

# Intuition, Revelation, and Relativism

*Steven D. Hales*

## Abstract

This paper defends the view that philosophical propositions are merely relatively true, i.e. true relative to a doxastic perspective defined at least in part by a non-inferential belief-acquiring method. Here is the strategy: first, the primary way that contemporary philosophers defend their views is through the use of rational intuition, and this method delivers non-inferential, basic beliefs which are then systematized and brought into reflective equilibrium. Second, Christian theologians use exactly the same methodology, only replacing intuition with revelation. Third, intuition and revelation yield frequently inconsistent output beliefs. Fourth, there is no defensible reason to prefer the dictates of intuition to those of Christian revelation. Fifth, the resulting dilemma means that there are true philosophical propositions, but we can't know them (scepticism), or there are no philosophical propositions and the naturalists are right (nihilism), or relativism is true. I suggest that relativism is the most palatable of these alternatives.

**Keywords:** relativism; intuition; revelation; foundationalism; basic belief; reflective equilibrium

Recent defences of relativism mostly focus on a negative task: that of rebutting various common attacks on relativism, especially the ever-popular argument that relativism is self-refuting.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I sketch a positive strategy for showing the truth of relativism, or, more precisely, the truth of the view that *philosophical* propositions are merely relatively true, true relative to a doxastic perspective defined at least in part by a non-inferential belief-acquiring method.<sup>2</sup> Here is the strategy I will defend: first, the primary way that contemporary philosophers defend their views is through the use of rational intuition, and this method delivers non-inferential, basic beliefs which are then systematized and brought into reflective equilibrium. Second, Christian theologians use exactly the same methodology, only replacing intuition with revelation. Third, intuition and revelation yield frequently inconsistent output beliefs. Fourth, there is no defensible reason to prefer the dictates of intuition to those of Christian revelation. Fifth, the

resulting dilemma means that there are true philosophical propositions, but we can't know them (scepticism), or there are no philosophical propositions and the naturalists are right (nihilism), or relativism is true. This is quite a radical conclusion: either all of intuition-driven philosophy is bogus (option 1) or a waste of time (option 2), or relativism is true. I suggest that relativism is the most palatable of these alternatives.

### Intuition

What are philosophical propositions? I have no general theory or definition, and resort to mere ostension, which is sufficient for present purposes. Philosophers attempt to acquire justified beliefs about propositions such as these:

- Intended harm is morally worse than foreseen but unintended harm.
- Psychological facts supervene on microphysical facts.
- All of the parts of a whole are essential to it.
- Gettier cases prove that knowledge is something other than justified true belief.
- If S knows that P and S knows that P implies Q, then S knows that Q.
- Because of determinism, libertarian free will is impossible.
- 'The F is G' is equivalent to 'There is an F, there is no more than one F, and anything that is an F is G.'
- Multiple realizability arguments refute token identity theories of mind.
- Apparent organization in the universe is best explained by positing an omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent God.
- Physical objects wholly exist at each moment of their existence and endure through time.

It is easy enough to add to this list. The principal method by which philosophers assess such propositions is, ultimately, by appealing to intuition, a sort of intuition that does not depend on the senses or deliver hypotheses about the physical world. For example, David Chalmers explicitly states that 'all these arguments [on the nature of the mind] are based on intuition' (Chalmers, 1996: p. 110). His defence of this is a familiar one: 'I have tried to make clear just how natural and plain these intuitions are, and how forced it is to deny them.' Daniel Dennett contends that much of what philosophy does is bandy about considerations that are meant to promote one or another intuition, what he calls 'intuition pumps'. 'The point of such thought experiments', writes Dennett, 'is to entrain a family of imaginative reflections in the reader that ultimately yields not a formal conclusion, but a dictate of "intuition"' (Dennett, 1984: p. 12). Saul Kripke is quite explicit about the role of intuition. In *Naming and Necessity* he enthuses, 'I think having intuitive content 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, ultimately speaking' (Kripke, 1980: p. 42). Joel Pust writes, 'philosophers typically rely on intuitions for evidence. Moreover, it isn't clear what else they could rely upon' (Pust, 2000: p. 105). The central thesis of Laurence Bonjour's recent book on rationalism is that we must accept rational intuition 'more or less at face value as a genuine and autonomous source of epistemic justification and knowledge', and that 'philosophy is *a priori* if it has any intellectual standing at all'.<sup>3</sup> Even Jaakko Hintikka, a critic of the use of intuition, admits that 'one of the favorite argumentative methods of present-day philosophers is appeal to intuitions' (Hintikka, 1999: p. 127). Let us call the sort of intuition cited above *rational* or *philosophical* intuition, in contrast to empirical intuitions about contingent matters of fact.

'Intuition', like many concepts in contemporary epistemology, finds its origins in Descartes. In the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, rule 3, he writes,

Let us now review all the actions of the intellect by means of which we are able to arrive at a knowledge of things with no fear of being mistaken. We recognize only two: intuition and deduction.

By 'intuition' I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding. Alternatively, and this comes to the same thing, intuition is the indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason.

(Descartes, 1628 (1985))

Descartes claims that he is the first to use 'intuition' in this technical sense. He writes, 'In case anyone should be troubled by my novel use of the term "intuition" and of other terms to which I shall be forced to give a different meaning from their ordinary one, I wish to point out here that I am paying no attention to the way these terms have lately been used in the Schools.'

Descartes assumes that we know necessary truths, when we do, with certainty, that they are indubitable for us. As examples of things one can know by rational intuition he lists 'that [one] exists, that [one] is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, and the like'. It is 'only through intuition' that we arrive at first principles, and it is upon these that deduction operates to yield additional knowledge.

The conception of rational intuition first laid out by Descartes has changed little. He claims that

1. intuition yields knowledge of necessary truths
2. intuitive knowledge is foundational
3. intuitive knowledge is indubitable.

Descartes's idea that intuition is of necessary truths has gained a wide following. For example, George Bealer writes, 'For you to have an intuition that A is just for it to seem to you that A', and then adds that he means *a priori* intuitions about what is necessary (Bealer, 1996: p. 5). Ernest Sosa concurs that intuitions are 'a priori intellectual seemings, which present themselves as necessary' (Sosa, 1996: p. 151). Bonjour writes, 'It is common to refer to the intellectual act in which the necessity of [an analytic] proposition is seen or grasped or apprehended as an act of ... rational intuition' (Bonjour, 1998: p. 102).<sup>4</sup> It is not the case that all necessary truths are known by intuition (mathematical theorems are not, for example), but rather everything we do know via rational intuition is necessarily true. I am very sympathetic to Descartes's second point, that intuitive knowledge is foundational, and have defended this elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Many philosophers, for example those quoted at the beginning of this article who take intuitions as philosophical data, agree.<sup>6</sup>

Descartes's final point, that intuitive knowledge is indubitable, has been repeatedly criticized. Descartes himself defended various principles concerning material objects that he derived 'from the light of reason, so that we cannot doubt their truth' (Descartes, 1644 (1985). Pt III, ¶80). Nevertheless, many of these principles – for example that Euclidean geometry and mathematics explain all natural phenomena – are now considered to be false.<sup>7</sup> Likewise Locke thought intuition showed it to be logically impossible 'that things wholly void of knowledge, and operating blindly, and without any perception, should produce a knowing being',<sup>8</sup> and then along came Darwin. Frege found it intuitive that any property determines a set (a proposition that he thought necessarily true), at least until Russell sent him his famous note. So there is good reason to think that intuition is fallible. Yet let's ask the more radical question: given that intuition delivers basic beliefs about (putative) necessary truths, why should we trust it *at all*? That is, we might use other basic methods of gaining beliefs about morality, metaphysics, mentality, justification, and so on. Why settle on *intuition*?

One sort of answer is that nobody takes any other method seriously. For example, Paul Boghossian praises the widespread belief-acquiring methods of observation and deduction, and promptly concludes that '[there is] nearly universal agreement about which epistemic principles are true' (Boghossian, 2001: p. 4). Perhaps among professional analytic philosophers there is such consensus. Out in the wider world there are many, extremely diverse,

ways to gain beliefs about philosophical propositions, with partisans who insist that their favoured method yields justified beliefs or even knowledge, and detractors who dismiss the same method as sophistry or magic. It is risible to think that there is anything like universal agreement about which epistemic principles are true.

Furthermore, the alternative belief-acquiring method to be discussed presently, namely Christian revelation, is very similar to rational intuition along these dimensions: it supposedly produces basic, non-inferential beliefs, the basic beliefs generated are not the final word, but must be rationally evaluated for consistency, explanatory cohesiveness, and the like in order to achieve reflective equilibrium, and it is taken seriously by a great many people. I mention this last because I am not simply inventing bizarre philosophers' scenarios which might be airily dismissed, but relating empirical facts about how people really come to believe what they do in the real world. The problem is that revelation frequently produces beliefs that are inconsistent with those sanctioned by rationalist philosophy, and so rationalists face the onus of defending rational intuition as the more preferable method.

### **Revelation**

In this section I will discuss Christian revelation. I will attempt to show that, according to mainstream traditions in Christian theology and scholarship, (1) revelation is an epistemic method that yields beliefs about a class of philosophical propositions, (2) the beliefs generated by revelation are foundational ones, upon which reason then operates to produce a more elaborate theology, (3) revelation and rational intuition produce inconsistent results; that is, there are many propositions  $p$  such that a consensus view among mainstream theologians relying on revelation is  $p$  and a majority of rationalist philosophers utilizing rational intuition hold that not- $p$ .

#### *Revelation is an Epistemic Method of Acquiring Beliefs about Philosophical Propositions*

It is an easy matter to show that, historically understood, 'revelation' denotes an epistemic method of coming to acquire certain beliefs. There are a good many controversies about Christian revelation, even for those sympathetic to the concept. One is whether God revealed various truths to some special people in the Middle East about 2,000 years ago and has pretty much kept quiet since or whether all of us have an innate capacity to sense the divine and we just need to tap into this ability. John Calvin defends the latter view. Calvin argues that revelation is a universally available method of gaining beliefs about the divine; whatever training or education might be required to interpret or understand the dictates of revelation, all non-defective

persons have a sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatis*) just as all non-defective persons have sight, hearing, and the like. Indeed, Calvin thinks that the evidence for the *sensus divinitatis* is overwhelming: 'that there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man [are] aware that there is a God.' (Calvin, 1559 (1845): 3.1). Calvin's argument for the universality of the *sensus divinitatis* is the widespread acceptance of some sort of religion in all cultures and locations. Even the fact of pagans, heretics, and animists Calvin takes as a sign of a crude use of the *sensus divinitatis* groping towards the truth of the Christian God.

More recently Richard Swinburne has defended a position more akin to the view that God revealed some things to a select crowd a long time ago, and theology's task since then is a hermeneutical one, to decipher and interpret the writings of God's legitimate prophets. Swinburne's argument for this view is based upon his *a priori* assessment of the character and motivations of God. He finds it *a priori* likely that, if there is a God, he will share knowledge by revelation, that this revelation will be attended by miracles, that it will concern human imperfections and how we have wronged God thereby, that it will show the need for our atonement, and that it will provide information that God became incarnate and how we can use this fact to plead atonement.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Swinburne thinks it *a priori* plausible that the content of revelation will be somewhat ambiguous and opaque – God does not want salvation to be *too* easy; we ought to have to work at it (pp. 94–5).<sup>10</sup> Thus we need the continuing church and theological traditions to help us understand the original revelation. In short, Swinburne's theology is carefully constructed and tailored so that the actual history of Christianity turns out to be more or less how things had to go. He then concludes that there is 'only one serious candidate for having a body of doctrine which is to be believed on the grounds that it is revealed, and that is the Christian revelation' (p. 95).

Whether Calvin's Christian chauvinism or Swinburne's just so stories are right about the nature of revelation, they are both well within the central teaching of Christianity that God revealed *something to someone*, at *some* point, and this revelation was the method by which the recipient of revelation came to acquire knowledge about the content of the revelation. What truths are supposedly apprehended through revelation? Different writers make a variety of claims. Cardinal Newman notes that 'The Catholic Church claims, not only to judge infallibly on religious questions, but to animadvert on opinions in secular matters which bear upon religion, on matters of philosophy, of science, of literature, of history, and it demands our submission to her claim' (Newman, 1892: p. 257). The Catholic Church's pretensions to infallibility on such a wide range of topics are ultimately grounded

in its contention to be in possession of God's revelation, and its claim to be the historical (and most trustworthy) continuer of the original Christian community. However, not all theologians make such sweeping claims on behalf of revealed knowledge. Primarily the propositions supposedly delivered by revelation are about the philosophy of mind (for example that human beings have souls, that these souls have certain properties such as location, that we survive our deaths via our souls), ethics (for example that we have certain duties of charity or forgiveness, that we are mired in original sin, that the death of an innocent person can atone for our moral failings), metaphysics (that there is a Heaven and a Hell, that there are invisible spirits that affect our lives like angels and demons), and the nature of the divine (for example that there is a God, that God loves us, that God is triune). In short, revelation produces beliefs about philosophical propositions, many of the same ones that secular philosophers assess through the methods of rational intuition and logical argument.

*Revelation-Generated Beliefs are Foundational and Basic*

Historically, revelation has been understood as a method that produces epistemically basic, non-inferential beliefs. Etienne Gilson notes as much in his fine study of the history of revelation in the Middle Ages: 'To such men as St. Anselm and St. Augustine, religious faith is there, objectively defined in its contents by Revelation, as a reality wholly independent from their own personal preferences ... just as scientists accept observable facts as the very stuff which they have to understand, those religious geniuses accept the data of Revelation as the given facts with they have to understand' (Gilson, 1938: p. 32). Contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion defend this traditional view. Richard Niebuhr likens revelation to Cartesian first principles: 'in dealing with revelation we refer to something in our history to which we always return as containing our first certainty. It is our "*cogito ergo sum*"' (Niebuhr, 1962: p. 140). He goes on to assert that the content of revelation is 'self-evidencing'. Nothing else is epistemically prior to the data delivered by the method of revelation, as Karl Jaspers also maintains. He writes that the possibility of revelation cannot be deduced *a priori*, and that revelation 'precedes all reasoning' (Jaspers, 1967: p. 27). 'The truth of revelation is established only by revelation itself' (p. 27). Jaspers does not think that this is evidence of vicious circularity so much as a statement of the foundational, self-justifying nature of religious revelation.

Among contemporary philosophers of religion, Alvin Plantinga and William Alston are the best-known defenders of the view that the beliefs that revelation produces are non-inferential ones. Alston defends the idea that there is a belief-acquiring method that he calls 'Christian Mystical Practice' (CMP). CMP is a matter of forming perceptual beliefs about God in a way that is concordant with the chief traditions of mainstream Christianity.

Alston stresses conformity with the Christian tradition because he, like many other Christian writers, is concerned with how one can exclude the exotic teachings of, say, James Jones or the Heaven's Gate cult, who claim to have received a revelation from God, while keeping the teachings of Jesus or Paul, who also claimed to be in possession of revealed truth. Alston gives a lengthy, general defence of the need for one's beliefs to fit into socially established doxastic practices, but this is not relevant to the current discussion. Crucial for our purposes is that Alston defends the existence of a mystical experience of God that gives rise to propositional beliefs (that God is doing X or desires Y); it is this experience that I have been including under the general umbrella of 'revelation'.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Alston's CMP generates what he calls properly basic beliefs (Alston, 1991: p. 196).

Plantinga is even more explicit and detailed in his assertion that the beliefs formed by revelation (his language: the Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit) are non-inferential ones:

Christian belief is basic; furthermore, Christian belief is *properly* basic, where the propriety in question embraces all three of the epistemic virtues we are considering. On the model, the believer is *justified* in accepting these beliefs in the basic way and *rational* (both internally and externally) in so doing; still further, the beliefs can have warrant, enough warrant for knowledge, when they are accepted in that basic way.<sup>12</sup>

(Plantinga, 2000: p. 259)

There are various ways in which Plantinga's treatment of revelation differs from Alston's, and from that of other Christian writers like Swinburne, and he is careful to lay out all of the distinctions. Everyone has their own theory about why revelation-based beliefs are basic ones, and why it is reasonable to hold them. These differences are irrelevant here, though. What is striking among all of these writers is their considerable agreement: revelation is a method of gaining beliefs about a class of philosophical propositions, these beliefs are non-inferential and basic, and they are often (details vary) epistemically warranted, justified, reasonable to maintain, etc.

#### *Reason is Used to Develop Foundational Beliefs into a System*

It is to be expected that philosophers of religion like Alston, Plantinga, and Swinburne use reason and logical argument to build upon the basic beliefs delivered by revelation and develop a more comprehensive theistic metaphysics and axiology. In doing so, they fall squarely within the mainstream of Christian theology. Gilson, for example, argues that the theological tradition since at least Augustine is that given the idea of revelation as providing



basic knowledge, reason must then operate to provide understanding of the divine. In Augustine's formulation, 'understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand' (Gilson, 1938: p. 19). Niebuhr expands this, claiming that our moral knowledge too is the result of taking the data of revelation and interpreting it through reason (Niebuhr, 1962: p. 171).

In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II defends the use of reason not only to 'successfully intuit and formulate the first principles of being' (§4) but also to take the deliverances of revelation and develop them into a systematic philosophical theology. He writes, 'Revelation ... introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth which stirs the human mind to ceaseless effort; indeed, it impels reason continually to extend the range of its knowledge until it senses that it has done all in its power, leaving no stone unturned' (§14). Once revelation has delivered its data, the task of fundamental theology is to integrate this information with the insights of pure *a priori* philosophy and develop a more comprehensive, systematic view of 'the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence' (§5).

The views of Augustine, Niebuhr, and John Paul II on the relationship between revelation and subsequent reasoning sound very similar to the relationship between intuition and rational reflection. In traditional intuition-driven philosophy, we take our intuitions as data and then subject them to critical scrutiny, testing them for logical consistency, coherence, explanatory connectedness, and so on. Our intuitions are tested against one another, and their logical entailments drawn out and presented as evidence. Weaker, less well-rooted intuitions get overruled, and ultimately eradicated, when one squarely faces the implications of one's deeper, more firmly held intuitions. This is the familiar procedure of example and counterexample. Augustine, Niebuhr, and John Paul II seem to be advocating a parallel procedure for the dictates of faith or revelation. Instead of the method of intuition delivering foundational data (albeit fallible and subject to review by reason), it is the method of revelation that produces foundational beliefs that are then interpreted and made systematic by reason and argument.

### The Conflict Thesis

In this section I will argue that the methods of revelation and rational intuition come into conflict: that is, they will produce inconsistent results. My strategy is to look at what contemporary theologians believe on the basis of revelation and what contemporary philosophers believe on the basis of rational intuition and see whether they conflict. Of course, it is unlikely that there are many, if any, propositions that *all* contemporary theologians believe, even if this is restricted to Christian theologians. The same is true in spades of philosophers. However, we can see whether

there are philosophical propositions that, if not all secular philosophers accept, at least a sizable majority do, and whether a substantial class of theologians disagree about those same propositions. If there are such propositions, then this will provide some reason to think that the method of revelation leads in one direction and the method of intuition in another.

The theological views I will focus on are the official views of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholicism is the largest Christian denomination, and tends to have more precisely codified doctrines than Protestant denominations, whose historical roots are in a rejection of hierarchy and priestly authority. I am not suggesting that Catholic theology is correct, simply that it is the most prominent and most explicit about philosophical propositions, and thus the easiest to examine. There are cases in which the revelation-derived beliefs of the Catholic Church come into conflict with, if not universal, at least very widespread views of contemporary philosophers who rely on rational intuition. The irony is that ever since Aquinas, the Catholic Church has emphasized the idea that theology and rationalist philosophy dovetail, with the latter aiding and enhancing the former.<sup>13</sup> In fact this optimism is unwarranted.

The first conflict between Catholic revelation-derived teachings and the views of most secular intuition-driven philosophers can be seen in matters of sexual and medical ethics, especially the morality of pre-marital sex, masturbation, birth control, voluntary sterilization, homosexuality, abortion, and euthanasia. The Catholic Church finds all of these things to be unequivocally immoral. Most secular philosophers do not.

The Roman Curia's doctrinal document on sexual ethics (Roman Curia, 1975) is explicit that 'Christian doctrine ... states that every genital act must be within the framework of marriage' (§7). Thus pre-marital sex, even for the best of reasons, even when the couple intend to get married, is strictly forbidden. Not only pre-marital sex, but homosexual relations are also taboo. The Curia claims that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered' and 'in Sacred Scripture they are condemned as a serious depravity' (§8). In Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he writes that 'the Church ... teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life'. (Paul VI, 1968: §11). Paul VI states quite clearly that this teaching comes directly from God, who supposedly established a moral connection between sex and procreation. Indeed, he claims that 'the teaching of the Church regarding the proper regulation of birth is a promulgation of the law of God Himself' (§20). Since God has revealed that sexual acts must have the possibility of leading to new life (successful use of the rhythm method as a means of birth control, and involuntary infertility are exceptions), masturbation and homosexuality are straightforwardly condemned under any circumstances. Official Catholic doctrine makes every episode

of birth control, vasectomy, and tubal ligation immoral, if those actions are designed to prevent conception.<sup>14</sup> The Doctrine of Double Effect would permit sterilization as a side-effect of an otherwise necessary medical procedure, but that's it. In addition, Catholics hold abortions to be wrong for a panoply of reasons, one of which is that it prevents a new life arising from coitus.

Paul VI's teaching in *Humanae Vitae* is strongly endorsed by John Paul II. In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (John Paul II, 1995) he rails not only against abortion and contraception (§13) but also against euthanasia (§15). Even cases of voluntary passive euthanasia, where a suffering or dying patient voluntarily requests to be removed from life-sustaining equipment, or have life-sustaining treatment withheld, are considered by John Paul II to be contrary to the moral law. Again, it is worth emphasizing that the moral views enunciated by Paul VI, John Paul II, and the Roman Curia are not the result of *a priori* reasoning or the ferreting out of moral intuition through reflection and debate, but ultimately stem from divine revelation, as those authors explicitly acknowledge.

It would be foolish to attempt to show that all intuition-based philosophy rejects these conclusions. There is probably no proposition that, once conceived of, hasn't been defended by some philosopher. Nevertheless, I do not know of a single contemporary secular philosopher who defends the idea that all pre-marital sex is seriously immoral or that birth control is unethical. Likewise, defences of the immorality of masturbation are exceedingly scarce. A few philosophers oppose homosexuality on moral grounds, but they are clearly a small minority. Abortion and euthanasia are more controversial, but it is a safe bet that a substantial majority of philosophers who rely on rational intuition in normative ethics think that quite a few cases of abortion and voluntary euthanasia are morally permissible.

A second area of conflict concerns the doctrine of original sin. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Pt 1, sec. 2, Ch. 1, art. 1, para. 7) makes it abundantly clear that it is only through divine revelation that we can come to understand the nature of sin and recognize that it is something other than a developmental deficiency or psychological weakness. Furthermore, every person is infected with sin from birth, as the result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (as related in Genesis 3). Tempted by the serpent, they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thus defying God's orders otherwise, and offending him so profoundly that he punished all of their descendants. The *Catechism* admits that 'the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature' (Pt 1, sec. 2, Ch. 1, art. 1, para. 7, §404). When Adam fell from grace, we all did. Thus every human being is inherently sinful – even newborn infants and saints – and all need redemption before God or face damnation and eternal torment.

For secular philosophers, original sin is more than a mystery that we just have to accept. It is absurd. The idea that a person can be fairly punished for the misdeeds of another, especially a hypothetical ancestor of a few thousand years ago, is anathema to every treatment of justice of which I am aware. St Augustine was racked with guilt over his youthful theft of some pears, raising this indiscretion up as the height of wickedness (Augustine, 400 (1952): Bk 2, §§9–18). Secular philosophers these days generally find this risible, but they would be positively stupefied at a suggestion that Augustine's modern-day descendants (if any) ought to be arrested and prosecuted for pear-theft. The method of revelation thus yields a belief that p: every human being morally deserves punishment for the wrongdoing of Adam, and the method of rational intuition supports a belief that not-p.

Ethics is not the only area of conflict. Catholic teachings also conflict with the majority view in the philosophy of mind. According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Pt 1, sec. 2, Ch. 1, art. 1, para. 6, §366) human beings each have a soul which animates their bodies and 'is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection'. This is not just a Catholic view, either, as some of the ethical positions discussed above may be. Nearly every Christian denomination, perhaps all, includes the view that persons are partly or wholly composed of a non-physical, spiritual entity that survives the death of the body and lives for ever.

There are many competing views about the nature of the mind in contemporary philosophy – that the mental supervenes on the physical, that mental properties are emergent from physical properties, various identity theories, functionalism, eliminativism, etc. One view that is almost universally rejected is substance dualism. Even philosophers like Frank Jackson or David Chalmers who are sceptical about the prospects for a completely satisfactory materialist explanation of the mental don't think that our mental lives reside in an immortal soul. To be sure, there are some secular philosophers who are still substance dualists, but their ranks have rapidly shrunk since Descartes.<sup>15</sup> And even they don't argue for immortal souls destined for a future of reunification with resurrected bodies. Jaegwon Kim remarks that 'the idea of minds as souls or spirits, as *entities* or *objects* of a special kind, has never gained a foothold in a serious scientific study of the mind and has also gradually disappeared from philosophical discussions of mentality' (Kim, 1996: p. 3). He states that there is an almost complete consensus among philosophers in rejecting the existence of an immortal spiritual soul (p. 4). The existence of souls may be an even more explicit example in support of the Conflict Thesis. The method of revelation supports a belief in p: each human being is at least partly composed of a spiritual, immortal soul, and the method of rational intuition (it is overwhelmingly accepted) supports a belief that not-p.

In fact, I am going to go out on a bit of a limb and claim that a majority of philosophers who reject revelation as a legitimate belief-acquiring method, preferring to rely on rational intuition alone, also do not believe that there is a God. It is generally considered that Hume and Kant killed off the traditional (Ontological, Teleological, and Cosmological) arguments for God's existence, despite periodic attempts to disinter their skeletons and dress them in modern clothes. Philosophers like Plantinga, Alston, and Swinburne, who make many rationalist, intuition-based arguments on behalf of God, also all accept some form of revelation (Christian Mystical Practice, Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit, etc.) as an authentic epistemic means of gaining beliefs about the divine. Their arguments would be crippled if they did not endorse revelation, and they would be largely reduced to debating how a triune God is a logically coherent concept, or how it is logically possible that there could be a Hell and a perfectly just God. All idle academic speculations without some reason to think that there really is a God, or there really is a Hell, reasons that most philosophers who dismiss revelation believe are lacking. So even if the method of intuition does not directly lead to atheism, it does seem to lead at least to agnosticism.

I am offering an inductive argument, and am not labouring under the illusion that it is the knock-out blow. Catholic defenders of revelation would no doubt reply that rational intuition alone, unaided by revelation, is bound to fail. John Paul II claims exactly that in *Fides et Ratio*. We will not be able to understand correctly the nature of the self, devise a true theory of mentality, know how to behave in matters of sexual and medical ethics, or develop an accurate and comprehensive theory of justice without the aid of revelation. Revelation is needed to supply the data upon which reason can then operate. Trying to do philosophy without the input of God is a fool's errand.

This defence proposes that there are non-empirical propositions that cannot be known through rationalist methods and can only be known through revelation. However, the idea that rationalist philosophy and revelatory religion have separate spheres of influence is not an adequate rebuttal of the inductive argument I gave. No doubt, adding the basic claims of Christian revelation to one's set of beliefs would yield a different moral outlook, or a different theory of the mind, from what one might develop without Christian input. Whether such theories are closer to or further from the truth is a separate matter. I am arguing that the method of rational intuition yields results inconsistent with the results of revelation (at least the Catholic version of it). The evidence is empirical: philosophers who rely on rational intuition as their principal method of acquiring moral beliefs or beliefs about the nature of mentality tend to agree with each other and disagree with the Catholic position on a wide range of issues. I am not arguing that secular philosophers are *right*. That is a different issue altogether.

Defenders of revelation might also reply that the fact that secular philosophers largely disagree with Catholic moral teachings or Christian doctrines

about an immortal soul does not show that there is a fundamental conflict between rational intuition and revelation. The philosophy of the future will no doubt vindicate what has already been expounded *ex cathedra*. Any conflict between Athens and Jerusalem (to use the imagery of Tertullian) is a temporary chimera. Plantinga supports a view along these lines: 'if there were a demonstration or a powerful argument from other sources against Christian belief ... then ... this would be a genuine example of a clash between faith and reason. No such demonstration or argument, however, has so far reared its ugly head' (Plantinga, 2000: p. 259, n. 34). Plantinga is a first-rate, well-read philosopher, so one wonders how he has failed to notice that, in Blanshard's words, 'revelation and church authority have frequently said one thing while secular reflection has demanded another' (Blanshard, 1975: p. 323). Presumably Plantinga assumes that he and his fellow-travelers will be able to defeat all comers, past and present, who use arguments grounded in rational intuition to reject Christian belief. One gathers that he thinks it a small matter to refute the near-consensus among secular philosophers relying on rational intuition that the doctrines of original sin and the existence of immortal spiritual souls are irreparably mistaken.

This is, of course, a possibility. But it is hard to find sympathy for such a condescending, magisterial 'when you learn to reason well, you'll come to see that I was right all along' approach like this one. It is even harder to see how one might go about refuting it in the form stated above, as it appears unfalsifiable. Perhaps it is *possible* that the majority of contemporary philosophers are wrong about souls, sin, euthanasia, masturbation, pre-marital sex, and the rest, and that in the future, rational intuition and reasoning will lead everyone to the Christian positions on these topics. However, this bare possibility does not refute the Conflict Thesis. Compare: it is logically possible that the earth science, palaeontology, and biology of the future will reject evolution through natural selection and abandon the position that the earth is four-and-a-half billion years old. But this possibility does not show a compatibility between modern science and fundamentalist creationism. As things stand, the gulf between philosophical beliefs grounded in revelation and those stemming from rational intuition is deep and wide.

#### **Four Briefs on Behalf of Intuition**

I have presented two different methods of acquiring beliefs about philosophical propositions: rational intuition and Christian revelation. I have argued that both methods produce non-inferential, basic beliefs, that those who use these methods proceed to take the basic beliefs and develop them into more comprehensive belief systems through the use of reason, and that intuition often yields a belief that *p*, and revelation frequently produces a belief that not-*p*, for many propositions *p*. The question then arises: which method is the more reliable way of acquiring beliefs about philosophical

propositions? We plainly can't use both methods without running into inconsistency. One answer, that of the naturalists, is that revelation and intuition are equally reliable. That is, neither of them is reliable at all, and so the question of which method is to be preferred is like this one: 'Which is a better predictor of future experience, reading tea leaves, divining the entrails of a chicken, or the Magic 8-Ball?' Clearly, the naturalists' answer is rejected by rationalist philosophers. But even if (a big, unargued if) naturalism is to be rejected, why think that rational intuition is any better at gaining the truth than revelation?

Here are four arguments to the conclusion that rational intuition is epistemically better than revelation when it comes to gaining beliefs about philosophical propositions. I will argue that none of the following arguments adequately shows the relative superiority of intuition.

*Argument One: The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating*

Both methods rely on the post hoc evaluation of the foundational beliefs in order to achieve reflective equilibrium. That is, analytic philosophers and Christian theologians seem to agree that the set of our beliefs about philosophical propositions should exemplify certain epistemic virtues. There is general agreement that we need to integrate our basic beliefs about the mind, the gods, and the good life into a systematic, cohesive way of understanding the world and our place in it.

As Kai Nielsen suggests, the virtue of wide reflective equilibrium is that it offers a procedure for selecting one network of beliefs over another: the more stable, cohesive, and comprehensive system of beliefs is the one to be retained (Nielsen, 1993: p. 327). Now, suppose that the set of beliefs produced by rational intuition is more epistemically virtuous than belief-sets generated by revelation. Beliefs based on rational intuition turn out to be more comprehensive, unified, consistent, and explanatorily cohesive than those generated by revelation. This superior result is a good reason to prefer intuition as a basic method – and the perspective of rationalist philosophy as more credible – than the alternative we have been considering.

This strategy is very similar to traditional coherentist theories of justification. For such theories, a belief is justified just in case it is an element of a set of beliefs that are mutually explanatory, consistent, and the like. Here, a belief-acquiring method is vindicated if it produces such belief-sets. The problem with the Proof of the Pudding argument is much like familiar complaints against coherence theories: there seem to be many possible belief-sets that are equally coherent, but inconsistent with each other. Not only has no evidence been provided that intuition really will yield an eminently virtuous set of beliefs (relative to competitor methods), but it is difficult to imagine in principle what evidence would uniquely select intuition. For example, the intricacy and level of detail one finds in Catholic

theology suggest that belief-sets resulting from revelation fare pretty well by the standards of comprehensiveness, consistency, explanatoriness, and the rest. Without further argument, it is hard to see how the Proof of the Pudding argument will select intuition over revelation, or what kind of evidence would definitively settle the issue. Even more difficult is the modal point. How could one argue that intuition *must* have more systematizable results than revelation? Perhaps these concerns could be answered, but so far it looks as if the Proof of the Pudding argument is chiefly wishful thinking.

*Argument Two: Common Doxastic Practice*

George Bealer writes, 'It is standard justificatory practice to use intuitions evidentially. Unless and until a reason for departing from this standard practice is produced, we are entitled – indeed, obligated – to continue using intuitions as evidence.'<sup>16</sup> In other words, if everybody else trusts intuition, we should too. It would be irrational of us to discard intuition when recognized experts in our peer group rely upon it and we don't have a powerful argument against them. Analogously, it is standard justificatory practice to use perceptions and sense experience evidentially. Powerful arguments are needed to overthrow this method. Bealer's conclusion is that, pending excellent sceptical reasoning, we are justified in continuing to employ the method of rational intuition to come to have beliefs about philosophical propositions.

Unfortunately, the Common Doxastic Practice argument is not going to privilege rational intuition – Plantinga and Alston use exactly the same argument, *mutatis mutandis*, to defend the use of Christian revelation. Here is a representative passage from Alston:

My main thesis in this ... whole book is that Christian Mystical Practice is rationally engaged in since it is a socially established doxastic practice that is not demonstrably unreliable or otherwise disqualified for rational acceptance.

(Alston, 1991: p. 194)

It is *prima facie* rational to engage in Christian Mystical Practice ... because it is a socially established doxastic practice; and it is unqualifiedly rational to engage in it ... because we lack sufficient reason for regarding it as unreliable or otherwise disqualified for rational participation.<sup>17</sup>

(Alston, 1991: p. 223)

Both Plantinga and Alston argue that revelation is a basic belief-acquiring method, and that it is illegitimate to use one basic method (they are



particularly concerned with sense perception) to evaluate another. They argue that it is arbitrary to assume in advance that if revelation is a source of warranted belief, then it must be likely to be reliable by the lights of ordinary sense perception. It would be equally unjustified to insist that sense perception turn out reliable with respect to some group of epistemic powers that doesn't include sense perception (like revelation). Christian revelation and sense perception are autonomous, independent methods of acquiring beliefs. They are separate but equal.<sup>18</sup>

So intuition may look incomplete from the vantage of Christian revelation, and revelation may look bizarre from the point of view of rationalist philosophers. If Plantinga and Alston are right and we can't use one basic method to assess another, then everyone can use the Common Doxastic Practice argument; all we need to do is find the right peer group. Therefore it is no help in adjudicating between the belief-acquiring methods under consideration.

*Argument Three: The Mint of Nature*

Thomas Reid writes,

The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason, says the skeptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception? – they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?

(Reid, 1764 (1975): pp. 84–5)

Richard Foley and Paul Tidman interpret Reid's remarks as treating our epistemic faculties as equally trustworthy, and reliance on reason or intuition as just as reasonable as trust in our senses. Tidman, for example, writes, 'nothing further [than intuition] is needed to justify appeals to intuitions ... because these beliefs are produced by a basic belief-forming mechanism we have no reason to question. ... Each of our faculties is innocent until proven guilty.'<sup>19</sup> Given that there are many different methods of forming beliefs about philosophical propositions that we might choose, why should we trust the belief-forming method of intuition? Reid's response is that the mint of Nature has beneficently issued to us innate tendencies to use certain belief-acquiring methods, and the ability to use these methods so that they reliably

generate true beliefs. Nature gave us sense perception, and that was pretty good. Nature gave us intuition as well, so we should go ahead and trust it too, unless confronted with an excellent reason not to.

The cheery optimism of Reid and his followers is open to several criticisms. The key one for our purposes is that the Mint of Nature argument will not pick out rational intuition as the best method of gaining beliefs about philosophical propositions. In fact, Plantinga and Alston cite exactly the same passage from Reid to defend their trust in revelation. Here is Alston: 'we will follow the lead of Thomas Reid in taking all our established doxastic practices to be acceptable as such, as innocent until proven guilty'.<sup>20</sup> And, of course, the established doxastic practice Alston is really interested in is Christian Mystical Practice, or revelation. Defenders of both intuition and revelation can claim their chosen methodology to be a natural faculty whose deliverances we are *prima facie* justified in accepting. All protagonists can use the Reidian argument to their advantage, and we are left with the same problem of conflicting output. The Mint of Nature argument therefore provides no means of showing that rational intuition is an epistemically superior means of gaining philosophical beliefs.

#### *Argument Four: The Priority of Reason*

The final argument on behalf of the authority of rational intuition over its competitors is as follows. All parties agree that we need to use reason to operate upon our basic beliefs and develop epistemically virtuous belief-sets. Reason is used to uncover and resolve inconsistencies, eradicate fallacious inferences, promote explanatory unity, etc. In other words, rational reflection is the basic method by which we come to have justified beliefs about philosophical propositions. Other methods, like revelation, are additions. Rational intuition is the basic model, and revelation is an optional feature. So if push comes to shove, and there are inconsistencies among the basic beliefs provided by intuition and those provided by revelation, we had better stick with the basic package. Since everyone agrees that reason is essential and not all agree that we need these 'bonus' methods, in case of trouble, the bonus methods are the first to go. Rational intuition remains the best way of acquiring beliefs about philosophical propositions.

Unlike the Proof of the Pudding, Common Doxastic Practice, and Mint of Nature arguments, the Priority of Reason response is not one that can be used by all protagonists. I have argued that both Christian theologians and traditional intuition-driven philosophers rely upon reason to systematize their beliefs and attain reflective equilibrium. However, there are three problems with the Priority of Reason argument. First, there is no reason to suppose that both groups recognize the same set of properties as being epistemically virtuous. There may be a wide discrepancy in the qualities they want their belief-sets to exemplify. Even if both rationalists and Chris-

tian theologians count certain beliefs as good inferences from logically prior beliefs, this does not imply that they are using the same concept of 'good inference'. Even among philosophers, some regard justification to be a normative concept, and some think that it is a causal-nomological one. Some philosophers defend an internalist notion of justification, and some an externalist one. We should be cautious not to overstate agreement about exactly how reason is to be used in developing inferential beliefs. The Priority of Reason argument takes cross-party agreement about the value of reason as an inferential procedure and uses it to encourage acceptance of rational intuition as the best way to gain basic beliefs about philosophical propositions. Recognizing that there may be a good bit of diversity concerning exactly how reason is to be used in achieving reflective equilibrium undermines the central claim of cross-party agreement.

Second, there is a difference between the use of reason to evaluate basic beliefs and draw inferences (inductively or deductively) from these basic beliefs, and the use of rational intuition to generate the basic beliefs themselves. That is, once one has a set of basic beliefs, arrived at by whatever method, reason is employed to operate upon this set and produce inferential beliefs. This procedure is a different activity from the use of *a priori* philosophical intuition to arrive at basic beliefs. The use of reason as an inferential procedure is logically separate from how one acquires non-inferential beliefs. An independent argument is required to demonstrate that intuition is the best way to get non-inferential beliefs; the value of reason in making good inferences from the foundations tells us nothing about how to get the right foundations. There is an acronym in computer programming: GIGO – garbage in, garbage out. A computer is an extensional logic machine, but its output is only as good as the data it is fed. The present concern is not over how to process the data, but how to get them in the first place. The Priority of Reason argument is that since reason is a good inference procedure, rational intuition is a good way of gaining non-inferential beliefs. This is like arguing that since a computer's inferences are all logical deductions, its input must be logical truths – a manifest *non sequitur*.

The final difficulty with the Priority of Reason defence is brought out clearly by analogy. In 1610 Galileo published an account of his recent astronomical discoveries in *Sidereus Nuncius*, revealing among other things that the moon is mountainous, craggy, and in general not perfectly spherical. Galileo faced some legitimate criticisms, for example that his telescopes were still fairly crude, imprecise, and not entirely to be trusted. Purely rationalist arguments were offered as well; the Aristotelians of the day opposed Galileo on the grounds that empirical science relies upon the use of reason to adjudicate competing hypotheses, evaluate data, draw correct inductive inferences, and so on. Thus reason, rational reflection, *a priori* intuition is the primary method by which we gain empirical knowledge. Should there be any discrepancies between what pure reason tells us about the nature of the

physical world and the observations of the experimentalists, we must discard experimentation and rely solely on reason, our fundamental method. Since reason dictates that the universe conform to the *a priori* beauty of the spheres, argued the pedants, we are entirely justified in discarding Signore Galileo's telescopic findings to the contrary. In fact, Giulio Libri, one of the foremost philosophers at Pisa, refused even to look through Galileo's telescope.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, this mulishness is precisely the sort of scholastic hubris that fomented resistance to experimental science in the Renaissance. It is clear in the case of empirical knowledge that reason alone is inadequate. We must also use the method of sense perception to acquire basic beliefs. The simple fact that reason (in the form of science) operates upon these basic beliefs to produce intricate theories is no evidence that sense perception is not also needed as a method of belief-acquisition. Just as reason operates upon the beliefs produced by sense perception to develop a systematic scientific understanding of the world, so too reason operates upon the beliefs produced by Christian revelation to develop a comprehensive theological outlook. In short, the Priority of Reason argument is precisely the same argument that Aristotelian dogmatists used to dismiss Galileo's experimental method of acquiring empirical beliefs. It is employed in the present context to dismiss revelation. If the Priority of Reason argument wasn't a good argument then, it isn't a good one now. Galileo did not deny that pure reason had its place; he denied that it alone could discover the nature of the heavens. Likewise, John Paul II does not deny that *some* knowledge can be gained through rational intuition. Rather, what he denies is that it alone could discover the nature of Heaven. Reason alone is not enough for science. So far we lack an adequate argument to think that is enough for philosophy.

At this point I have considered four different arguments designed to show the relative superiority of intuition: the Proof of the Pudding, Common Doxastic Practice, Mint of Nature, and Priority of Reason arguments. All four turn out to be inadequate – they lend no more credibility to intuition than they do to Christian revelation. Our quandary remains: the methods of intuition and revelation have inconsistent results, and we can't seem to show that one is better than the others. What now?

### **A Trilemma for Philosophical Knowledge**

Given an inability to show the relative superiority of rational intuition to the two other methods we have been discussing, there are three possible responses. The first is purely epistemic: scepticism. Since we don't know whether intuition or revelation is the best way to gain justified beliefs about philosophical propositions, if we pick the best method, it is merely a matter

of luck. Therefore we have no *knowledge* of philosophical propositions. The second two responses are metaphysical: nihilism and relativism. Perhaps our failure to vindicate rational intuition over the competition is evidence that there are no properly philosophical propositions to be known at all. It is our attempts to acquire justified beliefs about the non-existent that is the problem. The final alternative, relativism, is the idea that there are knowable philosophical propositions, but which ones are true is somehow dependent on method. Given the methodology of the Catholic Church, there are non-physical, spiritual souls, but given the methodology of rationalist, analytic philosophy, there aren't. All three of these alternatives are disturbing ones. I will examine each of these in turn.

### *Scepticism*

I have argued that the belief-acquiring methods of rational intuition and Christian revelation yield inconsistent beliefs. I have further argued that attempts to show the relative superiority of the method of intuition have all failed. One natural response at this point is to view these results as a demonstration of scepticism concerning philosophical propositions. The literature on the correct way to construe scepticism is, of course, voluminous, and I am loath to get caught up in those thickets. However, I will hazard that sceptical arguments are generally based on the notion that S doesn't know P because S's true belief that P is improperly dependent on good luck. Sara doesn't know that it is 3.30 because it is no more than luck that she glanced at the stopped clock at exactly 3.30. Smith doesn't know that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona because he is just fortunate that logical addition yielded a true disjunction from the justified yet false premise that Jones owns a Ford. Henry doesn't know that he is seeing a barn, even though it is a barn and his true belief was caused by the state of affairs that it is a barn because it is simply luck that he is not fooled by one of the many *papier mâché* barns in that area. More global scepticism proceeds from the contention that we can't perceptually discriminate among veridical sense perception and dreams, evil demons, or the neural inputs of alien scientists. Since we can't tell the difference, if we have true beliefs based on sense perception then it is the sheerest fortune that we are not dreaming, deceived, etc. Thus our true empirical beliefs never rise up to knowledge.

It looks as if the same argumentative strategy can be deployed against knowledge of putative philosophical truths. We have no defensible reason to prefer one basic method of acquiring beliefs about philosophical propositions over another basic method that gives different results. Any true beliefs we have about philosophical propositions are accidental – it is just good fortune if we pick the right method. If my intuition-based belief that 'necessarily, my duty is to maximize the good' is true, then it is no more than good luck that I chose intuition as my method instead of one

of the competitors. I could have had a divine revelation, and upon integration of my experience with the doxastic practices and teachings of the established church come to believe the Golden Rule as the correct expression of my moral obligations. Since my choice of belief-acquiring method is ultimately arbitrary and not based in reason, I don't know the principle of utility or *mutatis mutandis* any other philosophical proposition to be true as the result of using rational intuition. In short, our failure to vindicate intuition means that we don't know any philosophical truths. There may be truths about morality, the divine, metaphysics, and other philosophical propositions, but we'll never know them. Intuition-driven philosophy is a waste of time; as far as we know, we're just as well off reading the Bible.

### *Nihilism*

Another possibility is that there are no philosophical propositions. As naturalists will be eager to argue, the fact that we are unable to show that rationalist philosophy is a more reliable means of acquiring beliefs than Christian revelation constitutes a *reductio ad absurdum* on the very idea of non-naturalistic philosophical knowledge. Our mistake all along was to think that there are any properly philosophical truths to be had. Once we give that up, along with the suspicious, magical-sounding belief-acquiring methods we have been considering, we will be able to see that the only knowledge to be had is empirical knowledge. Traditional intuition-driven philosophy is empty foolishness; it is the ethereal pursuit of the non-existent.

There are two main ways to understand the nihilist solution. One is that propositions that are putatively philosophical and tractable only by non-scientific means are in fact secretly empirical. Concepts like 'God', 'knowledge', 'object', 'free will', 'duty', and so on secure their meaning through some causal series of events, finally grounded in the empirical world. Scientific discovery of these causal mechanisms will enable us to establish the truth-values of 'philosophical' claims involving these concepts without needing to invoke rational intuition or (Heaven forbid!) divine revelation. So 'philosophical' propositions are real propositions with determinate, unique truth-values; they just aren't really philosophical. In other words, all truths are fundamentally scientific ones, and Michael Devitt is right when he claims, '[we should] reject *a priori* knowledge and embrace "naturalism", the view that there is only one way of knowing, the empirical way that is the basis of science' (Devitt, 1999: p. 96).

The second nihilistic approach is to hold that philosophical propositions are indeed philosophical, but they aren't really propositions. Instead, sentences about the divine, morality, epistemology, and the rest are pseudo-propositions, which is to say, such sentences don't express propositions at all, but are instead empty verbiage. At best, philosophical language

expresses approbation or disapprobation, or is a kind of poetry. Carnap was right when he wrote 'metaphysics is a substitute, albeit an inadequate one, for art' (Carnap, 1959).

### *Relativism*

The only remaining alternative seems to be relativism. According to the relativist, when it comes to philosophical propositions, there is no way to decide rationally among basic belief-acquiring methods. Dogmatic faith in rational intuition is no better than faith in ... well ... faith. If we select rational intuition as our method, certain propositions will come out necessarily true. If we choose Christian revelation, different propositions will come out true. According to the relativist, what propositions *are* true is therefore dependent on, and relative to, method. There is more than one true philosophical story to be told about morality, epistemology, metaphysics, and the divine. Relativism has a bad reputation among most analytic philosophers, and defenders of Christian revelation are not too keen on it either.<sup>22</sup> Yet both analytic rationalists and Christian partisans of revelation may find it more attractive than either scepticism or a hard-core naturalism about the philosophical. Clearly, a theory of relativism remains to be articulated, but equally clearly, the need for such a theory is considerable.

*Bloomsburg University, Pennsylvania, USA*

### Notes

- 1 See particularly Hales, 1997, Bennigson, 1999, and Lynch 1998.
- 2 The sketch is more fully worked out in my *Relativism and the Foundations of Philosophy*, in preparation.
- 3 Bonjour, 1998: pp. 98, 106.
- 4 Roderick Chisholm also argues that rational intuition yields knowledge of necessities, and traces this view to Aristotle. See Chisholm, 1977: pp. 38–9.
- 5 Hales, 2000.
- 6 Bonjour maintains that 'appeal to apparent rational insight is epistemologically so basic and fundamental as not to admit of any sort of independent justification' (Bonjour, 1998: p. 148). Bealer states that 'there is no alternative but to identify intuition as a basic source of evidence' (Bealer, 1996: p. 31).
- 7 Kant also thought that it was an *a priori* necessary truth, known by intuition, that space conforms to Euclidean geometry. See Kant, 1787 (1965): B41.
- 8 Locke, 1690 (1974): Bk 4, Ch. x, §5.
- 9 See Swinburne, 1992: Ch. 5.
- 10 An excellent critique of Swinburne on this and related points is Byrne, 1993.
- 11 See Alston 1991: Ch. 5.
- 12 Although Plantinga admits that he is not arguing either that God exists or that the deliverances of revelation do in fact have warrant. His 500-page treatise *Warranted Christian Belief* is devoted to defending the conditional proposition that *if* there is a God, then Christian beliefs have warrant. See Plantinga, 2000: pp. 186–90, p. 347.

- 13 See especially John Paul II, 1998. Modern Catholic writers are not *entirely* uniform on this, though, as we saw in the case of Cardinal Newman.
- 14 See *Humanae Vitae*, §§14–15. For more on masturbation in particular, see the Roman Curia's doctrinal document (Roman Curia, 1975).
- 15 One philosopher who is a self-avowed dualist is Robert Almeder. Interestingly, however, Almeder defends dualism on empirical grounds, not on the basis of rational intuition. See his 1992. I have criticized some of Almeder's arguments in Hales, 2001a and Hales, 2001b.
- 16 Bealer, 1996: p. 30, n. 15.
- 17 Plantinga defends Alston's peer pressure argument in Chapter 4 of *Warranted Christian Belief*.
- 18 See Plantinga, 2000: p. 132 and Alston, 1991: p. 220.
- 19 Tidman, 1996: pp. 169–70. Cf. Foley, 1998: p. 242.
- 20 Alston, 1991: p. 153; cf. Plantinga, 2000: p. 130.
- 21 Langford, 1966: p. 41.
- 22 For example, John Paul II writes (*Fides et Ratio*, §82), '[a] relativist philosophy would be ill-adapted to help in the deeper exploration of the riches found in the word of God ... theology needs therefore the contribution of a philosophy which does not disavow the possibility of a knowledge which is objectively true.'

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