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The Nature and Role of Intuition in Contemporary Analytic Philosophy

Abstract

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The dissertation concerns the role and the nature of intuition in contemporary analytic philosophy. It belongs therefore mainly to metaphilosophy and deals with the questions thoroughly discussed within it during recent years, such as what intuition is, how one can grasp it, how it could be defined, how – and to what extent – it can be used in philosophy, whether it can be tested empirically and if so – to what extent the results of conducted studies matter to philosophical analyses and, finally, whether the proper methodology of philosophy should be based on the extensive reliance on intuitions. All of those questions – and the like – mark out the starting point for the analyses in this dissertation.

For centuries the topic of intuition was at the centre of philosophical inquiry. Indeed, the notion of ‘intuition’ in philosophy has a rich history and is substantially theory-laden. In this dissertation in a major part I ignore this tradition and instead I focus on particular area of philosophical scrutiny – contemporary analytic philosophy. It stems from the fact that intuition is discussed within analytic philosophy in a distinctive fashion, often without an overt relation to the questions posed throughout the history of philosophy. Specifically, it is claimed that intuitions on different thought experiments are used as an evidence for particular philosophical theories or claims, playing an important epistemic role.

The main goal of the dissertation is thus to put under scrutiny the nature of intuition so conceived and the critical assessment of the role it plays in philosophy. The main theses of the dissertation are the following. Firstly, intuition indeed is very often used as an evidence for many philosophical theories and claims. Secondly, that evidence is constituted directly by intuitive propositions (or judgments) that can be characterized as noninferential and dispositional, while their source is an intuition understood as a kind of mental process or state that can be studied on empirical grounds, e.g. by cognitive psychologists. Thirdly, intuitions can be mentalistic evidence, that is, they can provide evidence (or be the source of evidence) about concepts, but not about the extramental entities in the world. The argumentation for those claims lasts for five chapters that are preceded by the introduction and followed by the conclusion.

In the introduction I make an attempt to carefully delineate the topic of the dissertation paying particular attention to the variety of contexts in which the term ‘intuition’ is deployed. Firstly, thus, I analyze different associations of that notion within the history of philosophy, mentioning for instance the understanding of intuition in scholastic philosophy, in Plato and

Aristotle, and in the modern era, among both influential rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza) and empiricists (Locke). Then I indicate the more recent conceptions of intuition in philosophy, such as in Peirce's pragmatism, Husserl's phenomenology and Bergson's thought, as well as its role in logic and particular fields of science. I also consider the contexts of the use of the term 'intuition' in ordinary language or the literature. In the introduction several terminological and translational decisions made in the dissertation are also discussed. Finally, the introduction ends with the treatment of the methodology, main theses of the dissertation and the detailed content of every chapter.

The first chapter is devoted to thought experiments and their role in the contemporary philosophy, particularly in conceptual analysis. I propose a certain general model of philosophical thought experiment, paying particular attention to the role intuition plays in it – one that is crucial for its execution, as I argue. The model is then illustrated by three examples of the famous thought experiments in philosophy: two from the twentieth-century analytic philosophy (Gettier's on knowledge and Kripke's on reference) and one from the ancient philosophy (an excerpt from Plato's *Republic* on the definition of justice), showing in all of the examples how every step of the proposed model is actualized. The chapter ends in a discussion on the so-called problem of the informativeness of thought experiments, the one that stands in analogy to the famous paradox of analysis in analytic philosophy.

In the second chapter I recapitulate on the contemporary debate on the nature of intuition that is being held in recent analytic philosophy. I make multiple divisions parceling the presented positions up into e.g. doxastic and nondoxastic (relating to beliefs or states), thin and thick (imposing few or more conditions of being an intuition) or rationalistic and naturalistic (depending on one's attitude towards the *a priori* knowledge and justification) accounts. I critically discuss diverse positions, from the broadest theories that equate intuition with a belief to the more sophisticated ones that take intuition to be associated with modal content (Bealer), based on conceptual competence (Ludwig) or constituting a kind of specific *sui generis* experience (Chudnoff, Bergson, Koksvik).

While the second chapter reports the debates concerning the nature of intuition, the third one focuses on contemporary reflections regarding its role in philosophy, in particular its epistemic status. I invoke here the Traditional Metaphilosophical Picture (TMP) according to which philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence for various philosophical theories or claims. The legitimacy of the philosophical practice based on the TMP is called into question on both theoretical (Cummins' challenge on the impossibility of the calibration of intuition) and, first and foremost, empirical grounds (the so-called negative program of experimental philosophy). In the third chapter I analyze closely those challenges and the ways of responding to them. In particular, I critically scrutinize the so-called expertise defense, according to which philosophers are experts on philosophy and therefore their intuitions matter more in case of philosophical thought experiments. In the last part of the chapter I present the view of intuition deniers (Cappelen, Deutsch) according to which the whole debate is misguided since it relies on misunderstanding of the practice of philosophy: philosophers do not rely on intuitions whatsoever and the TMP is false. As I believe that intuition deniers are deeply wrong, by the end of the chapter I argue why this view should be dismissed.

In the fourth chapter I argue for my own conception of intuitions as noninferential propositions/judgments. I begin by differentiating on the two senses of the notion of intuition: as a particular mental act or state on the one hand, and the content of such an act, that is proposition, on the other. Some philosophers claim that if we take intuitions as evidence in the first sense, it poses a threat of psychologizing the evidence, while if we take in the second sense, the whole thesis becomes trivial: philosophy is a discursive enterprise so obviously all of the evidence is propositional. It is important, however, to understand the evidential nature of intuition in the vein that combines the two senses: in philosophy the ultimate evidence consists of the intuition as a proposition the source of which is an intuition understood as a certain act or state. For the philosopher the propositional content of intuition is important, but its source can be investigate empirically especially by cognitive psychology. Therefore in the fourth chapter I examine also the results of psychological studies on intuition, focusing on the topics that may be of a great philosophical importance. That whole analysis leads finally to the argumentation for the philosophical conception of intuition as a noninferential proposition/judgment of a dispositional character. Accepting that claim requires argumentation against the view that take intuition to be inferential, which I make in the next subchapter. The last theme of the fourth chapter concerns the hypothesis of the heterogeneity of intuitions, according to which intuitions in philosophy do not constitute a unique kind or type but instead should be treated separately, case by case.

The last, fifth chapter contains the argumentation for mentalistic understanding of the role of intuition as evidence. In other words, I defend the view according to which intuition in philosophy is evidence about concepts, but not (at least directly) about the external world. I begin by presenting the so-called Canberra Plan, a philosophical program that postulates two-fold approach to studying the world: first we conduct a conceptual analysis that makes the role of the analyzed concept explicit, then in a more empirically-minded manner we check what actually fulfils those roles in reality. To understand the role of intuition in this whole process, first we need to understand what exactly a concept is. Thus, I put under scrutiny a variety of different theories of intuition, indicating two general types of philosophical approaches to concepts (one that takes concepts to be a form of representation and the other that takes it as an abstract entity) and psychological findings on concepts in order to come up with a minimal theory of a concept which, firstly, makes no theoretical commitments, and secondly, allows specify precisely what the phenomenon in question is. Relying on those results I further argue that intuition in philosophy – took as explained in the previous chapter – serves as an evidence about concepts. That evidence is nevertheless far from being flawless, so by the end of the dissertation I take into consideration the prescriptive alternative (such as conceptual engineering) in which the use of intuition as evidence is abandoned and the normative way of studying concepts is proposed instead.

All of the topics considered in the course of the dissertation are summarized in the conclusion. The main findings of the thesis are restated, the goals of the dissertation are reanalyzed and it is indicated how the main theses have been proved to be accurate. The final upshot is a moderately skeptical conclusion regarding the epistemic status of intuition and the postulate of using a wider spectrum of theoretical tools in philosophy.

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