

More Intuition Mongering

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In “Intuition Mongering” (2012, *The Reasoner*, 6, 169-170), I argue that, for appeals to intuition to be strong arguments, the relevant philosophers (the “experts”) must agree on the intuition in question. If the “experts” disagree, then an appeal to intuition is weak. This Principle of Agreement on Intuition (PAI) is a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for strong appeals to intuition. Another necessary condition is the reliability of intellectual intuition. If intellectual intuition doesn’t track truth, then appeals to intuition are weak.

Appeals to intuition look like this (cf. Huemer, 2007, “Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 74, 30-55):

(I1) It seems to *S* that *p*.

(I2) (Therefore) *p*.

The Mary thought-experiment (Jackson, 1982, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32, 127-136) is an example:

(M1) Before her release, Mary has complete physical information about color vision.

(M2) (*It seems that*) Mary learns something new upon her release.

(M3) (Therefore) What Mary learns upon her release must be non-physical.

For Jackson’s argument to be strong, the “experts” must agree on (M2). Even if there’s agreement about (M2), one could challenge the belief-forming-process by which the “experts” come to believe (M2). Even if it *seems* to the “experts” that (M2), why should that count as a strong reason to believe (M2)? I will argue that it doesn’t because intellectual intuition is an unreliable belief-forming-process.

In “Intuition Mongering,” I show that appeals to intuition (whether the intuition of one or many) presuppose the following:

(A1) If, in response to case *C*, it seems to *S* that *p*, then *p*.

(A1) is unwarranted, since the inference from (I1) to (I2) is unreliable. For example:

- It *seems* to me that the correct answer to the multiple-choice question is (a), so the correct answer is (a). [But (a) is incorrect. I confused (a) with (b) because they’re similarly worded.]
- It *seems* to most students in the class that the correct answer to the multiple-choice question is (a), so the correct answer is (a). [But (a) is incorrect. Most students confused (a) with (b) because they’re similarly worded.]

If this is correct, then intellectual seemings [Casullo, 2002, "A Priori Knowledge," in P. Moser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (pp. 95-143), NY: OUP] *by themselves* don't provide a strong basis for inference about what is the case.

In the case of philosophical thought-experiments, there's another reason to be suspicious about appeals to intuition. To see why, consider the Mary thought-experiment. To Jackson (1982, 130), "*It seems just obvious* that [Mary] will learn something about the world," so he infers that Mary will learn something. As I show in "Intuition Mongering," however, other philosophers have different intuitions about this case. This state of affairs is quite common in philosophy. One philosopher intuitively judges that p , whereas another intuitively judges that not- p . For example:

- Jackson (1982) and Dennett (1991, *Consciousness Explained*, Boston: Little Brown) have conflicting intuitions about Mary.
- Chalmers (1996, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, NY: OUP) and Dennett (1995, "The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2, 322-326) have conflicting intuitions about zombies.
- Bird (2008, "Scientific Progress as Accumulation of Knowledge," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 39, 279-281) and Rowbottom (2008, "N-Rays and the Semantic View of Scientific Progress," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 39, 277-278) have conflicting intuitions about progress.

But both philosophers cannot be right. Since the same belief-forming-process, namely, intellectual intuition, gives incompatible verdicts about the same case, it's unreliable. More explicitly:

1. In response to case C , philosopher A intuitively judges that p , whereas philosopher B intuitively judges that not- p .
2. It's not the case that p and not- p .
3. (Therefore) Either A is wrong or B is wrong.
4. But both A and B came to judge that p and not- p , respectively, by relying on the same belief-forming-process, namely, intellectual intuition.
5. If the same belief-forming-process yields incompatible verdicts about the same case, then it's unreliable.
6. (Therefore) Intellectual intuition is unreliable.

In support of (5), consider the following: suppose I use a Litmus Test to form beliefs about whether a solution is acidic or basic. When testing the same solution, however, my blue Litmus paper sometimes turns red (thereby indicating an acidic solution) and sometimes stays blue (thereby indicating a base solution). In this case, I wouldn't put much trust in my Litmus paper as a basis for forming beliefs about the pH of the solution.

Applied to the case of zombies, the aforementioned reasoning looks like this:

1. In response to zombie thought-experiments, philosopher David Chalmers intuitively judges that zombies are conceivable, whereas philosopher Daniel Dennett intuitively judges that zombies are inconceivable.

2. It's not the case that zombies are conceivable and inconceivable.
3. (Therefore) Either Chalmers is wrong or Dennett is wrong.
4. But both Chalmers and Dennett came to judge that zombies are conceivable and that zombies are inconceivable, respectively, by relying on the same belief-forming-process, namely, intellectual intuition.
5. If the same belief-forming-process yields incompatible verdicts about the same case, then it's unreliable.
6. (Therefore) Intellectual intuition is unreliable.

Even if some philosophers share Chalmers's intuition (e.g., Webster, 2006, *Human Zombies are Metaphysically Possible*, *Synthese*, 151, 297-310), whereas others share Dennett's intuition (e.g., Marcus, 2004, *Why Zombies are Inconceivable*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 82, 477-490), the fact that the same belief-forming-process yields incompatible judgments about the same cases is enough to cast doubt on the reliability of that belief-forming-process.

If my argument is sound, then appeals to intuition are weak arguments because intellectual intuition is an unreliable belief-forming-process (since it yields incompatible verdicts in response to the same cases, and since the inference from (I1) to (I2) is unreliable). So, although *in principle* the (PAI) could be met, *in practice*, the track record of appeals to intuition in philosophy provides strong reasons to believe that intellectual intuition is unreliable. Since the reliability of intellectual intuition is a necessary condition for strong appeals to intuition, it follows that appeals to intuition are weak arguments.