. if they are not all useful and/or successful) then we may need to limit the trustworthy kind of intuition to that involving only the examination of such concepts as *are* covered.

The next challenge I want to consider comes from Cummins (1998). Cummins argues that intuition is 'epistemically useless' (p. 126), for *philosophers* at least, since either it cannot be calibrated (checked for correctness) using another,

independent, source as a guide, or it is redundant, because we have another, independent, source of the same information.

Cummins does not define 'intuition' or give any explicit clues as to what he means by it, so it hard to be sure which (if any) of the various candidate properties discussed above he might associate with that term. However, his list of possible *sources* of philosophical intuition suggests some contact with both bundle one and bundle two, since it includes both 'ordinary beliefs' and 'concepts'. But intuition as I am understand it for the purposes of this part of this paper can be calibrated, at least to some extent, using good old-fashioned ordinary empirical confirmation. For example, we have (I think) both an intuitive route and a straight inductive route to the belief that $2+2=4$. Nor is there any reason to think the existence of an alternative route to this information renders the intuitive route redundant. For one thing, why should it be *intuition* that is redundant here rather than ordinary empirical confirmation? For another, being able to discover an object's shape by means of either sight or touch doesn't in any philosophically interesting sense render either sight or touch 'redundant' with respect to this question.

This might be taken to provide something like the kind of 'partial certification' described by Weinberg et. al. (MS), although, as they point out, it could be argued that intuition's reliability across this particular range of cases cannot be projected if there is some reason to think the sample is biased. (I don't know what reason might sensibly be offered here, however.)

Another reasonable reply to the concern about calibration is that it invokes too much epistemic internalism. The demand for calibration amounts to a demand for double-checking, and a certain kind of epistemic externalist⁸ can reply that one *needn't* double-check in this way in order for something to be a source of knowledge. (A reply along these lines is outlined in Goldman 2007, §3.) A young child, for example, can secure visual knowledge without undertaking any obligation to calibrate her visual apparatus against alternative sources of the same information. Perhaps the situation would be different if evidence could be provided that the faculty in question was *unreliable*. I shall argue shortly, however, that the familiar kinds of putative evidence to that effect is not such as to give rise to this kind of problem.

Cummins also suggests that if one understands intuitions as 'generated by concepts' (p. 119), and if concepts are taken to be mental representations (which is my preferred view), then concepts can 'generate philosophical intuitions only by functioning as a pointer to something else: an explicit or tacit theory ...' (p. 121). In which case, he suggests, epistemic reliance on intuitions simply amounts to reliance on one's (explicit or tacit) theory. But no argument is offered as to *why* concepts (understood as mental representations) can only generate intuitions by functioning as pointers to something else. Concepts, as I understand them, are capable of encoding information about the world which we can read off through conceptual examination (see Jenkins 2008.)

⁸ See Jenkins 2008 for my preferred take on the characterization of externalism.

The third challenge under consideration in this section states that we have evidence that (at least some kinds of) intuitions are unreliable, because intuitions differ between people, and even a single person's intuitions can vary over time. It is certainly true that philosophers report 'clashes of intuition', though it is less clear that they are reporting clashes of intuition in the bundle-two-driven sense that interests me in this paper. The notion of intuition discussed in certain influential works of 'experimental philosophy' (such as Weinberg, Nichols and Stich 2001) is clearly pretty distant from the bundle-two conception of intuitions. (This possibility is also noted by Russell.) Weinberg, Nicholas and Stich take ordinary people's considered verdicts on a particular thought-experimental case to be 'intuitions' in the sense that interests them, without regard to whether those verdicts are a priori or the deliverance of conceptual examination or otherwise possessed of bundle two symptoms.

Even if intuitions in the relevant sense sometimes *are* in tension with one another, we should bear in mind that the number of clashes is going to be very small compared with the *massive* (and unreported) agreement of intuitions (in the relevant sense) among philosophers, and indeed everyone else. According to the account I develop in my 2008, propositions like *All bachelors are unmarried*, *All vixens are female* and $2+2=4$ are among those that can be known via conceptual examination. There is overwhelming agreement in intuitions on such uncontroversial propositions as these, and there are overwhelmingly many such propositions. Focusing on the small number of cases where we might be able to point to non-agreement in the deliverances of intuition (in the bundle-two-driven sense) is natural and sensible, because these cases are interesting and potentially problematic. But it shouldn't lead to a skewed sense of their significance. To argue that intuition is unreliable (in any epistemically problematic way) on the grounds that intuition *sometimes* goes wrong is no better than to argue that vision is unreliable (in an epistemically problematic way) on the grounds that we are *sometimes* subject to optical illusions.

Other responses to the challenge, which could work regardless of how intuitions are construed, abound. For example, there is the thought (developed in Sosa 1998) that the mini-fictions told to subjects to elicit 'intuitive' responses may get filled out in different ways by different subjects, so that when they are asked whether in the envisaged scenario *p* is true, they are (in effect) answering different questions (that is, questions about different envisaged scenarios) rather than giving different answers to the same question.

Alternatively, one could argue that the supposedly responses given by different groups of subjects concern slightly different concepts, both (or all) of which get expressed using the same *word* 'knows'. This line is suggested by Jackson (1998) and defended by Sosa (2009, §3).

Finally, of course, one can simply point out that even if there is genuine disagreement and that means somebody is wrong, *infallibility* is not the standard for provision of evidence/warrant. Cautious use of intuitions, restricted (for

example) to cases where divergence has not been found, may still be perfectly respectable.

The final challenge I want to consider concerns naturalistic respectability. 'Intuition, after all, is a traditional hallmark of rationalism, an oft-mentioned source of a priori warrant. ... How can a priori warrant be reconciled with epistemological naturalism?', asks Goldman (2007).

Addressing this challenge requires that we first catch our naturalist. What kinds of doctrines that go by the name 'naturalism' could conflict with belief in intuitions (in the bundle-two-driven sense)? Most obviously, there are those who call themselves 'naturalists' simply because they reject a priori knowledge and justification. They won't be happy with intuitions if they are associated with the a priori.

Of course, if I'm right that intuitions can be or provide a priori knowledge and/or justified belief, then intuitions going to be unacceptable to naturalists in this sense. But I offer an account of how that such things are possible which renders the knowledge and justification in question ultimately empirical. So this is no *ordinary* kind of a priorism, and I certainly do not believe in any kind of special faculty or in any unexplained epistemic powers or virtues. If these naturalists are motivated by *empiricism*, they should consider that my proposal respects empiricism, *whilst accommodating* the apparently distinctive features of intuition in the bundle-two-driven sense.

Others mean by 'naturalism' the view that philosophy, or perhaps *all* disciplines, should be conducted as the natural sciences are (or should be) conducted. On the assumption that reliance on intuition in the relevant sense is not part of the methodology of the natural sciences, this kind of 'naturalism' could also cause problems for a commitment to the methodological appropriateness of relying on intuition in (for example) philosophy.

But in fact, it is plausible that scientists both do and should rely on intuition (in the relevant sense) all the time. On the assumption, which I am happy to make, that truths of mathematics and logic are the kinds of things that can be known intuitively, any scientist who ever uses some mathematics or some logic (even implicitly) could be relying on intuition.

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