

Philosophy 2²3³: Intuitions and Philosophy
Fall 2009
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1pm - 2:15pm
Library 209

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Classes 23-24 - Defending Intuition
George Bealer, "Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy"

I. Autonomy, authority, and intuition

Bealer's article is long and difficult.

Daniel's presentation before break focused on Part I of the article, especially the section on the phenomenology of intuitions.

After break, we will look at Bealer's two arguments for the autonomy and authority of philosophy, the argument from concepts and the argument from intuition.

The critics of intuition, including many of the proponents of experimental philosophy, argue that we should replace our appeals to intuitions in philosophy with references to the hard data of empirical science.

They argue that we should burn the armchairs, and perform experiments instead.

Bealer's conclusions, that philosophy is autonomous from empirical science and that it has greater authority in philosophical matters, are grounded in appeals to philosophical intuitions.

He argues that philosophy is autonomous from empirical science, and thus must work with intuitive evidence rather than scientific evidence.

And he argues that intuitive evidence outweighs empirical evidence in philosophical arguments.

Bealer does not explicitly define 'philosophy' as it is used in the autonomy and authority theses, but there is nothing particularly odd, I think, about his use of the term.

Nearly all philosophers seek answers to such questions as the nature of substance, mind, intelligence, consciousness, sensation, perception, knowledge, wisdom, truth, identity, infinity, divinity, time, explanation, causation, freedom, purpose, goodness, duty, the virtues, love, life, happiness, and so forth (203).

He characterizes 'philosophy' a bit further at fn 28, where he provides a list of terms central to philosophy. He mentions terms relevant to ethics, logic, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science.

Bealer spends most of his article sketching a prototype of an argument for the legitimacy of appeals to intuition in philosophical argument.

Some of the articles we have read recently attempted to define or describe philosophical intuition, mainly in order to discredit it.

Gopnik and Schwitzgebel characterized intuitions as judgments not made on the basis of explicit, consciously-observable reasoning processes.

They argued that the instability of such intuitions makes them philosophically suspect.

Cummins searched for the origins of intuitions in tacit theories, arguing that such intuitions have no justificatory force.

Bealer argues that the claims that such opponents of philosophical intuitions have made regarding their instability and unreliability have depended on mis-characterizing intuition.

Many philosophers believe that the empirical findings of cognitive psychologists such as Wason, Johnson-Laird, Rosch, Nisbett, Kahneman, and Tversky cast doubt on their epistemic worth. But, in fact, although these studies bear on “intuition” in an indiscriminate use of the term, they evidently tell us little about the notion of intuition...which is relevant to justificatory practices in logic, mathematics, philosophy, and linguistics (213).

In contrast, Bealer defends the kind of intuition that we use in philosophy arguments. He argues that our intuitions are based in our abilities to grasp concepts, and that such abilities have precisely the right characteristics to serve as evidence in philosophical arguments. It will be important, thus, to characterize precisely the concept of intuition as Bealer uses the term.

We’ll start with the phenomenology of intuitions, how it feels to have an intuition. Bealer claims that the kinds of intuitions that serve philosophy are conscious experiences.

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).

But, not all seeming is the result of philosophical, or rational, intuition.

II. Rational intuitions and physical intuitions

Rational intuitions are intellectual seemings, rather than sensory seemings. They are analogous, but not identical. Sense experience is the source and grounding of many of our beliefs, but not of our rational intuitions.

By and large, the two cannot overlap: most things that can seem intellectually to be so cannot seem sensorily to be so, and conversely... [It cannot] seem to you intellectually (i.e. without any relevant sensations and without any attendant beliefs) that there exist billions of brain cells; intuition is silent about this essentially empirical question (208).

Bealer distinguishes such rational intuitions, which he believes can serve as evidence in philosophical arguments, from physical intuitions.

A physical intuition tells us how the world would be in certain counterfactual circumstances. We have physical intuitions about how the world would be if I were sitting in a different location, say. A rational intuition tells us how the world must be. We have rational intuitions about logic, for example.

When we have a rational intuition - say, that if P then not not P - it presents itself as necessary: it does not seem to us that things could be otherwise; it must be that if P then not not P (207).

Correspondingly, Bealer distinguishes rational intuitions from thought experiments. Thought experiments, as he uses the term, are attempts to consider what would happen in a hypothetical situation.

They rely on physical intuitions.

In contrast, a rational intuition concerns the possibilities of applying concepts.

Bealer cites Putnam’s Twin Earth and Burge’s arthritis cases as relying on rational intuitions.

Those cases are thus not thought experiments, in Bealer's usage.

I have been following tradition in my use of 'intuition' and 'thought experiment', rather than Bealer. Bealer's use seems puzzling to me.

For example, I do not know whether Galileo's falling balls is a thought experiment in Bealer's sense. Galileo's experiment relies on physical intuitions, on what would happen if a heavier and lighter object were tied together and dropped.

His conclusions about Aristotelian physics, though, are stronger than physical intuitions would support. Galileo's argument, that the system would fall both more quickly and more slowly than the heavier ball alone, seems to appeal to rational intuition, at least at the step in which we realize that the Aristotelian account is faulty.

Bealer wants to distinguish rational intuition from physical intuition so that intuition can play a more substantial, modal role in philosophical conclusions.

Intuitions are modal if they tell us about possibility and necessity, about how the world must be or can be, rather than how it is.

The claim that rational intuitions do not support a narrower class of thought experiments seems otiose, though.

We can just try to remember that the kinds of intuitions to which Bealer is appealing do not concern the application of physical laws in imagined scenarios.

He is referring to intuitions with a modal character, ones whose content is necessary.

Thus, it will be essential to characterize his use of 'intuition' more clearly.

III. The phenomenology of intuition

Bealer's characterization of intuition is mainly negative.

He argues that intuitions are:

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.

The above six proposed accounts of intuition are all reductionist in that they explain intuitions in terms of some other kind of phenomenon.

Bealer opposes all of the above reductionist accounts.

We will proceed here, in order

III.1 Beliefs

Bealer uses intuition as a propositional attitude, like belief.

Propositional attitudes are most of those mental states that take that-clauses as their objects.

Belief, desire, and will are all propositional attitudes.

I believe that there is a cat that can play the piano, or I can desire, or will the proposition. Similarly, I can intuit that a subject does not know that the sheep is a sheep. Still, there are many propositional attitudes, and Bealer argues that intuition is not a type of belief. We can see that an intuition is not a type of belief by recognizing that I can intuit something without believing it.

The [Müller-Lyer](#) illusion creates a seeming without a corresponding belief. While such an example does show that seeming is distinct from belief, that illusion is sensory. To provide a non-sensory example, Bealer considers the naive axiom of comprehension. He claims to intuit the axiom without believing it.

Here is some background on the axiom of comprehension:

Naive set theory, as it was originally developed by Cantor, and used by Frege in his logicist attempt to reduce mathematics to logic, includes an unrestricted axiom of comprehension.

The axiom of comprehension says that every predicate, every property, denotes a set.

One problem for naive set theory is the Burali-Forti paradox.

On naive set theory, the property of being an ordinal number should determine a set; there should be a set of ordinal numbers.

But, ordinal numbers are themselves just particular kinds of sets.

The set of all ordinals would itself be an ordinal, larger than any member of the set.

That result, which is sometimes called Cantor's paradox, shows that there is no largest ordinal.

It follows that there can not be a set of all ordinals, and that the property of being an ordinal can not determine a set.

So the comprehension axioms seems to have an exception!

More famously, Russell's paradox asks us to consider the set of all sets that do not contain themselves.

The set can not contain itself, for then it would not be the set as described; it would contain a set that contains itself.

But then, since it does not contain itself, and it is supposed to contain all the sets that do not contain themselves, it should be a member of itself.

(Analogously, consider the barber who shaves all and only the men in town who do not shave themselves; does he shave himself?)

In current axiomatic set theory, we avoid paradoxes like those of Burali-Forti and Russell, by giving up the axiom of comprehension and building sets iteratively.

In other words, we have learned that it is not the case that every property determines a set, even though it seems as if it should.

Bealer's point is that the comprehension axiom seems true, even though we have over-riding beliefs that show it to be false.

We accept the evidence that the set-theoretic universe is not as it first seems.

But being dissuaded that the world is as we intuit it does not change the way that the world seems.

Similarly, though, like the Müller-Lyer illusion, physically, I believe that the table is mostly empty space, even though it seems like a solid object.

It seems pretty clear that we need not intuit everything that we believe, nor need we believe everything we intuit.

Still, I'm not convinced that Bealer's argument from plasticity succeeds in distinguishing the two.

Bealer argues that belief is plastic, while intuitions are not.

We can change our beliefs, but not our intuitions (208).

This claim violates doxastic involuntarism, which is just a jargon-y term for the claim that we can not choose what to believe.

We discussed doxastic involuntarism briefly, earlier in the term.

An example: you can not choose to believe that there is a pink elephant in the room.

Perhaps there are some kinds of beliefs that you can choose, or you can work towards believing something you do not believe by acting as if it were true.

The paradigm cases of belief seem involuntary, just like intuitions.

Nevertheless, the argument from the axiom of comprehension seems sufficient to show that intuitions are not kinds of beliefs.

III.2. Spontaneous inclinations to belief

Instead of identifying intuitions with a kind of beliefs, one could identify them with inclinations to believe.

This proposal has a kind of plausibility, given the distinction above between beliefs and intuitions.

Bealer interprets spontaneous inclinations to belief as being 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.

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).

That is, since inclinations to believe are dispositional, they can not have the phenomenal content we experience when we intuit.

When we intuit, we have a conscious experience.

Our spontaneous inclinations, as in the above sum, are non-conscious beliefs.

We have far more inclinations to believe than we could ever experience.

Bealer's second counter-example to the spontaneous-inclination-to-believe account is puzzling.

He argues that we could modify people's brains so that they would spontaneously believe certain propositions that are out of the range of our rational intuition.

For example, Bealer cites the claim that gold has atomic number 79.

Even if we were to have, as the result of our brains being tweaked, the spontaneous inclination to believe that the atomic number of gold is 79, we would not be intuiting that fact.

My concern about this example is that we might similarly induce a rational seeming in a subject.

If it is plausible that we can induce an inclination to believe that the atomic number of gold is 79, it seems plausible that we can also induce intellectual seemings, or at least beliefs that we are having such seemings.

If that latter case is plausible, if such intuitions can be falsely induced, then it seems unlikely that rational intuition could be used to support philosophical conclusions in the way that Bealer wants.

Or, more likely, if the possibility of falsely inducing beliefs and intuitions does not rule out their justificatory role, then Bealer's second counter-example is unsound.

Nevertheless, if we take intuitions to have a phenomenal character, and we take inclinations to believe to lack phenomenal character, then it is clear that we can not reduce intuitions to inclinations to believe.

III.3. Raising to consciousness of nonconscious beliefs

The proposal to identify intuitions with the raising to consciousness of nonconscious background beliefs runs into some of the same difficulties as the prior suggestions.

Intuitions certainly can not be identified with all of my nonconscious beliefs, since I have many more of them than I have intuitions, or even possible intuitions (e.g. concerning the atomic number of gold). Further, an intuition concerning the axiom of comprehension conflicts with beliefs about its falsity, whether those beliefs are taken as conscious or as nonconscious.

More importantly, 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.

Bealer considers the case of ‘necessarily, the number of planets is greater than seven’.

It is unlikely that many of you have any beliefs about that sentence at all, even nonconscious ones.

But, it is a puzzling sentence.

Depending on how one reads it, it can be either true or false.

It is false if we take it to mean that it is necessary that there be nine planets.

It is true if we take the term ‘the number of planets’ merely to refer to the number nine.

For nine is necessarily greater than seven.

When you learn about those 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.

While Bealer thus rejects the claim that our rational intuitions are just the raising to consciousness of nonconscious beliefs, he 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.

For, 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.

Note that Bealer’s claim here is a direct response to Cummins’ account of intuitions as tacit beliefs.

Cummins argued that philosophical uses of intuition, especially in generating reflective equilibrium, are illegitimate, just because they must be based on tacit theory.

Cummins argued that tacit beliefs are likely to be biased, the result of either innate mental structures or environmental conditioning.

Innateness has been shown historically misleading, and environment is skewed by anecdote and chauvinism.

In either case tacit theories are not reliable indicators of truth.

Bealer believes that there are alternative accounts of intuition, ones which allow for the reliability of our rational intuitions.

III.4. 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.

But, 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.

Intuitions are linked to seeming, not to guessing.

III.5. Commonsense beliefs

Bealer distinguishes between intuitions and commonsense beliefs by presenting examples of non-commonsense intuitions and commonsense beliefs which are not intuitive.

In the former case, some of us have intuitions about some sophisticated scientific and metaphysical claims like the infinite divisibility of space and time.

In the latter case, it is unwise to put your finger in electrical sockets, though this belief is not an intuition.

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.

III.6. Linguistic intuitions

Bealer accepts that we have linguistic intuitions, but resists reducing all of our intuitions to linguistic ones.

Most importantly, 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.

III.7. Judgments

Bealer claims that intuitions are not judgments, since they are not occurrent beliefs.

(He combines the discussion of judgments with that of guesses and hunches, but it will be helpful to separate them.)

I think that Bealer's claim about judgments is that the identification of belief and judgment is a category error.

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

An occurrent, conscious belief may be supported by intuition, but is not itself an intuition.

Earlier, Bealer had argued that intuitions are not beliefs by providing examples in which our intuitions

conflicted with our beliefs.

That is, our intuitions differ in extension from our beliefs, even from a subset of our beliefs.

But the argument against identifying intuition with judgment makes it seem as if there is a deeper worry. Bealer's claim, on this interpretation, would be that there is an epistemological or semantic error in thinking about intuitions as beliefs or judgments.

The epistemological error might lead us to think that intuitions fail to carry justificatory weight, as beliefs do.

The semantic error is to infer that because beliefs and judgments and intuitions are all propositional attitudes they may be inter-definable, or reducible to one another.

The semantic similarities among intuitions and beliefs need not entail that one is reducible or translatable into the other.

There is also a phenomenological error in identifying intuitions with judgments, which Bealer illustrates using the example of the claim that $25^2=625$.

Bealer alleges that we do not intuit that claim, we remember it.

The claim lacks phenomenal character, even though we believe it.

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).

Combining the arguments against reducing intuition to other processes or states, we can find some room for a positive account of intuition.

IV. A positive account of intuition

While the extended characterization of 'intuition' that Bealer presents is largely negative, we can glean several elements of a positive account.

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

I examine four characteristics of intuitions, as Bealer presents them.

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

IV.1. Phenomenal character

Intuitions are conscious episodes of seeming.

About such episodes, 'seems' is to be taken as a technical term.

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).

It will be helpful to distinguish between this conscious episode, which is strictly speaking the intuition, and the content of the intuition.

We have intuitions, which have contents.

I might intuit that the substance on Twin Earth that feels like water is not water.

The intuition is the conscious experience, and the content of the intuition regards Twin Earth.

We can become introspectively aware of our intuitions, which helps us classify those experiences.

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.

IV.2. Natural attitudes

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

Bealer's claim that intuitions are natural attitudes entails that they are a real aspect of the world, not some gerrymandered class of mental states.

The distinction between Cambridge and natural attitudes derives from the concepts of Cambridge and natural properties and changes.

A Cambridge change is the change that I experience when other objects in the universe change.

For example, if I am sitting north of Brad Pitt, since he is in Miami, but he then travels to Iceland, so that I am sitting south of him, one of my properties has changed.

But, nothing about me has changed.

We call such a change a Cambridge change; it is not a real change in me.

Cambridge properties are defined similarly, and are to be contrasted with natural properties.

Having a mass or momentum might be a natural property.

Being blue seems like a natural property; being grue or bleen seems not.

Some relational properties, like being someone's roommate or shorter than someone, might be natural.

The distinction between natural and Cambridge properties is difficult to draw precisely.

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties might help, though it needs explication itself. In any case, Bealer's claim is that intuitions are not some artificial amalgam of various other natural mental states, but their own natural kind.

IV.3. Concepts

Intuitions are conceptual, as long as we don't take 'conceptual' too narrowly.

A concept is an abstract object, to be distinguished from a thought, which is a mental object.

Thoughts might be understood as neural events.

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 contains the concepts of being a man and being unmarried.

Bealer claims that rational intuitions are grounded in our understanding of concepts and their application.

Bealer's account of concepts has to be distinguished from other accounts of concepts.

Intuitions essentially concern possibility.

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 (212).

Some philosophers attempt to define possibility in terms of consistency or analyticity.

In contrast, Bealer's account of intuition does not limit itself to analytic relations.

Nor does intuition, on his account, concern itself only with consistency.

There are impossible states of affairs which are not analytically false nor inconsistent.

For example, Bealer considers color incompatibility.

It is impossible for the same spot to appear (in my field of vision) as both red and blue.

But, it is not inconsistent with the laws of logic nor is it analytically false, on standard construals of analyticity, that a spot could be both red and blue.

IV.4. Modal character

Furthermore, intuitions present their content as necessary, as befits philosophy.

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 (203-4).

The modal character of intuition makes it particularly apt for philosophy, as well as logic, mathematics, and linguistics, which Bealer assimilates.

Further, it means that rational intuition need only pronounce on the possibilities of particular cases. We need only know that Twin Earth is possible, not actual, to see that it is necessary that water is H₂O. Similarly, while blind sight is an actual phenomenon, philosophers only need it to be possible. In other cases in which philosophers appeal to empirical results, it is also possible to modalize those 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 (206).

Moreover, as we have seen, philosophy is committed to modality. Bealer's appeals to the modal nature of both intuition and philosophy conflict with standard naturalism, a topic to which we will return.

V. Examples of intuitions

The remainder of Bealer's article concerns two detailed arguments for the autonomy and authority of philosophy.

Before we get to those arguments, I thought it might be useful to see a list of the kinds of philosophical, or rational, intuitions to which Bealer alludes.

We can make Euthyphro's error of trying to characterize something by iterating examples!

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

The axiom of comprehension (202, 208, 209)

The axiom of choice (211)

Mathematical limits (211)

Congruence is symmetric (211)

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

Infinite divisibility of space and time (211)

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

Phenomenal colors are incompatible (211, 212)

A determinate falls under its determinables (211)

Gettier cases or that the person in the poodle-sheep case does not know that there is a sheep in the field (204-5, 208, 210-1, 211, 211-2, 217).

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

That intuitions are a basic source of evidence (217)

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

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

Chisholm and Putnam's refutations of behaviorism (205)

Multiple-realizability theses against identity theory (205)

Jackson's Mary case (205)

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

Burge's contract case (221-2)

Putnam's beech/elm cases (229)

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

The multigon and chromic examples (223-5)

VI. The argument from evidence

The empiricist claims that all evidence is sense evidence.

If we take this claim to entail that all of our theories have to be reducible to sense data, we arrive at the positivist's program, following Wittgenstein and Carnap.

That program seems to have foundered for several reasons, not merely the holistic one that we have examined, but we will not pursue those reasons here.

Bealer refers to an earlier article in which he argues that the "radical empiricist" project of only taking sense data as evidence, excluding intuition, is self-refuting.

We will proceed, as Bealer does, under the assumption that strict interpretations of the claim that all evidence is sense evidence are untenable.

There may be weaker interpretations of the empiricist's claim.

Bealer's argument is that any weaker interpretation will allow intuitive evidence.

As historical evidence, he cites Hume (p 221), but I will not pursue the connection.

Once we weaken (or broaden) the claim that all evidence is sense evidence, we need some criterion for calling something evidence.

Obviously, the claims of purported psychics are not evidence for scientific theory.

Similarly obviously, the scientific claims of good scientists are evidence.

The problem in the argument from evidence is to find where to draw the line between the two kinds of cases.

Bealer's claim is that something is evidence if it has a modal-reliable connection to the truth.

VII. An aside on reliabilism in epistemology

Reliabilism in epistemology was developed in the wake of the debate over the definition of knowledge.

The standard definition of knowledge is that it is justified true belief (JTB).

This definition traces back to Plato's characterization of knowledge as true belief with a logos, or an account, attached; see *Theaetetus* 201d-201a, especially.

The standard definition was mostly taken as settled until 1962, when Gettier published his counter-examples.

The Gettier cases provide instances of people who have a JTB, but lack knowledge.

In one of Gettier's cases, as we have discussed, Smith believes that the man who will get a job has ten coins in his pocket because he believes (on good evidence) both that Jones will get the job and that Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

It turns out that Smith will get the job, and that Smith, though he does not know it, has ten coins in his own pocket.

So Smith has a JTB, but not knowledge.

The Gettier cases led to an explosion of interest in epistemology, which had traditionally focused on other matters, like skepticism and foundationalism.

Suddenly, philosophers did not know what they were chasing, any more.

One attempt to refine the definition relied on a causal theory of knowledge (CTK).

CTK adds a fourth condition on JTB: that the justification has to include appropriate causal connections between the knower and the proposition known.

Smith does not have an appropriate causal connection to the object of his knowledge, which in this case is Smith himself, rather than Jones.

So, CTK gets the answer right: Smith does not know that the man who will get the job has three coins in

his pocket.

Unfortunately, by the mid-1970s, it became clear that CTK was itself flawed.

Part of the problem was the obscurity of the notion of causation on which it depended.

But, a more serious objection came from Alvin Goldman, who had himself contributed to the development of CTK.

The objection is seen in the fake barn country example I mentioned in class, or in the poodle-sheep example that Bealer develops.

If you are, unknowingly, driving through fake barn country, and happen to see one of the rare real barns, you would believe that you have seen a barn.

You would have a JTB that you have seen a barn, and in fact you would be appropriately causally connected to a barn, so you would fulfil the extra condition arising from CTK.

But, since you would have been in the same belief state had you seen one of the fake barns, you do not know that you have seen a barn.

Reliabilism was thus initially developed as a theory of knowledge:

One knows that p iff, one believes that p , p is true, and one has arrived at the belief that p through some reliable process.

The problem with fake barn country, and the poodle-sheep, is that the process of my coming to believe that there is a barn over there is, given the circumstances, not a reliable process; the same process is much more likely to lead to false beliefs.

Notice that reliabilism is naturally compatible with externalist theories of knowledge.

The person driving through fake barn country does not know whether her process is reliable or not.

VIII. Using intuitions as evidence

Bealer, arguing for the legitimacy of intuitions as a source of evidence, distinguishes between basic and derived sources of evidence, and defends the reliability of philosophical intuitions as basic sources of evidence.

Modal reliabilism, which Bealer distinguishes from contingent reliabilism, is just a theory about what basic sources of evidence we should accept.

Something counts as a basic source [of evidence] iff there is an appropriate kind of strong modal tie between its deliverances and the truth (216).

I will not pursue much further the arguments for modal reliabilism.

Bealer's claim is really just that the way to distinguish what counts as evidence is to look at the sources which best (or most reliably) track the truth.

These sources may be sensory, intuitive, or rational.

Reliabilism is thus a deflationary theory of evidence: there is no single source for all evidence.

All that matters, when characterizing the class of experiences that count as justificatory, is whether the experience is reliably connected to the truth.

The problem with contingent reliabilism, which allows that an experience can serve as evidence if it has a contingent tie to the truth, is that it allows certain experiences to count as evidence which should not. Bealer uses the example of the accidentally-reliable guesser.

Since the guesses are indistinguishable, for the guesser, from other experiences that have no reliable connection to the truth, even if a certain class of guesses accidentally is reliably connected to the truth, we should not count them as evidence.

We want to count as evidence only the guesses that have a modal connection, perhaps a necessary connection, to the truth.

We can not require that the connection be infallible, since that connection will be too strong, in both phenomenal and intuitive cases.

We are sometimes deceived by both our senses and our rational intuition.

Instead of requiring infallibility, we can demand a slightly weaker modal tie.

A candidate source [of evidence] is basic iff for cognitive conditions of some suitably high quality, necessarily, if someone in those cognitive conditions were to process theoretically the deliverances of the candidate source, the resulting theory would provide a correct assessment as to the truth or falsity of most of those deliverances (219).

In sum, the argument from evidence starts with a defense of a modal-reliabilist theory of evidence.

The next step in the argument would be to show that intuitions are modal-reliable.

Bealer does not pursue the details of the argument, which would be required in each particular case of an appeal to intuitions.

He has provided an outline of an argument which can be instantiated in particular cases (e.g. linguistic intuitions, Twin-Earth intuitions, internalist/externalist intuitions).

The argument concludes the autonomy and authority of philosophy from premises about the legitimacy of using intuitions as evidence.

IX. The argument from concepts

The argument from concepts concludes the autonomy and authority of philosophy from premises about our ability to possess determinately various philosophical concepts.

We would be able to possess a concept determinately, or completely, if we could apply it in a stable fashion.

If we could not possess concepts determinately, Bealer argues, then our philosophical intuitions could not be reliably used in philosophical arguments.

We would have to cede autonomy and authority to empirical science.

But, he continues, we can, at least in principle, possess our concepts determinately.

x determinately possesses a given concept iff x determinately understands some proposition that has that concept as a conceptual content...

determinateness = the mode m of understanding with the following properties:

- (a) correctness
- (b) categorial completeness
- (c) noncategorial completeness (230)

Bealer's challenge, then, is to explicate the concepts above, like categorial completeness, and to show that it is possible for us to possess concepts determinately.

He wants to show that our mastery of concepts can support the autonomy and authority of philosophy.

There are cases in which we possess concepts incompletely.

Bealer alludes to the Burge cases, for example.

One aspect of Burge's arthritis example is that we attribute understanding of a concept to persons when they only incompletely understand that concept.

We attribute understanding of the concept of arthritis to a person even though it turns out that there are aspects of the concept, like whether it holds of joints only, or of bones and joints, that are independent of that person.

Burge argues that cases similar to the arthritis case can be constructed with any such concept that is incompletely understood.

He uses the concept of a contract as another example.

Many people mistakenly think that a contract, legally, has to be written.

But, under our laws, a contract can be any kind of agreement, including oral agreements.

The meaning of 'contract' is independent of any individual grasp (or thought) we have of the concept.

Similarly, Putnam points out that our grasp of concepts like those of beeches and elms are incomplete. Since some trees are elms and others are beeches, the concept of an elm differs from the concept of a beech.

I can refer to elms, and I can refer to beeches.

But, there is nothing in my thoughts that distinguishes the two concepts, since I don't have a complete understanding of them.

Putnam concludes that the meaning of 'beech' and the meaning of 'elm' are partially external.

Another option would be to say that I can refer to elms and beeches despite an incomplete grasp of their corresponding concepts.

The Putnam and Burge examples are influential in their domains, and may tell us something about the kinds of limits we may expect on our possession of certain sorts of concepts in certain sorts of cases.

But, Bealer argues that they are misleading if we take them to be paradigmatic of all of our concept possession.

We can possess certain concepts determinately, even if we do not possess all of our concepts in that way.

Furthermore, the kinds of concepts relevant to philosophical arguments may be less liable to incompleteness than the concepts of arthritis, contracts, beeches, and elms.

Bealer calls the terms that Burge and Putnam use semantically unstable, since the external environment plays a role in its meaning.

In contrast, the external environment plays no role in the semantically stable terms used in philosophy.

It is at least possible for most of the central concepts of philosophy to be possessed determinately - substance, mind, intelligence, consciousness, sensation, perception, knowledge, wisdom, truth, identity, infinity, divinity, time, explanation, causation, freedom, purpose, goodness, duty, the virtues, love, life, happiness, and so forth. It would be entirely ad hoc to deny this...the *possibility of determinate possession* (222).

The examples from Burge and Putnam, Bealer argues, are subject to scientific essentialism objections. Scientific essentialism is just the claim that certain things or kinds of things have essential, or necessary, properties.

So, water is H₂O, and lightning is electrical discharge.

We discussed essentialism in relation to Putnam's Twin Earth examples.

It is most famously defended in Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.

The claim that persons and natural kinds have essences seems to be in tension with a strictly materialist

world view.

Putting that problem with essentialism aside, Kripke's claim was that the discoveries of the essences of natural kinds like water or gold are a posteriori, requiring empirical science, even though those identities are necessary: water just is identical to H₂O, and gold is just the element with atomic number 79.

If those identities are really a posteriori, then we could not have any determinate understanding of those concepts a priori.

They would require empirical support.

Even in those cases, Bealer argues that we can possess some portion, which he calls the categorial portion, of the concept a priori.

We just fill-in the empirical portion as we discover the scientific essence.

The a priori understanding of the categorial portion of the concept requires only the knowledge that some such essence exists, and thus that some such identification is possible.

We can know that water has an essence a priori, even if we don't know what that essence is a priori.

Bealer says that we can settle a priori whether there is a counterpart of the property-identity that is true (228).

In cases like Putnam's and Burge's, we require greater empirical evidence, a refining of the web of belief, in order to achieve determinateness.

That is, in order to accommodate Kripkean insights about essences, Bealer weakens the account of determinate possession.

But, he also notes that such a weakening is unlikely to be required for the concepts used in philosophy.

There is an important family of test propositions p that are entirely immune to scientific essentialism, namely, those I call *semantically stable*: p is semantically stable iff, necessarily, for any population C it is necessary that, for any proposition p' and any population C' , if p' in C' is the counterpart of p in C , then $p=p'$... Most of the central propositions in the a priori disciplines - logic, mathematics, philosophy - are semantically stable and, therefore, immune to scientific essentialism (228).

The argument from concepts, then, relies on our ability to possess concepts determinately.

Especially since the concepts we require in philosophy are semantically stable, our intuitions are reliable enough to support both the autonomy and authority of philosophy.

X. A few observations

There's far too much in this article to cover in even two class sessions.

In particular, there is too much to say about Bealer's account of concepts.

I don't determinately understand the argument from concepts.

I have some concerns about whether our ability to grasp concepts has the fecundity that Bealer needs.

Bealer's claim that philosophical terms are semantically stable seems dogmatic, rather than defended.

Still, I think that Bealer is on the right track with the claim that our intuitions in philosophical cases are no different in kind from our intuitions more generally.

Bealer compares transitivity intuitions in both the cases of spatial regions and biological descendants.

“There is no relevant phenomenological difference between these two transitivity intuitions despite the fact that the former would traditionally be counted as synthetic and the latter would be counted as analytic... Nor is there any relevant “formal” difference between these two intuitions... The only cogent way to proceed is to admit all intuitions as evidence, at least provisionally (212).

Rational intuition, and a priori reasoning generally, is ubiquitous, in ways that the radical empiricist is forced to deny.

In philosophy, as Bealer argues, we can modalize-away appeals to actual cases, like blindsight (206).

When we reconsider the Galileo example, it might turn out that we can modalize much of our work in science, as well.

The ubiquity of rational intuition is under-appreciated.

Much of what Bealer says about philosophical intuition depends on the existence of seeming, with its concurrent phenomenal character.

That phenomenal character is supposed to play an evidential role; see 205.

I wonder if there really are such conscious episodes.

I understand having a belief.

But beliefs are supposed to be different, by both Cummins (and later Kornblith) and Bealer.

Is there really a conscious episode of seeming, in Bealer’s sense, that applies to how I feel when I think about the Truetemp cases, for example?

I am concerned that the difference between that phenomenal experience and the one, say, in which I believe that $25^2=625$ is overstated.

Relatedly, my worries about Bealer’s concept of intuition are heightened by his discussion of the purported plasticity of belief, in contrast to intuition.

As I mentioned, I find doxastic involuntarism convincing.

Moreover, it seems to me that we can change the way that things seem to us.

That is certainly true about sensory seemings; consider the [Necker](#) cube, or even the Müller-Lyer illusion.

I would think that both intuition and belief are resistant to our will, but that intuitions are more easily tweaked.

While the characterization of intuition may seem irrelevant to the argument for whether it can support the authority and autonomy of philosophy, if rational intuition does not have the characteristics Bealer claims, then it can not do the work he claims it can.

That work, for Bealer, is the support of a broad, long-term quest for reflective equilibrium over the whole of philosophy.

Human beings only approximate the relevant cognitive conditions [to support theoretical systematizations of our intuitions sufficient for philosophy], and they do this only by working collectively over historical time. This quest is something we are living through as an intellectual culture. Our efforts have never even reached equilibrium and perhaps never will... Nevertheless, I believe that, *collectively, over historical time, undertaking philosophy as a civilization-wide project*, we can obtain authoritative answers to a wide variety of central philosophical questions (203).