

Intuition Mongering

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[Forthcoming in *The Reasoner*]

Philosophers often appeal to intuitions elicited by thought experiments. According to Bealer (1998. A Theory of Concepts and Concept Possession. *Philosophical Issues*, 9, 261-301):

For you to have an intuition that A is just for it to *seem* to you that A. Here 'seems' is understood [...] in its use as a term for a genuine kind of conscious episode [...] [T]his kind of seeming is *intellectual*.

Jackson's thought experiment (1982. Epiphenomenal Qualia. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32, 127-136) is an example of an appeal to intuition:

Mary is a brilliant scientist who is [...] forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor. She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires [...] all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like 'red', 'blue', and so on [...] What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she *learn* anything or not?

Based on this case, Jackson argues as follows:

1. Before her release, Mary has complete physical information about human color vision.
2. But Mary learns something new upon her release.
3. (Therefore) What Mary learns upon her release must be non-physical.

The second premise implicitly relies on the following reasoning:

1. It seems to me that *p*.
2. (Therefore) *p*.

Bach calls this "default reasoning," which is based on his "take-for-granted rule" (1984. Default Reasoning: Jumping to Conclusions and Knowing When to Think Twice. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 65, 37-58):

(TFG) If it seems to me that *p*, then infer that *p*, provided no reason to the contrary occurs to me.

To Jackson (1982, 130), "*It seems just obvious* that [Mary] will learn something about the world," so he infers that Mary will learn something, and that is how he gets the second premise.

Now, I think there are relevant similarities between appeals to intuition and appeals to authority. Appeals to authority look roughly like this:

1. *E* is an expert on subject matter *S*.
2. *E* says that *p* (where *p* is a claim within the domain of *S*).

3. (Therefore) p .

For example:

1. The Surgeon General is an expert on public health.
2. The SG says the secondhand smoke can cause lung cancer.
3. (Therefore) Secondhand smoke can cause lung cancer.

Treatments of appeals to authority usually include two necessary conditions (Salmon, M. 2007. *Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking*. Wadsworth, 118-120):

- (a) The authority must be a genuine expert on S .
- (b) There must be an agreement among experts on S concerning p .

If (a) and/or (b) are not met, then an argument from authority is weak (the premises of a weak argument provide weak support—or no real support—for the conclusion). If conditions (a) and (b) are met, then an argument from authority is strong (the premises of a strong argument provide strong support for the conclusion). In the SG case, conditions (a) and (b) are met, since the SG is an expert on public health and the relevant experts agree on the harmful effects of secondhand smoke.

Here is an example where condition (a) is not met:

1. Jenny McCarthy is a spokesperson for Generation Rescue.
2. JM says that MMR vaccines cause autism.
3. (Therefore) MMR vaccines cause autism.

Since JM is not an expert, an appeal to her “authority” on vaccines is weak. Here is an example where condition (b) is not met:

1. Brian Greene is a theoretical physicist.
2. BG says that an electron is a black hole.
3. (Therefore) An electron is a black hole.

Condition (b) is not met, since the notion of a black hole electron is controversial.

Now, just as appealing to experts is not a good way to resolve a dispute when the experts themselves disagree, appealing to intuitions is not a good way to resolve a dispute when philosophers have incompatible intuitions. After all, aren't appeals to intuition a form of appeals to authority? That is, a philosopher's intuition is supposed to be the final word about the case under consideration. More explicitly:

1. Appeals to authority, which are inferences from ‘Expert E says that p ’ to ‘ p ’, are strong only if there is an agreement among experts on S that p (otherwise, appeals to authority are weak).
2. Like appeals to authority, appeals to intuition are inferences from ‘It seems to Philosopher H that p ’ to ‘ p ’.
3. (Therefore) Appeals to intuition are strong only if there is an agreement among philosophers on S that p (otherwise, appeals to intuition are weak).

Now, from this analogical argument and the assumption that philosophers are expert intuiters (cf. Weinberg, et al. 2010. Are philosophers expert intuiters? *Philosophical Psychology*, 23, 331-355) the Principle of Agreement on Intuition (PAI) follows:

(PAI) When philosophers appeal to intuitions, there must be an agreement among the relevant philosophers concerning the intuition in question; otherwise, the appeal to intuition is weak.

To illustrate, Jackson's intuition that Mary will learn something new is not generally shared by philosophers working on this subject. For example, Dennett (1991. *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little Brown) and Hardin (1992. Physiology, Phenomenology, and Spinoza's True Colors. In A. Beckermann, H. Flohr, J. Kim, Berlin: De Gruyter (Eds.), *Emergence or Reduction? Essays on the Prospects of Nonreductive Physicalism*. Walter de Gruyter) think that, upon seeing red, Mary would say something like, "Oh, so this is red." Since other philosophers don't share Jackson's intuition, condition (PAI) is not met, and so Jackson's argument is weak.

A referee suggested that appeals to intuition should be rejected altogether, since there is no reason to take even generally agreed upon intuitions as evidence. I agree. Since space is limited, however, an argument for this claim will have to wait. Here my claim is that (PAI) is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for strong appeals to intuition.