
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Where do philosophers appeal to intuitions (if they do)?

Richard Galvin | William Roche

Department of Philosophy, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Correspondence

Richard Galvin, Department of Philosophy, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX 76129, USA.

Email: r.galvin@tcu.edu

Abstract

It might be that intuitions are central to philosophy, and it might be that this is true because when philosophers give case-based arguments for philosophical claims (in published philosophy), the case verdict is typically (a) an intuited proposition and (b) either left undefended or defended on the grounds that it is an intuited proposition. This paper remains neutral on these global issues, however, and instead focuses on whether there is a nontrivial (or many-membered) class of case-based arguments in philosophy in which the case verdict is defended by appeal to background beliefs and not on the grounds that it is an intuited proposition. The paper argues that the answer is affirmative by examining seven such arguments that are referred to as “paradigm cases” of case-based arguments in which the verdict is justified via an appeal to intuition.

KEYWORDS

background beliefs, case-based arguments in philosophy, experimental philosophy, intuited propositions, intuitions

1 | INTRODUCTION

Are intuitions central to philosophy? Many philosophers believe that the answer is affirmative. But the term “intuition” has been employed to refer to a number of distinct phenomena.¹ Our interest here lies in whether philosophers appeal to intuition in the sense referred to by Weinberg: “Intuitions are odd critters: intellectual happenings in which it seems to us that something is the case without arising from our inferring it from any reasons that it is

¹See Pust (2019) for a discussion of the various senses of the term.

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so, or our sensorily perceiving that it is so, or our having a sense of remembering that it is so” (Weinberg 2007, 318). Weinberg goes on to criticize “the current analytic philosophical practice of appealing to intuitions as evidence for philosophical claims. In the extant practice of appeal to intuitions as philosophical evidence, one cites one’s application or withholding of a concept from a given case, usually a hypothetical one, in defense of (or in order to attack) a particular philosophical claim. Such citations thus are meant to carry argumentative, evidential weight, but one is not usually required to offer any further argumentation for the intuition itself” (Weinberg 2007, 320). Here Weinberg makes two related but ultimately distinct claims. One is what Cappelen (2012, 3) refers to as “*Centrality*,” viz.: “Contemporary analytic philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence (or a source of evidence) for philosophical theories.”

In addition, Weinberg claims that one way in which contemporary analytic philosophers appeal to intuitions as evidence is when philosophers issue verdicts regarding case-based arguments (hereafter “CBAs”). We refer to this as

Case Verdicts: When philosophers give CBAs for philosophical claims (in published philosophy), they appeal to intuition as evidence in support of the case verdict.²

There is a trivial sense in which the verdict in *every* CBA is defended, and not by appealing to intuition as evidence in its support: the verdict is supposed to follow at least in part from various case details. Consider, for example, Thomson’s (1971) Violinist case. The verdict in this case, that it is permissible to unplug yourself from the violinist, is supposed to follow from the fact that you find yourself hooked up to the violinist, and even though the violinist will die if you unplug yourself, it does not violate the violinist’s right to life, since the right to life does not entail the right to use another’s body. It might seem, then, that *Case Verdicts* is obviously false.

We mean, however, for *Case Verdicts* to be understood as short for something like:

When philosophers give CBAs for philosophical claims (in published philosophy), there’s a “connecting” claim (perhaps tacit) to the effect that the verdict follows from such and such case details (perhaps the conjunction of all the case details), and this connecting claim is typically (a) an intuited proposition and (b) either left undefended or defended on the grounds that it is an intuited proposition.

The *verdict* in every CBA is supposed to follow at least in part from various case details. This isn’t true of the connecting claim that *the verdict follows from such and such case details*. Hence, the worry noted above doesn’t arise.³

It will be easier in terms of presentation (and more in line with standard practice) to set aside these niceties and focus on verdicts as opposed to connecting claims. Bear in mind, however, that *Case Verdicts* is actually about connecting claims.

Weinberg argues that philosophical intuition—the source of the intuitions that are allegedly used by philosophers in CBAs for philosophical claims—is untrustworthy. Since we are unable to detect and correct its errors, it is “hopeless” as a source of evidence. The fact that

²It should be noted that our concern is not with how philosophers arrive at verdicts in various cases, that is, how philosophers formulate their beliefs about the correct verdicts in those cases. Rather, our interest is whether they “appeal to intuitions as evidence for philosophical claims” (from Weinberg 2007) in making case-based arguments.

³There are other potential ways of understanding connecting claims in CBAs. For example, they can be understood as conditionals of some kind where the antecedent is the conjunction of such and such case details and the consequent is the verdict. See Chalmers and Jackson (2001) and Jackson (2018) for relevant discussion.

philosophers appeal to intuition in this sense is problematic, and given that such appeals to intuitions as evidence are pervasive, philosophy, especially contemporary analytic philosophy, is in trouble.

Cappelen 2012 is essentially a book-length argument against *Centrality*. One chapter is devoted to an analysis of ten CBAs, the conclusion of which is that in not a single one is the case verdict defended on the basis of an appeal to intuition. So *Case Verdicts* is not confirmed by any of the ten cases that Cappelen examined. But many readers remained unconvinced, pointing out that looking at ten CBAs involves a very small subset of such arguments. Further, such a sample might not be representative of the frequency of appeals to intuition among CBAs. For instance, Chalmers has explicitly questioned Cappelen's sample: “[W]hy these case studies? Of course different cases are salient to different philosophers, but I might have taken Gettier's argument from cases, Kripke's arguments against descriptivism, Jackson's knowledge argument, and Searle's Chinese room argument to be more paradigmatic appeals to intuition than any of the arguments above” (Chalmers 2014, 539). While not responding directly to Cappelen's choice of cases, Pust (2019) lists four “paradigmatic instances” of the “method of cases,” which involves an appeal to intuition in support of the verdict regarding a particular hypothetical case: Gettier's Coins, Thomson's Transplant, Block's Chinese Nation, and Bromberger's Flagpole cases. It is noteworthy that none of Pust's paradigmatic cases is among those examined by Cappelen.

Let us test *Case Verdicts* by focusing on the seven CBAs explicitly identified by Chalmers and Pust as “paradigmatic” appeals to intuition (Gettier's Coins appears on both lists). Are the verdicts in those CBAs left undefended or defended on the grounds that they are intuited propositions? We aim to show that the answer is negative.

If we're right, does this entail the falsity of *Case Verdicts*? No, since *Case Verdicts* doesn't say that the verdicts in *all* CBAs are left undefended or defended on the grounds that it is an intuited proposition; it says just that this is *typical*. But, presumably, if we're right about our target CBAs, this *decreases the probability* of *Case Verdicts*.⁴

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we address our seven target CBAs. In section 3, we set out an alternative to *Case Verdicts* called “*Background Beliefs*” and note a reason for opting for it over *Case Verdicts*. In section 4, we address a concern to the effect that verdicts in CBAs are typically used as “data points” that adequate theories need to accommodate, and that when they are so used in arguments, they are premises rather than conclusions. In section 5, we briefly address an argument for the role of intuition at a level beyond the case verdict itself and suggest an alternative account. In section 6, we conclude by raising a concern for survey-based studies in experimental philosophy.

2 | SEVEN “PARADIGMATIC” CBAs

We now turn to the seven CBAs noted by Chalmers and Pust. Our presentation of each argument begins with a brief description of the salient features of the case, followed by the case verdict, and next a highly compressed outline of what we take to be the argument that the author provides in defense of the verdict.⁵

⁴We see no straightforward way to determine with *high probability* whether *Case Verdicts* is true. It is a frequency claim about the population of CBAs in philosophy. But the size of this population is astronomical, and we see no straightforward way to obtain a suitable sample of it, that is, a sample that would settle at least with high probability its truth-value. (A random and relatively large sample of the population of CBAs in philosophy might be suitable in this sense. We see no *straightforward* way, however, to obtain such a sample.) There is also the live issue of whether intuitions, understood in terms of non-inferential justification, actually exist. See Cling (2008) for helpful discussion of the possibility of non-inferential justification.

⁵As we noted above, it is more accurately the connecting claim that the author defends.

2.1 | Gettier (1963) on the JTB account

Gettier (1963) gives a case in which Smith has strong evidence for and believes:

- (a) Jones is the man who will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

This proposition entails:

- (b) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith see this entailment and believes (b) on the basis of (a). It turns out that Smith's belief in (b) is true, but not because (a) is true. It's true because, unbeknownst to Smith, he is the man who will get the job and he has ten coins in his pocket. Gettier takes this case to be a counterexample to the justified true belief (JTB) theory of knowledge. He writes (in slightly different notation): "In our example, then, all of the following are true: (i) (b) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (b) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (b) is true. But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (b) is true; for *(b) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (b) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job*" (Gettier 1963, 122, emphasis added). Gettier never appeals to intuition as evidence in support of the proposition that Smith does not know that (b). He instead says what's in italics in the passage above. Further, his claim that Smith's belief in (b) is justified is meant to follow in part from two general theses about justification. Gettier writes: "I shall begin by noting two points. First, in that sense of 'justified' in which S's being justified in believing P is a necessary condition of S's knowing that P, it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false. Secondly, for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q. *Keeping these two points in mind*, I shall now present two cases in which the conditions stated in [the JTB theory of knowledge] are true for some proposition, though it is at the same time false that the person in question knows that proposition" (Gettier 1963, 121, emphasis added). While Gettier doesn't explicitly invoke those two points when he claims that Smith is justified in believing (b), they are there implicitly.

2.2 | Bromberger (1966) on Hempel's D-N model of explanation

Bromberger (1966) gives a CBA against Hempel's D-N model of explanation. Here it is in its entirety:

There is a point on Fifth Avenue, M feet away from the base of the Empire State Building, at which a ray of light coming from the tip of the building makes an angle of θ degrees with a line to the base of the building. From the laws of geometric optics, together with the "antecedent" condition that the distance is M feet, the angle θ degrees, it is possible to deduce that the Empire State Building has a height of H feet. Any high-school student could set up the deduction given actual numerical values. By doing so, he would not, however, have explained why the Empire State Building has a height of H feet, nor would he have answered the question "Why does the Empire State Building have a height of H feet?" nor would an exposition of the deduction be the explanation of or answer to (either implicitly or explicitly) why the Empire State Building has a height of H feet. (Bromberger 1966, 92–93)

Bromberger issues three verdicts in the last sentence of this passage but does not offer a defense; he instead moves on to four additional putative counterexamples to Hempel's D-N model. Salmon (1989), however, includes a discussion of what is essentially the same case and offers a defense that includes what we believe Bromberger thought to be obvious and would implicitly endorse. Regarding the relationship between a flagpole and its shadow, even though we can deduce the height of the flagpole from the length of its shadow and can deduce the length of the shadow from the height of the flagpole (given the position of the sun), “few people would be willing to concede that the height of the flagpole is explained by the length of its shadow. The reason for this asymmetry seems to lie in the fact that *a flagpole of a certain height causes a shadow of a given length, and thereby explains the length of the shadow, whereas the shadow does not cause the flagpole, and consequently cannot explain its height*” (Salmon 1989, 47, emphasis added).

Bromberger likely believed something like the italicized claims in the latter passage and took it that his readers did as well and would see that his case verdict is an obvious consequence thereof.

2.3 | Kripke (1972) on Gödel/Schmidt

Kripke (1972) introduces his Gödel/Schmidt case in a CBA against what he calls “Thesis 3,” which is associated with descriptivism. He puts the thesis as follows:

If most, or a weighted most, of the ϕ 's are satisfied by one unique object γ , then γ is the referent of ‘ X ’. (Kripke 1972, 71)

Here is the CBA in full:

Imagine the following blatantly fictional situation....Suppose that Gödel was not in fact the author of this theorem. A man named ‘Schmidt’, whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and it was thereafter attributed to Gödel. On the view in question, then, when our ordinary man uses the name ‘Gödel’, he really means to refer to Schmidt, because Schmidt is the unique person satisfying the description ‘the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic’. Of course you might try changing it to ‘the man who published the discovery of the incompleteness of arithmetic’. By changing the story a little further one can make even this formulation false. Anyway, most people might not even know whether the thing was published or got around by word of mouth. Let's stick to ‘the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic’. So, since the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about ‘Gödel’, are in fact always referring to Schmidt. But it seems to me that we are not. We simply are not. (Kripke 1972, 84)

Kripke then notes a possible reply, sets it aside for later, and presents three actual cases that are parallel to his hypothetical (one about Peano, one about Einstein, and one about Columbus). His doing so strongly suggests that since (for example) the fact that those whose only belief about Columbus is that he discovered that the earth is round are nonetheless referring to Columbus himself (and similarly for Peano and Einstein), in the hypothetical we are referring to Gödel and not Schmidt. When Kripke issues his verdict, he doesn't invoke intuition in its defense. Instead, he cites the three actual cases in support of it.

2.4 | Thomson (1976) on the Transplant case

Thomson (1976) gives a CBA that (allegedly) supports the thesis that killing is worse than letting die:

And isn't what they mean by it [i.e., the thesis that killing is worse than letting die] further confirmed by the fact—isn't it a fact?—that in the following case, David must not kill, that he must instead let die:

(4) David is a great transplant surgeon. Five of his patients need new parts—one needs a heart, the others need, respectively, liver, stomach, spleen, and spinal cord—but all are of the same, relatively rare, blood-type. By chance, David learns of a healthy specimen with that very blood-type. David can take the healthy specimen's parts, killing him, and install them in his patients, saving them. Or he can refrain from taking the healthy specimen's parts, letting his patients die.

If David may not even choose to cut up one where five will thereby be saved, surely what people who say “Killing is worse than letting die” mean by it must be right! (Thomson 1976, 205–6)

Thomson's verdict is that it is impermissible for David to kill the healthy patient in order to save the five, but not just because killing is worse than letting die, or that one has a negative duty to refrain from killing but only a positive duty to rescue, nor that there is a principle of “moral inertia” according to which there is *prima facie* duty to refrain from interfering with existing states of affairs just because they are existing states of affairs. Instead, she gives a series of arguments (involving runaway trolleys, cutting patients to bits, nuclear bombs, and health pills), the implication of which for the Transplant case she summarizes as follows: “[W]hat matters in these cases in which a threat is to be distributed is whether the agent distributes it by doing something to it, or whether he distributes it by doing something to a person.” “[T]he special nastiness in David, if he acts, lies in this: in the first place, he gives to the five what belongs to the one (*viz.*, body parts), *and* in the second, in order to bring out a better distribution of the ailments threatening his five... he does something to the one (*viz.*, cuts him up)” (Thomson 1976, 216). Thomson defends the verdict in the Transplant case by appealing to the more general principles cited above, not by appealing to intuition.

2.5 | Block (1978) on the “Chinese Nation”

Block (1978) gives a case in which all of the citizens of China are given a special two-way radio that allows them to communicate with one another and a humanlike body, and are arranged so as to be functionally equivalent to some human brain and to interact with the humanlike body in a way that is functionally equivalent to how the brain interacts with the human body. Does the “China Brain” have mental states? Block holds that machine functionalism implies that the answer is yes, and that this is problematic for machine functionalism, since in fact the answer is no. He doesn't initially defend his verdict. But he later writes: “So there is *prima facie* doubt that machine functionalism is true. So what? After all, *prima facie* doubt is only *prima facie*. Indeed, appeals to intuition of this sort are notoriously fallible. I shall not rest on this appeal to intuition. Rather, I shall argue that the homunculi-headed simulation described above lacks mentality (or at least qualia) has at least in part a rational basis, and that this rational basis provides a good reason for doubting that Functionalism (and to a lesser degree Psychofunctionalism) is true” (Block 1978, 278).

Block's argument is quite lengthy, but among its central claims are (i) some mental states are qualitative, (ii) the “China Brain” being merely functionally equivalent to some mental state does

not entail that it possesses mentality just because our mental state does, (iii) “crude behaviorism” is false (and he inserts a truncated version of his “sensible strings” argument that would subsequently appear in Block 1981 to support that), (iv) brains can produce qualia (although we don’t know how they do), (v) that the “China Brain” might be functionally equivalent to some qualitative mental state does not show that it actually has that mental state. As noted above, the point of the argument is to *avoid* appealing to intuition, and to provide instead “a rational basis” for the verdict.

2.6 | Searle (1980) on the Chinese Room

Searle (1980) describes a case where he is locked in a room and given a big batch of Chinese writing. He doesn’t know any written or spoken Chinese and isn’t confident that he can even distinguish Chinese writing from, say, Japanese writing. Next, he’s given a second batch of Chinese writing along with some instructions in English on how to correlate the second batch with the first. Finally, he’s given a third batch of Chinese writing along with some instructions in English on how to correlate the third batch with the first two and give back Chinese symbols with certain shapes in response to symbols with certain shapes in the third batch. It turns out that the people who have been giving him all this call the first batch a “script,” the second batch a “story,” the third batch “questions,” and the symbols he gives back “answers.” After a while he gets so good at doing this that his “answers” to the “questions” about the Chinese “stories” are (from the perspective of someone unaware of what’s happening in the room) indistinguishable from those of a native Chinese speaker. Does Searle understand the Chinese stories? He answers in the negative and takes this to be problematic for Strong AI. He writes: “As regards the first claim, it seems to me quite obvious in the example that I do not understand a word of the Chinese stories. I have inputs and outputs that are indistinguishable from those of the native Chinese speaker, and I can have any formal program you like, but I still understand nothing” (Searle 1980, 418).

Searle defends his verdict, but not by appealing to intuition. Instead it involves the claims that he still doesn’t understand Chinese, that all he learned to do in the room was to manipulate symbols by following a set of instructions that allowed him to mimic the responses of a native Chinese speaker, and that understanding a story requires more than the ability to mimic a set of responses—it requires understanding the language in which the story is written, which requires understanding its semantics, which he lacks.

2.7 | Jackson (1982) on Mary

Jackson (1982) gives a case in which Mary is a brilliant scientist who, for whatever reason, is forced to study the world from a black-and-white room via a black-and-white television monitor. Her specialty is the neurophysiology of vision. She ends up acquiring all the physical information that there is to acquire on sensations and their properties. She will eventually be released from her room or else be given a color television monitor. Physicalism implies that when this happens, her prior knowledge (her knowledge prior to being released or given a color television monitor) includes everything there is to know about sensations and their properties.⁶ Jackson disagrees: “What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a colour television monitor? Will she learn anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then it is inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete. But she had all the physical information. Ergo there is more to have than that, and Physicalism is false” (Jackson 1982, 130). Jackson’s argument for this conclusion

⁶Jackson (1982, 127) construes physicalism as the view that all information is physical information. See Jackson 1986, 291, for a slightly different construal, and for clarification on how to understand the argument.

actually begins prior to his introducing the Mary case. The Fred argument (where Fred sees two different colors that the rest of us see simply as red), which immediately precedes the Mary case, establishes that knowing all there is to know about how Fred's physiology works would not tell us what it's like to have the experience of seeing the two colors where we see one, and were we to modify someone's visual apparatus so as to duplicate Fred's brain and optical system, that person *would* learn something new—what it's like to see those two colors.

Jackson then points out that “Fred and the new colour(s) are of course essentially rhetorical devices. But the same point can be made with normal people and familiar colours” (Jackson 1982, 130), and at this point he introduces the Mary case. He maintains that when Mary exits the black-and-white room (or gets the color monitor), she will also learn something new, viz., what it is like to see red. But since she knew the complete physicalist story about vision, physicalism leaves something out—“qualia are left out of the physicalist story.”

2.8 | Summary and discussion

In Gettier's CBA, he explicitly notes two background beliefs about justification and implicitly appeals to them in defense of his claim that though Smith has a *justified* true belief in (b), he doesn't know that (b) is true. Intuition plays no role in his defense. Bromberger just issues the verdict and offers no defense. But Salmon discusses what is essentially the same case and defends the verdict, but not by appealing to intuition, explicitly citing what Bromberger likely thought was obvious enough to his target audience not to require explicit mention. Kripke issues the verdict and doesn't immediately defend it, but does so shortly thereafter by citing three actual cases that parallel his hypothetical. Thomson issues the verdict and defends it, not by appeal to intuition, but on the basis of a series of arguments that establish intermediate conclusions, which she eventually ties together. In Block's CBA, he seems to think that his verdict might be construed as an intuited proposition, and that this would give it *prima facie* support, but since intuition is notoriously fallible, he will not rest the case there and instead defends the verdict in a way that does not rely on intuition as evidence. Searle issues the verdict and defends it, not on the basis of intuition, but by appealing to what it means to understand a story and the language it is written in. Jackson defends the verdict, appealing to premises established by the previous (Fred) case.

Even if our analysis is correct, it hardly suffices to show that *Case Verdicts* is false—these CBAs might not be a representative sample. Still, it's not as though Pust and Chalmers selected their CBAs by random sampling from the population of CBAs in philosophy—these are claimed to be paradigm cases of appeals to intuition. That in itself gives our analysis more significance than if it involved a set of cherry-picked or randomly chosen cases. Further, there are numerous CBAs in philosophy like Gettier's in that the verdict issued is defended by appeal to background beliefs. We don't have the space to defend this claim in detail. But in the next section we note some examples and explain why we don't find it surprising that such CBAs exist.

3 | BACKGROUND BELIEFS

Our hypothesis is that the arguments provided in the target cases we examined involve appeals to background beliefs that the author holds and presumes are shared by the author's target audience. Hence we offer the following as an alternative to *Case Verdicts*:

Background Beliefs: There is a nontrivial (or many-membered) class of CBAs in philosophy in which the case verdict is defended by appeal to background beliefs and not on the grounds that it is an intuited proposition.

This doesn't require that intuitions exist and isn't about what's typical when philosophers give CBAs.

Three quick clarifications of *Background Beliefs* are in order. First, *Background Beliefs* should be understood so that *implicit* defenses of case verdicts count as defenses of the sort at issue. An implicit defense is a defense nonetheless (just as an implicit premise is still a premise). Second, nothing in *Background Beliefs* implies that when philosophers appeal to background beliefs in their CBAs, the beliefs in question are typically justified and true. Those are separate issues. Third, nothing in *Background Beliefs* implies that when philosophers defend their case verdicts by appeal to background beliefs, the defenses in question are dialectically effective. This too is a separate issue.

Background Beliefs is suggested in part by the fact that when philosophers start theorizing about a given philosophical topic T, they typically have many background beliefs about, or relevant to, T. Consider, for example, the topic of explanation. When philosophers start theorizing about explanation, they typically have many background beliefs in propositions such as:

(3.1)	The lights came on because the light switch was flipped to the “On” position.
(3.2)	It's not true that the light switch was flipped to the “On” position because the lights came on.
(3.3)	Effects can be explained by appeal to their causes, but not vice versa.
(3.4)	Refrigerators don't utter sentences in English regardless of whether you tell them not to.

(3.1) and (3.2) are particular claims and, let us suppose, are about an *actual* case of cause and effect. (3.3) is a general claim about causes and effects. (3.4) isn't explicitly about explanation. But it is relevant to it in that it could be used as a premise against theories of explanation on which the fact that your refrigerator doesn't utter sentences in English can be explained in part by appeal to the fact that you told it not to.

Now consider, for a second example, the topic of knowledge. When philosophers start theorizing about knowledge, they typically have many background beliefs in propositions such as:

(3.5)	John knows that he lives in Chicago.
(3.6)	John doesn't know that he doesn't live in Chicago.
(3.7)	Knowledge of an effect doesn't require knowledge of its cause.
(3.8)	It's possible for a subject to be justified in believing a proposition that in fact is false.

(3.5) and (3.6) are particular claims and, let us suppose, are about an *actual* person and what she knows and doesn't know. (3.7) is a general claim about knowledge. (3.8) is a general claim about justification and, as noted above in section 2, is part of Gettier's overall argument for the conclusion that his Ten Coins case is a counterexample to the JTB theory of knowledge.

The topics of explanation and knowledge are just two examples. There are numerous other philosophical topics, for instance, moral rightness, personal identity, free will, and reference, as well as related topics, about which philosophers have a variety of antecedent beliefs. Philosophers are people (odd people in many cases, but people nonetheless), and people in general believe numerous claims like (3.1)–(3.8). It would be surprising—*very* surprising—if philosophers were akin to Lockean “white paper” when they start thinking about philosophical topics and have no background beliefs in claims like (3.1)–(3.8) to appeal to in their thinking.

Background Beliefs isn't entailed by the fact that philosophers have a variety of background beliefs relevant to the topics they address. It could be, for example, that although philosophers typically have many background beliefs about, or relevant to, T when they start theorizing about T, they for some reason never appeal to those background beliefs in support of their case verdicts. *Background Beliefs* is nonetheless at least somewhat plausible given that philosophers typically do have such beliefs.

Let us return to Gettier's Ten Coins argument and consider the two points we noted in section 2 at the beginning of the second paragraph in Gettier's paper, specifically: "I shall begin by noting two points. First, in that sense of 'justified' in which S's being justified in believing P is a necessary condition of S's knowing that P, it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false. Secondly, for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q" (Gettier 1963, 121). Gettier is here noting in effect two of his background beliefs about justification. He relies on the first in his judgment that Smith is justified in believing the false proposition that Jones is the man who will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. He relies on the second in his later judgment, which is based in part on the earlier judgment just noted, that Smith is justified in believing the entailed proposition that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. His conclusion that his Ten Coins case is a counterexample to the JTB theory of knowledge is thus based in part on two of his background beliefs about justification (which, presumably, he takes to be in the common ground and thus not in need of defense).⁷

Likewise, Kripke's Godel/Schmidt argument relies upon any number of background beliefs to which Kripke refers in defending his verdict. These include that many people know little or nothing about Godel, perhaps only that he wrote the incompleteness theorem (if that!). Kripke also refers to the background beliefs regarding Peano, Einstein, and Columbus. Jackson's Mary argument relies on the background belief that there is something that it is like smelling a rose (or seeing red, and so on) that is not captured by a description of the physical processes involved. Searle appeals to background beliefs about how understanding a story requires understanding the sentences in the story, and that understanding a language includes syntax and semantics. In Thomson's Transplant case she appeals to the background belief that a person has a claim (presumably a very strong one) to one's organs that others do not have. The argument for Block's "Chinese Nation" verdict appeals to a host of background beliefs about rigid designation, that it is (physically and metaphysically) possible to arrange the citizens of China in a way that instantiates the relevant functional relations between brain and body, and that at least some mental states are qualitative. While Bromberger doesn't do so explicitly, Salmon's argument does specify what at least some of the relevant background beliefs are, such as beliefs about causation and explanation.

Consider also Thomson's (1971) Violinist case. There she argues that it is permissible to unplug yourself, and does so by appealing to a sequence of background beliefs, such as (to name just two) that having the right to life does not include having the right to everything necessary for exercising the right to life, and that one does not behave unjustly if one fails to allow another person to use something to which you have a right and the other person does not. She also supplies independent arguments for each of these background beliefs, as well as the other background beliefs that she appeals to in support of not only the verdict in the Violinist case but also the claim that at least some abortions are permissible even if the fetus is granted the right to life from the moment of conception. She does not claim that the verdict in the Violinist case is "intuited" in the senses we are addressing, and hence does not claim that such an intuition provides evidentiary support for the verdict.

⁷It might be that Gettier also appeals (implicitly) to a claim to the effect that for any subject S and proposition P, if (i) S believes P, (ii) P is true, and (iii) what makes P true isn't something that S knows or even believes, then S doesn't know that P.

Again, given their prevalence in the literature, a sample of seven CBAs is hardly sufficient to justify any claim to what is typical regarding such arguments. But our sample is neither cherry-picked nor random. These are cases that have been referred to as “paradigmatic” instances of appeals to intuition as evidence in support of a case verdict. In our judgment the number of instances in which intuition is not appealed to as evidence for the verdict in a CBA is enormous. Our conjecture—and it is at this point only a conjecture—is that the dominant mode of defense of such verdicts involves appeals to background beliefs as opposed to intuition. But that conjecture is supported by each of the seven cases we examined.

4 | CASE VERDICTS AS CONCLUSIONS OR CASE VERDICTS AS PREMISES? BOTH!

We have argued that the case verdicts in our target CBAs are defended (and the defense isn't that they are intuited propositions). We believe, but haven't argued, that there are numerous additional CBAs like our target CBAs in this respect. We believe this in part because of *Background Beliefs* (see section 3). If all this is correct, then case verdicts are oftentimes *conclusions* in arguments.

It doesn't follow, though, that case verdicts are not oftentimes *premises* in arguments. Consider Gettier's first CBA. Gettier defends the verdict but also uses the verdict as a premise against the JTB theory of knowledge. First, the verdict is defended by appeal to claims such as the claim that it's possible for a justified belief to be false. Here the verdict is a conclusion in an argument. Second, with the verdict taken as established, it is used as a premise in an argument against the JTB theory of knowledge. The argument overall thus consists of two sub-arguments, where the verdict is the conclusion in the first and a premise in the second.⁸

These points generalize. There is no doubt that when case verdicts are issued in CBAs, they are oftentimes, perhaps even almost always, used as premises in arguments for or against theories, and that when they are so used, they are taken as established. But this says nothing about why they are taken as established. It could be that they are taken as established for no reason or because they are thought to be intuited propositions. But it could be instead, as we believe, that they are taken as established because they are taken to follow from various background claims.

Consider the following from Nado (2017), who is commenting on Deutsch (2015):

Compare the above passage, for instance, to certain claims one might make about scientific hypotheses—say, for instance, the claim that Einstein's hypothesis that light consists of photons better accounts for experimental data on the photoelectric effect than does the hypothesis that light is a wave. Scientific hypotheses aren't used to argue for the facts they are claimed to account for—the direction of support is the other way round. I don't mean to claim that philosophical reasoning can always be viewed as an exact analog of scientific reasoning; but in this case, at least, the language quite strongly suggests that the mode of argumentation is more or less comparable. Goldman's theory gains confirmation from its ability to explain the Gettier case; Goldman is no more arguing for the truth of the Gettier judgment than Einstein was arguing for the accuracy of the experimental data. The post-Gettier literature is not best characterized as five decades of attempts to further convince us that Smith does not know. (Nado 2017, 395)

⁸See Colaco and Machery 2017, especially 413–15.

We agree that the post-Gettier literature is focused not on defending Gettier's verdict but on explaining, or accounting for, it (along with numerous additional verdicts). But this in no way tells against our view that Gettier's verdict itself is defended by appeal to various background claims. The same is true with respect to Nado's science example. Yes, in that example, scientists are focused on explaining various experimental data on the photoelectric effect. But this in no way tells against the view that the alleged data in question are taken as established in part because of various background claims, for example, claims about the reliability of certain experimental devices. If the overall argument were to be made explicit, it would start with a sub-argument from premises some of which concern the reliability of certain experimental devices to some conclusion about the photoelectric effect, and then this conclusion would be used as a premise in a second sub-argument, where the conclusion is about the truth or falsity of some theory. Consequently, accepting that the science and CBA cases are somewhat analogous does not commit one to endorsing the position that in making CBAs philosophers appeal to intuition as evidence, let alone as evidence in support of the case verdict. Indeed, background beliefs play a crucial role in each case.

5 | INTUITIONS SOMEWHERE?

If our conjecture about background beliefs is correct, philosophers who argue for the central role of intuitions in the work of contemporary (especially analytic) philosophy based on the claim that philosophers appeal to intuitions as evidence in support of their verdicts in CBAs need to reevaluate their position. While our analysis of these seven CBAs is hardly sufficient to show that *Case Verdicts* is false, it does reduce the probability of both *Case Verdicts* and *Centrality*. But even if philosophers do appeal to arguments as opposed to intuition in support of their verdict, some have argued that there must be an appeal to intuition at some point in those arguments—at some point they must bottom out, and intuition is seen by some as a likely candidate for that role. Such arguments embrace some version of what we refer to as:

Intuitions Somewhere: When philosophers give CBAs for philosophical claims, the case verdict is typically either an intuited proposition or defended ultimately by appeal to intuited propositions as regress stoppers.

Chalmers (2014) argues for something along the lines of *Intuitions Somewhere*. He writes:

More generally, reflection on the structure of justification yields a case that one has to appeal to intuitions (as I construe them) to get anywhere in philosophy. After all, all arguments have to start somewhere. Some premises will have background support, but even once one unpacks this support, there will plausibly be unargued premises without inferential support. Premises with memorial and testimonial support plausibly rely on previous more basic sorts of support, so one needs noninferential, nonmemorial, and nontestimonial support to get anywhere. Perceptual and introspective support can play some role, but it is arguable that inference from perception and introspection is not strong enough to get one to strong philosophical conclusions in many cases. So philosophical argumentation for these strong conclusions will rely at some level on broadly noninferential (that is, intuitive) justification. (Chalmers 2014, 542)

Chalmers is not arguing that *case verdicts* are typically intuitively justified, or that when case verdicts are defended, *the premises* are typically intuitively justified. His view is that philosophical argumentation for “strong” conclusions at least typically bottoms out *at some point* in intuitively justified propositions.

Chalmers's conclusion differs in at least two key respects from *Intuitions Somewhere*. First, unlike *Intuitions Somewhere*, his conclusion isn't restricted to CBAs for philosophical claims. Second, unlike *Intuitions Somewhere*, his conclusion is restricted to arguments for *strong* philosophical claims. If, however, Chalmers's argument succeeds, then it can likely be adapted to establish *Intuitions Somewhere*.

It's worth noting that *Background Beliefs* bears directly on a recent argument for *Centrality* noted by Nado (2016). In the following passage she argues for something very much like *Intuitions Somewhere*:

It strikes me that the *most* plausible argument for Centrality is one that Cappelen does not explicitly discuss. We might call this the 'Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options'. The argument consists of the simple observation that, in many cases, there just aren't any obvious extra-intuitive sources for our philosophical beliefs. When I consider the Gettier case, I surely don't have a visual experience upon which I base my subsequent belief that the protagonist of the case fails to know. Nor an auditory experience, nor a memory, nor an introspection, and so forth. I seem to simply know, though I cannot say how. Invoking intuition as the evidential source at least takes a step towards an explanation of how this might be so.... My impression is that it is at least tacitly endorsed by most pro-Centrality philosophers; a great many philosophical propositions have been standardly assumed to be a priori, and intuition is very frequently held (by rationalists, at least) to be the only viable option for explaining how we get at such truths. (Nado 2016, 793–94)

If Nado's Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options is sound, then, it seems, this is not because of arguments like the CBAs examined in section 2. Each of these arguments is such that the evidential source of the case verdict (or at least one such source) is a background belief (or set of such beliefs). Consider, for instance, Thomson's argument that it is impermissible to harvest the organs of the one in order to save five. Here there clearly is an obvious extra-intuitive source for Thomson's verdict, namely, the background belief that the one has a claim to one's organs that the others lack.

Nado is aware of this sort of reply. In response to Cappelen, she writes: "I'm inclined to agree with both these points, but an even more obvious and serious issue is lurking here—how does Cappelen's characterization do anything more than push the problem back a step? The principle that Cappelen takes to be a premise is in just as much need of justification as the claim that Mr. Truetemp does not know. How is it to be justified, other than via intuition?" (Nado 2016, 795–96). But Chalmers's and Nado's arguments, insofar as they insist that philosophy relies on intuitions as regress stoppers, are vulnerable to one fairly obvious response. Perhaps all justification, or at least all justification in philosophy, is *coherentist*. If so, then all justification, or at least all justification in philosophy, is *inferential* and grounded ultimately in coherence.⁹ And even if not *all* justification in philosophy is coherentist (there may be some claims whose justification is foundationalist), if the seven arguments we have examined are representative of how philosophers argue for their verdicts in CBAs, there is reason to think that such arguments do not rely on intuition and are arguably broadly coherentist in nature, insofar as the justification for the verdict is claimed to derive from a set of background beliefs all of which stand in a relationship of mutual support.

⁹Coherentist epistemologies aren't mere possibilities in logical space. See, e.g., BonJour (1985), Brink (1989), Lehrer (2000), and Sayre-McCord (1996).

That said, here we take no stand on whether Nado and Chalmers are right in their main claims. It's important to note, however, that if they were, then this would tell in favor of *Centrality* (and thus against Cappelen), but *not* in favor of *Case Verdicts*. The latter implies that *case verdicts themselves* (in CBAs in philosophy) are typically either intuited propositions or defended on the grounds that they are intuited propositions. This requires more than just that intuited propositions come into to play at some point as regress stoppers.

6 | CONCLUSION

Are case verdicts in survey-based studies in experimental philosophy intuitions or intuited propositions, or are they something else?¹⁰ If intuitions or intuited propositions are simply understood as case verdicts, then yes, trivially, case verdicts in such studies are intuitions or intuited propositions (since case verdicts are case verdicts). But that is not how they are understood by many experimental philosophers. Consider, for example, the following: “As we use the notion, an epistemic intuition is simply a spontaneous judgment about the epistemic properties of some specific case—a judgment for which the person making the judgment may be able to offer no plausible justification” (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2001, 19). No case verdicts are intuitions on this way of understanding intuitions, since case verdicts are propositions and thus are not spontaneous judgments. But they might be intuited propositions. This will depend on whether they are the contents of spontaneous judgments. It might seem that they *must* be the contents of spontaneous judgments, since, the idea goes, subjects have no non-spontaneous, or inferential, way of arriving at their case verdicts (see Nado's Argument from Lack of Other Obvious Options in section 4). Consider, though, our target CBAs. The case verdicts in those arguments are defended by appeal to background beliefs and could have been arrived at via inference from those beliefs. If subjects in survey-based studies in experimental philosophy have relevant background beliefs and use them as premises in inferences (perhaps nonconscious) to their case verdicts, then their case verdicts are *not* intuited propositions.

We close, then, with a plea to experimental philosophers who understand intuitions as non-inferential judgments (or beliefs) of a certain kind: please explain why we should believe that the case verdicts in question are in fact intuited propositions as opposed to propositions inferred from background beliefs, or else explain why we should think that even if the case verdicts in question were propositions inferred from background beliefs, the import of the studies in question with respect to CBAs in philosophy would be the same.

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¹⁰For a recent overview of experimental philosophy, and for references, see Mallon 2016.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Richard Galvin holds the Betty S. Wright Chair in Applied Ethics in the Department of Philosophy at Texas Christian University. He has published articles on Kant's moral theory, causal impotence, distributive justice, legal moralism, and various topics in applied ethics.

William Roche is a professor of philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at Texas Christian University. His main research interests are in epistemology, formal epistemology, and philosophy of science. His publication topics include coherence, inference to the best explanation, observation selection effects, parsimony, peer disagreement, purely probabilistic measures of explanatory power, and transitivity in evidence.

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