

THE PROBLEM OF INTUITION

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There is a mystery in the dark heart of reason, a skeleton in all of our closets that we would just as soon keep hidden from the light of day. This is the justificatory status of rational intuition. Sixteen years ago Daniel Dennett (1984, p. 17) confirmed that we fail to recognize the centrality of intuition due to "a fairly vigorous institution of professional repression." The most recent literature shows that philosophers are finding courage and therapeutically examining our not-so-solitary vice.¹ In this essay I take up the matter of intuition and argue for a stunning conclusion: appeal to rational intuition is epistemically justified only if a form of foundationalism is true. This type of foundationalism is the thesis that there is at least one proposition whose justification depends on nothing other than itself. I will also argue that unless we can establish that some intuitions are justified, philosophy as an enterprise that provides non-empirical knowledge is impossible. Not to put too fine a point on it then: philosophy is possible only if foundationalism is true. Whether this should be construed as the strongest possible defense of foundationalism, or the greatest objection to the pretensions of philosophy, I leave to the reader. One person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*.

Intuition about empirical facts, sometimes known as "common sense," has gotten bad press because human beings turn out to be frequently in error about the natural world. The universe seems intuitively Newtonian to us, not relativistic. The sun's apparent motion through the sky is intuitively best explained by the hypothesis that it really does move relative to a stable Earth. The thesis that a benevolent creator is responsible for the order and complexity we see evident around us has tremendous intuitive appeal. Yet hypotheses generated by our empirical intuitions must eventually face the impartial tribunal of experience, and all these plausible inferences have been laid waste by science.²

Philosophers do not rely on this sort of intuition, however. Our intuition is rational, not empirical; it is the pure light of reason that shines upon necessary propositions. We are never hauled before the tribunal of experience. Instead, as David Lewis observes,³ our intuitions are tested against one another, and their logical entailments drawn out and presented as evidence. Weaker, less well rooted intuitions get trumped, and ultimately eradicated, when one squarely faces the implications of one's deeper, more firmly held intuitions. The familiar system of example, counterexample,

and straight-up appeals to naked intuition is entirely closed.

To their credit, many philosophers are up-front in admitting that their arguments are ultimately grounded in intuition and that philosophy essentially depends on it, even if they do not say why intuition should provide any justification at all. For example, David Chalmers explicitly states that "all these arguments [on the nature of the mind] are based on intuition" (1996, p. 110). His defense 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." 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'" (1984, p. 12). Saul Kripke is wonderfully explicit about how crucial intuition is. In *Naming and Necessity* he writes, "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" (1980, p. 42). The bold central thesis of Laurence Bonjour's recent book 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."⁴

Some philosophers are in denial when it comes to the role of intuition. These tend to be either those who view philosophy as ancillary to science, or who still have in their mouths the bitter taste of the old skirmishes over "intuitionism" in the

philosophy of mathematics. Many are influenced by Wittgenstein, who declaimed that philosophy does not result in "philosophical propositions," but rather in the clarification of empirical propositions (1961, §4.112). That is, philosophy produces no special truths of its own, but is simply an activity good for making perspicuous the contentions of natural science. The Logical Positivists took up Wittgenstein's theme with a vengeance. A sample from A. J. Ayer: "philosophers who fill their books with assertions that they intuitively 'know' this or that moral or religious 'truth' are merely providing material for the psycho-analyst" (1936, p. 120). Propositions that are putatively justified by rational intuition are manifestly not subject to empirical verification, and so were derided as meaningless according to the Positivists' Verification Criterion of meaning. After Positivism committed suicide by this very criterion, its sympathizers went into hiding, ultimately to emerge under a variety of new banners—ethical anti-realism, radical empiricism, epistemological naturalism, etc. Michael Devitt succinctly states the contemporary naturalist creed. He writes, "[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. From the naturalistic perspective, philosophy becomes continuous with science."⁵

For good or ill, this strong empiricism is unquestionably a minority view among practicing philosophers. Many pay lip service to it while continuing the age-old practices of appeals to intuition or counterintuitiveness in order to establish their conclusions. Why have we all been persuaded that knowledge must be more (or other) than justified true belief? Because Edmund Gettier showed us cases in which

a person has a justified true belief, but our intuitions are that the person still does not know. Why do we think that existence is not a perfection? On the grounds that it is counterintuitive to suppose that existence is a property that a thing may or may not have. Why are we convinced that torturing babies for pleasure is wrong? Either because it seems intuitively immoral, or because it falls out from more general moral principles that we find intuitively plausible. Without appeal to intuition it is hard to see how we might even begin to settle such issues as whether compatibilism is an adequate notion of freedom, or what constitutes virtuous behavior, or if parts are essential to their wholes, or whether multiple realizability arguments undercut token identity theories of the mind.

The most cursory survey of the history of philosophy shows that it is thought experiments, not empirical ones, that constitute the great leaps forward. Think of Plato's cave; Descartes's evil genius; Locke's prince and the cobbler; Rousseau's state of nature; Nietzsche's blond beasts of prey; Quine's linguists translating "gávagai"; Goldman's *papier-mâché* barns; Searle's Chinese room; Putnam's Twin Earth; Rawls's original position; Thomson's kidnapped violinist; and no end of runaway trolleys, brain transplants, and teleportation. These are the common currency of our profession, and not a one is fundamentally empirical in nature, or even indicative of scientific insight. They all appeal in some fashion to our rational intuitions. Hard-core naturalizers like Devitt simply write off nearly everything that makes up philosophy, new and old.

It is my view, which I merely record, that science will never solve problems of metaphysics or modality, or satisfactorily explain the normativity of justification, ethics, and beauty. The actual practice of

the majority of active analytic philosophers shows that they think so too.⁶ Of course, the positivists, naturalizers, and other skeptics may be right, and all these topics may be nothing but tissues of pseudo-problems. We may well be trying to think the unthinkable, and speak of what cannot be spoken, as Wittgenstein charged. Any adequate defense of our practice begins with an examination of our methodology, namely, the appeal to rational intuition.

What is intuition exactly? James Van Cleve writes, "There is such a thing as just 'seeing'—by a kind of intellectual vision—that a proposition is true. . . . 'Seeing' of this sort is what many philosophers call 'intuition'" (1983, p. 36). George Bealer offers, "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 (1996, p. 5). Ernest Sosa concurs that intuitions are "*a priori* intellectual seemings, which present themselves as necessary" (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" (1998, p. 102). Following these writers, let us define rational intuition this way: to have an intuition that A is it to seem necessarily true that A.⁷

When Bealer discusses *a priori* intuitions, or Sosa writes that intuitions are *a priori* seemings, what they have in mind is not so much that the content of the intuition is *a priori*, but that intuition as a method of acquiring justified beliefs is *a priori*. It is a method that does not depend upon empirical investigation or *a posteriori* experience in order to deliver justified beliefs. That is, the objects of intuition are supposed to be logical necessities, propositions like these:

Necessarily, if p is true and q is true, then $p \& q$ is true.

Necessarily, nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time and in the same way.

Necessarily, if p is taller than q and q is taller than r , then p is taller than r .

Necessarily, one should never use persons solely as means to one's ends.

Necessarily, if one has a moral duty to do x , then it is morally permissible for one to do x .

Necessarily, no entity without identity.

Necessarily, if one knows that p , then p is true.

It is easy enough to continue this list, but hardly required. In traditional analytic philosophy we use possible cases—even examples that are physically impossible in our universe—to try to refute propositions like those above. If those propositions were not taken to be necessary truths, then refutation by demonstration of what's possible would not work. The usual pattern of argument is for someone to assert $\Box p$, and for an interlocutor to rejoin "but wait; $\Diamond q$, and $\Diamond q \rightarrow \Diamond \neg p$; therefore it is not the case that $\Box p$." The nature of these necessary propositions, whether they are *a priori*, analytic, or whatever, is irrelevant. All that matters here is that these are the sorts of propositions whose truth is supposedly apprehended by rational intuition or not at all.

There are several questions that immediately arise. Why should the fact that A seems true to me be evidence for A , or a justifiable reason to accept A ? Another way of putting the question: why should our phenomenological sense of self-evidence be reliable? If a proposition seems self-evident to me, why should this seeming be accurate? Sartre claimed that rational intuition yields certainty,⁸ but we need not

suppose this. In fact, there are good reasons for thinking that intuition is quite fallible.⁹ Frege found it intuitive that any property determines a set (a proposition that he thought necessarily true), and we all know the dismal history of this view.¹⁰ Most contemporary defenders of intuition concede that intuition justifies beliefs but does not make them certain. Nevertheless this fallibilistic intuitionism still faces a challenge once posed by Ayer. He wrote, "unless it is possible to provide some criterion by which one may decide between conflicting intuitions, a mere appeal to intuition is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity" (1936, p. 106). If intuition offers *prima facie* justification of belief, and two people have conflicting intuitions, then they have two conflicting *prima facie* justified beliefs. In itself this is not too uncommon; but I take it that Ayer's point is that if there is no way for the two opponents to settle their differences except by appeal to yet more intuitions that again conflict, then they have reached an epistemic impasse. Since they cannot both be right, the method of "pure reason" has proven useless in finding the truth.

There is a more basic, and more troubling, problem than Ayer's close to hand. He fears the irresolvability of conflicting root intuitions. What's worse is that unless we have reason to think that the belief-acquiring method of intuition provides *some* degree of justification for the beliefs that are premised on it, appeal to intuition is a total non-starter to begin with. Establishing that intuition is justification-producing proves exceedingly difficult because it does not seem that rational intuition can be justified empirically, yet if we attempt to justify it intuitively, we encounter a circularity of a particularly vicious sort. That is, before we can even ask to what degree or under what circumstances intuition provides justification of ostensibly necessary

propositions, we must establish that intuition does justify at least some propositions at least some of the time. Let us put the key question this way: is the proposition "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" true? To answer this question, we need to see what reasons we have to accept the proposition, what arguments might be adduced on its behalf; in short, whether we are justified in accepting the contention that intuition justifies some propositions. It is in attempting to justify this last that the deep problem of intuition arises most acutely.

The problem of intuition

premise

1. If a proposition is epistemically justified, then it is justified either *a priori* or *a posteriori*.

premise

2. If a proposition is epistemically justified *a priori*, then its justification depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions.

premise

3. If the proposition "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified, it is not justified *a posteriori*.

premise

4. "The method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified.

premise

5. Nothing is self-justifying.

From 1, 3

6. If "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified, it is justified *a priori*.

From 2, 6

7. If "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified, then its justification depends on the

method of intuition justifying some propositions.

From 4, 7

8. The justification of "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions.

From 5, 8

9. Thus "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is not epistemically justified.

From 4, 9

10. "The method of intuition justifies some propositions" is and is not epistemically justified.

Bealer accepts most of the central claims of the Problem of Intuition (PI). He argues that intuition is not infallible, but nevertheless that it has a kind of modal reliability.¹¹ It is worth noting that this modal link actually falls out of our preceding reflections. According to lemma 8 of PI, the justification of "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" depends on intuition. Yet the definition of "intuition" tells us that the rational intuition of a proposition requires that the proposition seem to be necessarily true. Thus if we find it intuitive that intuition justifies some propositions, then the modal tie must also seem present to us—necessarily, intuition justifies some propositions. To his credit, Bealer correctly acknowledges that demonstrating this reliability of intuition is a task that intuition itself must perform, as lemma 8 in PI states. He writes, "The thesis that intuitions have the indicated strong modal tie to the truth is a philosophical (conceptual) thesis not open to empirical confirmation or refutation. The defense of it is philosophical, ultimately resting on intuitions" (1996, p. 8).

While Bealer is concerned with the possibility that this requirement leads to an

undesirable circularity, he does not, I think, see the viciousness of the circle. Here is Bealer's first attempt to defuse PI.

Is it question-begging for advocates of intuitions to invoke intuitions in support of their theory of determinate concept-possession? No. 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.¹²

Imagine a similar response about a more famous puzzle involving circular reasoning—Hume's problem of induction. It is standard practice to use induction evidentially, goes the Bealerian reply, and unless a reason to depart from this practice is produced, we are obligated to continue relying on induction. Therefore it is not question-begging to rely on induction as evidence of its own reliability.

Surely no one would regard this as a persuasive response to the problem of induction. Hume's induction problem is designed to show that there is a splendid reason for departing from the standard practice of relying on induction as justifying empirical beliefs, namely, there is no non-circular justification for the practice. Here too, there is just as strong a reason for not using intuitions as evidence, namely, there is no non-circular justification for the practice. Unless Bealer is willing to say that circular reasoning is in general acceptable, we need an argument to show why an exception should be granted for intuition. And he needs a more persuasive reason than the preceding *argumentum ad populum*. Or suppose someone states "I rely on the testimony of others because everyone tells me to."¹³ Surely the fact that it is standard justificatory practice to rely on the testimony of others is not sufficient to accept this bit of

reasoning. The problem with intuition is that this kind of reasoning is the only game in town.

Bealer confidently asserts (p. 30) that no reason to discontinue using intuitions as evidence will be forthcoming. Yet lemma 9 of PI tells us that "intuition justifies some propositions" is not epistemically justified. Unless one of the five premises of PI is rejected, we have in hand as good a reason as we might want to discontinue using intuitions as evidence, Bealer's protestations aside. PI doesn't merely suggest that justifying the use of intuition via intuition has a funny odor of circularity, it shows that a logical contradiction results from the practice. This is a serious problem that appeals to "standard practice" will not escape.

Bealer's second attempt to rescue intuition from PI is an appeal to fear. "There is nothing vicious about this circle," he writes, "... denying that intuitions as evidence leads to epistemic self-defeat; it is impossible to have a coherent epistemology without admitting intuitions as evidence."¹⁴ My reply is to agree that Bealer is right: without admitting intuitions as evidence, we cannot construct a coherent epistemology. In fact, we cannot coherently do philosophy at all. There are two ways out of this conundrum. The first is to insist, as Bealer does, that since we do coherently engage in philosophy, and we do construct sensible epistemologies, that the circularity of justifying intuition on the basis of intuition is not vicious. That is, there must be something wrong with the problem of intuition as I have presented it. The other alternative is to admit that the problem of intuition is deep and far-reaching, and upon its solution the whole of philosophy hangs. This, I submit, is the unpalatable truth. It is easier to see if one considers a Bealer-like response to Hume. "Denying that the principle of induction is

justified leads to epistemic self-defeat; it is impossible to have a coherent science without admitting that the future will, in a relevant way, be like the past. Therefore, the problem of induction is not really a problem." There could be Bealerian answers to a host of philosophical problems. For example, if Quine's thesis about the indeterminacy of translation is correct, then we could never genuinely translate from French to English. But we do construct genuine translations. Therefore the indeterminacy of translation is a pseudo-problem. If Cartesian-style skepticism is right, then we know nothing about an external world. But we do have knowledge of an external world; hence Cartesian skepticism is not a genuine problem. It is too easy to solve philosophical problems by this method; they are solutions by theft.

I am sympathetic to Bealer's view (and the view of many others already mentioned, like Bonjour and Sosa) that without intuition, philosophy is left high and dry. But our desperate need to count on intuition does not absolve it of the charge that its use is both justified and unjustified. I conclude that Bealer has not found a satisfactory way of escaping PI.

Is there a way out? Let's examine the premises. The first premise states that if a proposition is epistemically justified, then it is justified either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. *A priori* justification, traditionally conceived, is justification that derives from pure reason alone and does not depend upon experience.¹⁵ If understanding a proposition is all that is needed to be justified in believing it, then such a proposition is justified *a priori*. Propositions that are justified but not justified *a priori* are justified *a posteriori*. That is, the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* are exhaustive and exclusive categories of justification. More positively, *a posteriori* justification requires

experiential input, it is the sort of justification needed by empirical propositions, and the sort provided by science. This classification is hardly news; the foregoing is a familiar distinction. Not everyone thinks this classification is worthwhile, however. Radical empiricists like positivists and naturalizers deny that anything is justified *a priori*. What isn't justified, in Devitt's words, according to the empirical way that is the basis of science is unjustified at best and non-cognitive at worst. As far as justification is concerned, it is *a posteriori* or bust.

To this I have two responses. The first is that PI is a powerful aid to the radical empiricist position; it concludes that the method of justification through *a priori* intuition is not only circular but inherently contradictory. It is a tactical error to strive to reject the premises of an argument that dovetails so nicely with their own conclusions. The second response is that the intended audience of PI and this essay more generally are those philosophers who already rely on *a priori* reasoning and appeals to intuitiveness to establish their results. They are certainly in no position to deny premise one. It is for them that PI is such a problem.

The second premise maintains that if a proposition is epistemically justified *a priori*, then its justification depends on intuition. Just how it depends on intuition is not stated. Yet it is nevertheless clear that there is an intimate tie between *a priori* justification and intuition. Rational intuition is defined in terms of the seeming necessary truths. That is, intuition is supposed to apprehend or make manifest the truth of non-contingent propositions. The justification yielded by intuition, Bonjour writes, "depends on nothing beyond an understanding of the propositional content itself."¹⁶ We grasp a proposition like "necessarily, if A implies B and B implies C,

then A implies C," and the promise of its truth-value is available to our intuition. If we admit *a priori* justification at all, it is hard to imagine why we would think a proposition is *a priori* justified if not either as a direct dictate of intuition or as a logical consequence of basic intuitions. Naturalists who deny that any proposition is justified *a priori* are logically committed to the truth of premise two. The premise is a conditional, and they deny the antecedent, so, of course, the conditional is true.

Premise three states that however "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" itself gets justified, it cannot be justified *a posteriori*. Hilary Kornblith has argued against premise three by attempting to show how such a thing could be accomplished; his argument goes something like this.¹⁷ Naturalists accept externalist accounts of justification, like reliabilism. So for a naturalist "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" means roughly "the method of intuition is a reliable way of acquiring true beliefs." Now, rational intuition is supposed to apprehend the truth values of necessities. If it does so reliably well, then we may conclude that the employment of intuition produces justified beliefs, i.e., that we are justified in accepting "the method of intuition justifies some propositions." For empirical science to evaluate or test the effectiveness of intuition, it would have to compare the results of our intuitions with the correct assessment of logically necessary propositions as determined empirically. For example, suppose I find it intuitive that this proposition is necessarily true: "all the parts of a physical object are essential to the whole." Let us suppose that my use of intuition justifies (to some extent) this proposition for me only if my use of intuition is generally reliable. If I am to establish this reliability *a posteriori*,

then I must be able to appraise various propositions like "necessarily, all the parts of a physical object are essential to the whole" in an *a posteriori* manner. Kornblith thinks that this could be accomplished if we take philosophical investigation to be the investigation of natural kinds, and we couple this with a causal theory of reference for natural kind terms (p. 134, *et passim*).

Kornblith's argument here is highly programmatic, and he does not give even one worked-out example of an *a posteriori* appraisal of a philosophical proposition. He offers up "work on the psychology of inference, concept formation, cognitive development, and so on" (p. 136) as examples of a wholesome naturalistic approach, but this contradicts his own view (p. 133) that "epistemologists ought to be concerned with the nature of knowledge, not the concept of knowledge; the proper subject matter of ethics is the right and the good, not the concepts of the right and the good, and so on." Empirical studies of concept formation cannot be relevant to philosophy if we do not care about the concept of the good, but the good itself.

There is a more difficult problem latent in the Kripkean strategy that Kornblith favors. Kripke argues that there are *a posteriori* necessities. They occupy the logical space provided by the rigid designation of proper names and natural kind terms coupled with a causal theory of reference for such terms. Naturalists who blithely suppose that the Kripkean approach is all they need to save necessity ignore two important facts, which I will briefly mention. The first is that Kripke does not claim, nor does it follow from his arguments, that *all* necessary truths are justified *a posteriori*. To establish this point would require arguments and resources beyond those Kripke provides. Second,

Kripke repeatedly and explicitly relies on rational intuition to bolster his arguments. He does so, for example, to determine which properties of a thing are essential and which accidental, which phrases act as rigid designators and which do not, and so forth. That is, intuition is used to justify modal propositions in Kripke's theory, and this justification is not *a posteriori*.

There is a second naturalist approach to necessity worth mentioning, namely Quine's. He and his followers maintain that the truth values of all propositions are contingent; they are matters of fact discoverable by the methods of science. At best nomological necessities—the laws of nature and their entailments—are in the offing. Since all propositions can in principle be overthrown by recalcitrant experience, no *logically* necessary truths are forthcoming. Yet these are a little tricky to elude. Consider a naturalist claim that "all propositions are logically contingent." That is, for all propositions p , possibly p and possibly not- p . This proposition itself is of course logically contingent by its own lights. If we substitute "all propositions are logically contingent" for p , we derive "possibly all propositions are contingent, and possibly it is not the case that all propositions are contingent." The second conjunct is equivalent to "possibly, there is a noncontingent proposition." If we adopt the popular S5 system of modal logic, then whatever is possibly necessary *is* necessary. It follows that there is at least one noncontingent proposition, and so there is a necessary truth after all. A bit of finesse is required for the naturalist to avoid being logically committed to necessary truths. Even if the naturalist replies by rejecting S5 in favor of S4, thus blocking the inference, what *empirical* evidence could possibly be adduced to support preferring one system of modal logic to another? And

if the naturalist wants to reject logical necessity entirely, some real argument is needed.¹⁸ Pending acceptance of these arguments, it seems safe to conclude that "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" cannot be justified *a posteriori*.¹⁹

Premise four states that "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified. If this premise is false, then we are unjustified in believing that intuition provides justification for anything. Given the evidence cited earlier that philosophy relies heavily upon intuition, and that it cannot help but do so, the falsity of premise four would be a hideous turn of events for the profession. We think that intuition as a method of determining the truth of *a priori* propositions is epistemically preferable to reliance on palmistry, crystal balls, and Tarot cards. Yet if we are not justified in believing that intuition justifies anything, it is difficult to see why it is better than the occult. If two methods of discovering the truth are worthless, it is splitting hairs to figure out which is worse. Of course, the fact that everyone but the radical empiricists should be put out of a job unless premise four is true is no evidence that the premise *is* true. So why accept it?

Thomas Reid's defense of premise four has recently been dusted off by Paul Tidman (1996) and Richard Foley (1998). 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?²⁰

Both Foley and Tidman interpret Reid's remarks as treating our epistemic faculties as equally trustworthy, and that reliance on reason or intuition is 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."²¹ Setting aside the evident endorsement of a long-discredited faculty psychology, we may still ask: given that there are many different belief-forming methods that we might choose, why should we blindly 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. There is no doubt that our survival has been predicated on our successful adaptation to our environment, and, phrased in an 18th-century way, we might think of these adaptive traits as bestowed on us by honest nature.

However, this is not enough to take the justification of "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" as pre-given by nature. The sanguinity of nature is often suspect; danger is routinely piggy-backed upon our adaptive traits. Czech physician Miroslav Holub offers several examples.

A classic example is sickle-cell anemia. It is fatal in homozygotes that have both the father's and the mother's gene for the deviant hemoglobin structure. Heterozygotes,

with just one gene, don't develop the disease and are protected against malaria caused by *Plasmodium falciparum*. The selective advantage for the population preserves a gene that is detrimental for some individuals. The proper forces of the so-called healthy body may happily participate in a process that would generally be perceived as illness. This can happen not only through mistakes of the complicated regulatory mechanisms of immune reactivity that lead to attacks by our own lymphocytes against our own selves; it also happens during the completely flawless functioning of our defenses. Antibodies against some viruses (including HIV) can paradoxically enhance the progress of the infection. Severe organ damage is caused in some circumstances by antigen-antibody complexes. Despite the good intentions of the antibody molecules, grave shock states occur not through direct action of the bacterial endotoxins, but through the general alarm of the organism sensing their presence. Pain, swelling, and irreversible damage are produced by the body's own mediators of inflammation, and the heavy artillery of bodily defenses, the phagocytic cells, find their most effective ammunition in free oxygen radicals that destroy not only the criminal microbes, but the body's own tissues as well. Friendly fire, as they say. (Holub 1997, chap. 1)

It may be nothing more than an accidental byproduct of evolution that we find some propositions to be intuitively true and not others, an accident that has only a random connection to the truth. Or it could be that reliance on intuition is positively damaging to the quest for truth—similar to the "friendly fire" in Holub's examples above. The Reidians need some real argument here, not just an innocent confidence in our natural inclinations. Moreover, given the remainder of the PI argument, it is very difficult to see how a Reidian might produce such an argument without ultimately relying on intuition itself. That is, not only does the Reidian defense of premise four look unpromising, but

what's more, it is impossible to defend premise four without surreptitiously helping oneself to the justification-conferring powers of intuition. And, as PI concludes, this leads rapidly to contradiction. Nevertheless, as has already been argued, traditional first philosophy essentially depends on the truth of premise four, that we are justified in accepting that the method of intuition justifies some propositions.

Premise five is the last assumption of the proof. It states that nothing is self-justifying. What does this mean? The idea is that there are no basic propositions whose justification stems from no source other than themselves that we are justified in accepting. That is, if we must already assume the truth of a proposition P in order to construct an argument showing that we are epistemically justified in accepting P, then P is self-justifying. And so it is with intuition. We must assume that the method of intuition delivers justified propositions when we employ this method to show that "the method of intuition justifies some propositions." It is this kind of self-justification that is rejected in premise five. This I believe expresses nothing more than a familiar rejection of foundationalism, a rejection now so common that Foley has declared that we are now in a "postfoundationalist era."²² He argues that, if we want to hang on to necessary propositions and engage in traditional philosophy, we have no choice but to believe that "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified.²³ He is correct—the rejection of premise four spells disaster. Yet Foley does not recognize that in order to maintain premise four consistently some premise of PI must go. I have already argued that philosophers who are not radical empiricists are committed to premises one and four, and that there are excellent reasons to accept

premises two and three. I believe that the only plausible way out is to reject premise five.

We must accept that some propositions are self-justifying and that "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is one. Put another way, this proposition is axiomatic for traditional intuition-driven philosophy. In adopting such an axiom, we adopt a form of foundationalism.²⁴ Modest foundationalism in this sense expresses the thesis that there are justified propositions whose justification depends on nothing other than themselves. Obviously, various stronger versions have been defended, maintaining that such propositions are known with certainty; that all of our knowledge rests upon basic propositions; and so on. I take no stand on these, and acceptance or rejection of them is beyond the requirements of this modest foundationalism.²⁵ We cannot, despite Foley's announcement of the postfoundationalist era, abandon all forms of foundationalism and continue to engage in traditional philosophy.

To sum up, the five premises of PI form an inconsistent set. I have argued that there are only two ways to avoid commitment to the elements of this set: (1) become a radical empiricist/naturalizer, give up the *a priori*, and abandon the use of rational intuition, or (2) accept that a modest foundationalism is true and that "the method of intuition justifies some propositions" is epistemically justified on the basis of nothing other than the method of intuition itself. The only way for a proponent of traditional *a priori* philosophy to get out of the Problem of Intuition is to reject premise five, and by so doing, endorse a modest foundationalism. Here, then, is our choice: either a form of foundationalism is true or philosophy grounded in the use of rational intuition is bunk.²⁶

NOTES

1. Important recent works include DePaul and Ramsey 1998, Bonjour 1998, Bealer 1996, and Tidman 1996.
2. For a discussion of other faulty empirical intuitions exposed by recent psychology, see Tversky and Kahneman 1983.
3. Lewis 1986, pp. 240–241. See also Rawls 1971, pp. 48–50 on reflective equilibrium.
4. Bonjour 1998, pp. 98 and 106.
5. Devitt 1999, p. 96. For a popular account of this view, see Wilson 1998. Wilson argues, for example, that evolutionary sociobiology will ultimately settle the issue of the correct normative ethics. The problem with his account is that while science may tell us which moral codes will work best for species (or group) preservation, it is incapable of telling us why species preservation is *valuable*.
6. An elaborate defense of this view can be found in Bonjour 1998, chap. 4.
7. This analysis of intuition takes no stand on the genesis of intuition or its deliverances. Bealer and Tidman think that nature has endowed us with intuition as a special faculty. Richard Rorty (1979, p. 34) maintains that intuition is just familiarity with a language-game.
8. Sartre 1956, p. 51.
9. Here and following, "intuition" is shorthand for "rational intuition," unless I explicitly state that I am discussing empirical intuitions.
10. Cf. Bealer 1996, p. 7 and Tidman 1996, p. 164.
11. Bealer 1996, pp. 16–17.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 30, note 15.
13. I thank Nenad Mišćević for this example.
14. Bealer 1996, p. 32, note 26.
15. For more detailed discussions of the nature of the *a priori*, see Bonjour 1998, chap. 1 and Chisholm 1989, chap. 4.
16. Bonjour 1998, p. 102. Compare Robert Audi's principle that "if *p* is a necessary truth which, simply on the basis of understanding it, *S* attentively believes, then *S*'s belief that *p* is prima facie justified" (Audi 1993, p. 310).
17. Kornblith 1998. Subsequent page references to Kornblith will be to this article.
18. Quine is one who has given general arguments against modal distinctions, but it is far beyond the scope of this paper to address his extensionalist program. I note, however, that he seems to have few followers in this regard.
19. Cf. Bealer (1996), who defends this premise in a different way on p. 8.
20. Quoted in Tidman (1996), p. 168.
21. Tidman 1996, pp. 169–170.
22. Foley 1998, pp. 242 *et passim*.
23. *Ibid.*, esp. p. 254.
24. The 20th century's ultrafoundationalist, Roderick Chisholm, makes clear this connection in Chisholm 1989, pp. 28–29.

25. For a review of the vast and well-known literature concerning these stronger theses, see Plantinga 1993.
26. Two anonymous reviewers for *The American Philosophical Quarterly* made helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this paper.

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