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**Philosophy 427**  
***Intuitions and Philosophy***

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Class 25 - Defending Intuition, Part II  
More Bealer



# Phenomenology of Intuitions

“We do not mean a magical power or inner voice or special glow or any other mysterious quality. When you have an intuition that A, it *seems* to you that A...a genuine kind of conscious episode” (207).

1. Not beliefs;
2. Not spontaneous inclinations to belief;
3. Not the raising to consciousness of nonconscious background beliefs;
4. Not guesses, or hunches;
5. Not commonsense opinions;
6. Not merely linguistic intuitions; and
7. Not judgments.



# Beliefs

- I can intuit something without believing it.
  - ▶ The Müller-Lyer illusion
  - ▶ The axiom of comprehension and the barber
- I can believe without an intuition.
  - ▶ The table is mostly empty space.
  - ▶  $634+783=1417$

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# Spontaneous Inclinations to Belief

- Instead of identifying intuitions with a kind of belief, one could identify them with inclinations to believe.
  - Plausible given the distinction between beliefs and intuitions
- Spontaneous inclinations to belief are like dispositions.
  - I have a spontaneous inclination to believe that  $634+783=1417$ .
  - But, prior to working it out, I had no intuition about that sum.
- Dispositions are not cognitive episodes.
  - “If I am to have an intuition about numbers, then above and beyond a mere inclination, something else must happen - a sui generis cognitive episode must occur. Inclinations to believe are simply not episodic in this way” (209).
- Inclinations are dispositional and lack the phenomenal content we experience when we intuit.
- We have many more inclinations to believe than we could ever experience.

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# Raising to Consciousness of Nonconscious Beliefs

- Intuitions can not be identified with all of my nonconscious beliefs.
  - I have many more of them than I have intuitions, or even possible intuitions.
- An intuition concerning the axiom of comprehension conflicts with beliefs about its falsity, whether those beliefs are taken as conscious or as nonconscious.
- The proposal to identify intuitions with nonconscious background beliefs fails to explain how one can have intuitions in matters about which one has no beliefs at all.
  - 'Necessarily, the number of planets is greater than seven'.
  - When you learn about the two readings of the sentence, it is possible that you have some intuition about its proper reading.
  - But, such an intuition is not the result of bringing nonconscious beliefs to your conscious mind.
  - It is the result of having acquired new beliefs.

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# Intuitions and Non-Conscious Mechanisms

- Bealer does not reject the claim that our intuitions are, at least in part, formed by some nonconscious mechanism.
- That process can not merely bring a nonconscious, or tacit, theory to consciousness.
- A nonconscious theory would not necessarily support the requisite modal intuitions used in philosophical arguments.
  - We would have to know whether the nonconscious theory is correct.
- Still, it seems likely that a process of bringing nonconscious beliefs to awareness, given the right nonconscious theory, would play some role in the formation of our intuitions.

# Tacit Theory

- Cummins argued that tacit beliefs are likely to be biased.
  - Innate mental structures
  - Environmental conditioning
- A nonconscious theory might not support the requisite modal intuitions used in philosophical arguments.
- We would have to know whether the nonconscious theory is correct.
- Wishing won't make it so: tacit theories are not reliable indicators of truth.

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# Guesses and Hunches

- Bealer presents two arguments that rational intuitions are not guesses or hunches.
- First, intuitions have different phenomenal character than guesses and hunches, which lack the same seeming feeling.
- More importantly, we give up our guesses and hunches when presented with contrary data.
  - If I guess that there are five coins in your pocket, and you pull out six, I cede my guess.
  - If it seems to me that there are five coins in your pocket, and you pull out six, I can still hold that it seemed to me that there were five, even though that seeming was not accurate.
  - I would want an account of why there seemed to be six, as a matter of epistemic integrity.
  - But guesses are often just wrong and need no account.
- Intuitions are linked to seeming, not to guessing.

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# Commonsense Beliefs

- There are non-commonsense intuitions and there are commonsense beliefs which are not intuitive.
- Some of us have intuitions about some sophisticated scientific and metaphysical claims.
  - The infinite divisibility of space and time
  - The axiom of choice
- Conversely, there are cases of commonsense beliefs which do not appear to be intuitions.
  - It is unwise to put your finger in electrical sockets.
  - But, Bealer claims, rational intuition has no role in generating this belief.
- As Cummins argued, commonsense knowledge is an amalgamation of beliefs from a variety of sources.
- Intuition may be one of those sources, but it is not the case that intuitions are the result of applying or reflecting on commonsense beliefs.

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# Linguistic Intuitions

- Bealer accepts that we have linguistic intuitions, but resists reducing all of our intuitions to linguistic ones.
  - Our intuitions regard concepts, rather than words of a particular language.
- I can have linguistic intuitions that 'colorless green ideas sleep furiously' is grammatical, but semantically deficient.
- Those intuitions are about the English language.
- My philosophical intuitions, like that 'if P then not-not-P', hold for any language.
- Concepts are mind- and language-independent.

# Two Concepts of 'Concepts'

- Cummins took concepts to be some kinds of psychological objects.
  - mental representations, or recognitions procedures, or theories
  - They must be tied to some content.
  - Such content cannot be a property of a brain state itself.
  - It must refer to something else.
  - “Concepts cannot be what generates philosophical intuitions unless they have a certain *content*: they must be, or provide pointers to, explicit or tacit theories of the target properties” (Cummins 121)
- Bealer takes concepts to be abstract objects which have their content intrinsically.
  - Mental states are private and subjective.
  - They have, at times, concepts which are public and objective as their content.
  - We can not share ideas, taken as neural firings or other mental episodes.
  - But we can think of the same concepts.
- Even if our intuitions about philosophical cases differ, they regard the same concepts and transcend language.

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# Judgments: A Category Error

“Judgments are a kind of occurrent belief; as such, they are not seemings” (210).

- Thinking that intuitions are judgments leads to three kinds of errors.
  - ▶ An epistemological error: intuitions fail to carry justificatory weight, as beliefs do.
  - ▶ A semantic error: because beliefs and judgments and intuitions are all propositional attitudes they are inter-definable.
- A phenomenological error:
  - ▶ “It does not *seem* to me that  $25^2=625$ ; this is something I learned from calculations or a table. Note how this differs, phenomenologically, from what happens when one has an intuition. After a moment’s reflection on the question, it just *seems* to you that, if P or Q, then it is not the case that both not P and not Q. Likewise, upon considering [the poodle-sheep example] it just *seems* to you that the person in the example would not know that there is a sheep in the pasture. Nothing comparable happens in the case of the proposition that  $25^2=625$ ” (210-1).

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# A Positive Account of Intuition

“Intuition is a sui generis, irreducible, natural (i.e. non-Cambridge-like) propositional attitude that occurs episodically” (213).

1. Intuitions have phenomenal character
2. Intuitions are natural, not Cambridge, attitudes
3. Intuitions regard concepts
4. Intuitions have modal properties

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# Intuitions Have Phenomenal Character

- Intuitions are conscious episodes of seeming.
- We can become introspectively aware of our intuitions.
- “Here ‘seems’ is understood, not in its use as a cautionary or “hedging” term, but in its use as a term for a genuine kind of conscious episode” (207).

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## Intuition and Content

- Consider the intuition that the substance on Twin Earth that feels like water is not water.
  - ▶ The intuition is the conscious experience
  - ▶ The content of the intuition regards Twin Earth
- If we take intuitions, with Bealer, to have justificatory force, to be usable as evidence, then their content is the evidence.
  - ▶ “I am presently intuiting that if P then not not P. Accordingly, the content of this intuition - that if P then not not P -counts as a bit of my evidence; I may use this logical proposition as evidence (as a reason) for various other things. In addition to having the indicated intuition, I am also introspectively aware of having the intuition. Accordingly, the content of this introspection -that I am having the intuition that if P then not not P - also counts as a bit of my evidence; I may use this proposition about my intellectual state as evidence (as a reason) for various other things” (205).
- The first piece of evidence, the logical claim, is likely to serve as evidence for other logical claims.
- The second piece of evidence, my introspective awareness, is more likely to serve as evidence in epistemological arguments than in logical ones.

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# Natural and Cambridge Attitudes

Intuitions are natural, as opposed to Cambridge-like, propositional attitudes.

- A Cambridge change is the change that I experience when other objects in the universe change.
  - ▶ Me and Brad Pitt
  - ▶ I have changed only Cambridge properties
- Contrast with natural properties
  - ▶ Having mass or momentum
  - ▶ Being blue, but not being grue or bleen
- Some relational properties might be natural
  - ▶ Being someone's roommate
  - ▶ Being shorter than someone
- Intrinsic and extrinsic properties?
- Bealer's claim is that intuitions are natural, as opposed to Cambridge-like, propositional attitudes.



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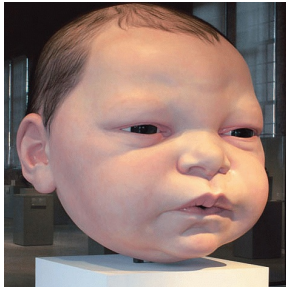
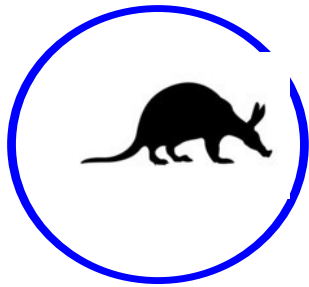
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# Concepts

## Abstract objects

- Thoughts are concrete individuals.
- Concepts are universals, and can be understood, or grasped.
- Concepts may be taken as constituents of propositions, which are similarly abstract.
- The proposition that the sun is shining may be taken as containing the concepts of the sun and of shining.
- Similarly, the concept of a bachelor might be taken to contain the concept of being a man and the concept of being unmarried.
- Bealer claims that rational intuitions are grounded in our understanding of concepts, and their applicability.
- “The typical philosophical counterexample requires a possibility intuition (that such and such condition is possible) as well as an ordinary concept-applicability intuition (that in such and such situation a relevant item would, or would not, count as an F). Without such possibility intuitions, philosophy would be fatally crippled” (B, 212).

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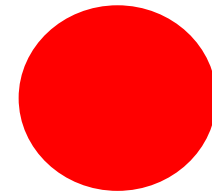
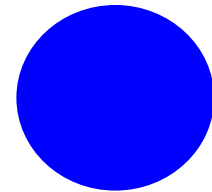


The concept of an aardvark is in a third realm:  
not an idea, not a physical object

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## Possibility is Not Consistency or Analyticity

- There are impossible states of affairs which are not analytically false nor inconsistent.
- Color incompatibility
- It is impossible for the same spot to appear (in my field of vision) as both red and blue.
- It is not inconsistent with the laws of logic.
- It is not analytically false, on standard construals of analyticity, that a spot could be both red and blue.
- Alternatively, one could identify possibility with analyticity, if one tweaked the notion of analyticity!



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## Modal Character

“Typically, the central questions of philosophy - and their answers - are phrased in quite general terms without mention of particular individuals, species, and so forth. These questions are necessary in the sense that they call for answers that hold necessarily. In being interested in such things as the nature of mind, intelligence, the virtues, and life, philosophers do not want to know what those things just happen to be, but rather what those things *must* be, what they *are*, in a strong sense. It is not enough that the virtue of piety happened to be what Euthyphro exhibited: a philosopher wants to know what piety must be” (B, 203-4).

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## Modal Character

- The modal character of intuition makes it apt for philosophy, logic, mathematics, and linguistics.
- Rational intuition need only pronounce on the possibilities of particular cases.
  - ▶ We need only know that Twin Earth is possible to see that it is necessary that water is H<sub>2</sub>O.
  - ▶ Similarly, while blind sight is an actual phenomenon, philosophers only need it to be possible.
- We can modalize any empirical appeals.
  - ▶ “For the purposes of settling central questions of philosophy...it is enough that the phenomenon of blind-sight be *possible*. And intuitively it is. The experiments are required to establish that it *actually* occurs; but to establish that it is *possible*, intuition suffices” (B, 206).

# Examples of Rational Intuitions

Some logical inferences and truths, e.g. that if  $p$  then not not  $p$  (B, 205, 209, 211, 217)

The axiom of comprehension (B, 202, 208, 209)

The axiom of choice (B, 211)

Mathematical limits (B, 211)

Congruence is symmetric (B, 211)

The part-whole relation is transitive over the field of regions (B, 211)

Infinite divisibility of space and time (B, 211)

'Necessarily, the number of planets is greater than seven' (B, 210)

Phenomenal colors are incompatible (B, 211, 212)

A determinate falls under its determinables (B, 211)

Gettier cases/poodle-sheep cases (B, 204-5, 208, 210-1, 211, 211-2, 217).

Guessing is not a basic source of evidence (B, 215-6)

That intuitions are a basic source of evidence (B, 217)

Twin Earth arguments for a posteriori necessity or externalism in mental content (B, 205, 208, 227-8)

Chisholm's abnormal-conditions refutation of phenomenalism (B, 205)

Chisholm and Putnam's refutations of behaviorism (B, 205)

Multiple-realizability theses against identity theory (B, 205)

Jackson's Mary case (B, 205)

Burge's arthritis example (B, 205, 208, 221)

Burge's contract case (B, 221-2)

Putnam's beech/elm cases (B, 229)

Moral and aesthetic facts supervene on physical and psychological facts (B, 211, 212)

The multigon and chromic examples (B, 223-5)