

JOEL PUST Intuitions as Evidence. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000. Pp. xiv + 123. \$

Joel Pust's compact and sharply-focused study of philosophical intuitions aims to map out the extent to which intuitions are used as evidence in contemporary analytic philosophy and then to defend the philosophical use of intuitions against recent sceptical challenges, largely by arguing that the sceptical challengers are no less philosophically dependent on intuitions than the philosophers they criticize.

His first chapter offers a broad survey of some areas in philosophy where intuitions are taken seriously: for topics as diverse as knowledge, moral rightness, personal identity and explanation, Pust claims, we typically aim to come up with analyses that accord with our intuitive judgments, and we argue against rival analyses by showing that they have counter-intuitive results. Although we can justify philosophical theories that override particular intuitions—so intuitions are fallible—we can do so only when there is a more significant body of intuitions supporting the resultant theory—so intuitions are the ultimate source of warrant in philosophy. In his examination of apparently divergent accounts of philosophical method Pust aims to show that his apparent rivals also end up (perhaps unwittingly) giving intuitions this decisive role. The exhaustive power of intuition is made slightly less surprising when we see how broadly Pust intends to use the term: 'intuition-driven philosophy' is for him not just the method of testing analyses against particular cases, like Gettier examples (this he dubs 'particularist intuitionism') but also the method of accepting abstract or general principles, like closure under logical implication in a theory of knowledge, on the basis of intuition ('generalist intuitionism'), and also, by combining these, what seems to him the best method – global intuitionism, in which we accept both particular and general intuitions as *prima facie* basic evidence. Pust sees intuitionism in Rawls's method of balancing considered moral judgments and principles in reflective equilibrium, and in Goodman's vision of deduction as a mutual fitting of particular inferences and general rules. Both of these methods indisputably involve judgments about particular cases and general principles, but it is another question whether Rawls and Goodman mean us to rely on intuitions in Pust's sense of the word, a sense he makes clear in his chapter two.

In his account of the nature of intuition, Pust offers us a modified version of George Bealer's definition, 'At t, S [rationally] intuits that p if and only if at t, it intellectually seems to S that necessarily p.' Reflecting on the phenomenology of Gettier examples, Pust decides to drop Bealer's requirement of the occurrent semblance of necessity in favour of a disposition: "S has a rational intuition that p if and only if (a) S has a purely intellectual experience, when considering the question of whether p, that p, and (b) at t, if S were to consider whether p is necessarily true, then S would have a purely intellectual experience that necessarily p." (39) When I ask myself whether someone in a Gettier case knows that q, Pust argues that I enjoy a non-perceptual seeming that they do not, and when I reflect on the question of whether this is necessarily so it will seem to me that it is, but this is not to say that the original seeming, in which I considered only the question and not its modality, involved the appearance of necessity. Here it might have helped to have more of a characterization of what could count as 'a purely intellectual experience' without any semblance of necessity, especially given that Pust has already excluded hunches about contingent matters like houses falling when their foundations are undermined as not being intuitions in his sense of the word. Indeed, a more developed explanation of the nature of a 'purely intellectual experience' would also help to allay the worry that one mystery is being explained in terms of another.

If any purely intellectual experience of a particular truth or general rule could count as an intuition, as long as further reflection on its modality could show it to be necessary, one might wonder what kind of philosophical thinking could fail to count as intuitive. Here Pust's strongest constraint on an intuition is 'that it not be the result of conscious inference.' (44) Pust claims that

this constraint is supported by introspection and by the normative requirement that intuitions must be non-inferential if they are to serve as ‘the ultimate premises in philosophical argumentation and analysis’. Indeed, not only are intuitions not the product of actual reasoning, they are treated (and Pust seems to think, properly treated) as ‘not *admitting* of further inferential support.’ (44, my emphasis) This foundationalist constraint does not seem to follow from Pust’s definition of intuition. Indeed one might have thought that coming to believe something on the basis of a proof could provide a paradigmatic example of an intellectual experience of something being necessarily so. And now it is now unclear that Rawls and Goodman are working with intuitions in Pust’s sense. Rawls’s reflective equilibrium is not a matter of being pushed back and forth by brute intellectual seemings, each occurring to us independent of the others, and none arrived at, or even supportable by, any process of conscious inference. Goodman quite clearly rejects the idea that we have ‘ultimate premises’ to rely on in characterizing the justification of deductive rules and particular deductions as an ongoing back-and-forth negotiation (Pust’s quotation from Goodman on page 18 is somewhat selective, giving the impression that Goodman intends intuitions about particular deductions to have primacy here). Furthermore, when we examine the question of whether a given principle is necessarily true – take the rule of *modus ponens*, for example – surely the natural thing to do is not just to sit back and wait for a non-inferential purely intellectual seeming that it is so, but to attempt to reason about the matter, to examine whether this rule can be shown to be truth-preserving, to consider the broader structure of classical logic, and so on.

Fortunately, the argument of the next chapter is largely independent of this foundationalism. Here Pust examines the sceptical worries of Harman, Goldman, and Stich about the reliability of moral, metaphysical and semantic intuitions. He sees all three authors as raising similar concerns about whether a good explanation of the occurrence of intuitions would have to require the truth of what is intuited, assuming a background epistemology in which we are only justified in believing observations (including observations about the occurrence of our intuitions) and propositions necessary for causal explanations of our observations. As these concerns are clearly motivated by a sense that we have no adequate positive epistemology of our philosophical intuitions, one might expect Pust to respond by supplying such a positive account; rather, for reasons revealed later, he goes negative and attacks the empiricist sceptics for inconsistency, arguing that the sceptics’ own claims about explanation dependent on non-observational tenets whose support could only be intuitive, and indeed that any plausible epistemology will require the support of intuition.

How is intuitive support so indispensable? Pust thinks it is only fair to ask the sceptics to justify their ‘explanationism’, and that they can either claim that it is just evident (which would be an appeal to intuition) or they can try to offer arguments for it. Pust has already claimed that all non-inferential judgments of necessity are intuitive; in this chapter inferential judgments invoke intuition too. Any philosopher who wants you to accept his position on the basis of a deductively valid argument is committed to admission of intuition, Pust claims, because ‘grasp of an argument’s validity, “seeing that” the conclusion must be true if the premises are true, requires an exercise of intuition’ (87); likewise any use of *reductio* forms of argument (89) and any appeal to the principle of non-contradiction (113). But surely there are various ways the empiricist sceptics about intuition might also be sceptics about necessity here: they can argue that it enough for you to accept their conclusions as true without seeing their *necessary* connection to the premises. Indeed they might see logical principles as sentences like any other, distinguished only by their location near the heart of the web of belief, or their low likelihood in practice of being chosen for revision. Whatever the merits of that view of logic it could have received more discussion here, together with the larger question of whether it makes sense to see the empiricists, especially those who elsewhere identify themselves as naturalists, as assigning their own position the status of a necessary truth.

If we are still concerned by the apparent absence of a positive epistemology of philosophical intuition, Pust’s last chapter is supposed to offer some reassurance. If we look for a mechanical or naturalistic justification of intuition we are sure to be disappointed, Pust argues,

because causal reasoning will always be insufficient to provide the right sort of link between what is necessarily the case and what we believe about it. Pust doubts that we can come up with any way of independently testing or calibrating the deliverances of intuition, but, drawing on Alston's arguments that there is no non-circular justification of sense-perception, he argues that the failure of any independent calibration is not a problem unique to intuition. It is possible to become a complete sceptic about sense perception and intuition, but if we admit the legitimacy of sense perception only an undue partiality could stop us from admitting the legitimacy of intuition. Pust may be right that our powers of rational insight are not subject to any independent check, but one might hope that epistemology could still reinforce our confidence in intuition by supplying some analysis of the ways in which it functions, and the ways in which we correct false intuitive impressions. If the intuitively appealing axioms of naïve set theory lead to paradox, the epistemologist who wants to defend intuition could do well to examine the rational means by which we extricate ourselves and figure out what is really (as opposed to just apparently) necessarily the case. But it is not clear that Pust has left himself much room for such a project, given that he is taking intuitions to be non-inferential deliverances of what is necessarily so, brute seemings that come to us independently of one another and all seem to stand on an equal footing. Given his sensitivity to the question of whether we are showing undue partiality to perception, it is surprising in the end that the problem may be (surprisingly) that he is to some extent modelling his account of intuition on perception here: as perceptions come to us occurrently, unbidden, (more or less) independently and on equal footing, so also intuitions. A careful examination of Pust's own conclusions in the last chapter makes one wonder whether this is the right model to be using.

Intuitions as Evidence is in Garland's Dissertations in Philosophy series, a series which has brought us a number of promising early works from authors who have gone on to make influential contributions to philosophy. Although written with professional clarity, it is clearly a preliminary work, but the kind of preliminary work that makes one look forward to the author's future discussions of this worthy subject.

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