

Some Quotations about Intuitions

“Of course, some philosophers think that something’s having intuitive content is very inconclusive evidence in favor of it. I think it is very heavy evidence in favor of anything, myself. I really don’t know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking.”

(Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p. 42)

“. . . the introduction of the word ‘intuition’ by a moral philosopher is always a signal that something has gone wrong with an argument.”

(Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 67)

“Piecemeal appeal to intuition has been severely attacked, and the attacks seem to me fatal. Intuitions as a class have no probative force.”

(James Griffin, *Well-Being*, p. 1)

“Why should we not rather make the opposite assumption, that all the particular moral judgments we intuitively make are likely to derive from discarded religious systems, from warped views of sex and bodily functions, or from customs necessary for the survival of the group in social and economic circumstances that now lie in the distant past? . . . it would be best to forget all about our particular moral judgments.”

(Peter Singer, “Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium,” p. 516)

“No coherent explanation or epistemological account has ever been offered to explain why these intuitions are reliable guides to answering our questions”

(Richard B. Brandt, *Facts, Values, and Morality*, p. 5)

“It can seem, and is sometimes said, that any philosophical dispute, when pushed back far enough, turns into a conflict of intuitions about ultimate premises: ‘In the end, all we have to go on is our intuitions.’ Yet analytic philosophy has no agreed or even popular account of how intuition might work, no accepted explanation of the hoped-for correlation between our having an intuition that P and its being true that P. Since analytic philosophy prides itself on its rigor, this blank space in its foundations looks like a methodological scandal.”

(Timothy Williamson, “Philosophical ‘Intuitions’ and Skepticism about Judgment,” p. 109)

“. . . our reliance upon case specific moral intuitions is problematic, and in need of a justification that we do not yet possess. More importantly, of course, anyone who is going to rely on intuition at all—and that, I think, means all of us—needs to explain exactly why we are justified in taking intuition to be particularly reliable in the first place. This is a justificatory burden that has not, I think, been satisfactorily discharged.”

(Shelly Kagan, “Thinking about Cases,” p. 62)

“. . . what is supposed to be the justification of such appeals to intuition? One searches the literature in vain for a serious attempt to provide such a justification. . . . In view of such goings-on, I am tempted to suggest, half-jokingly—but only *half*-jokingly—that the editors of philosophy journals agree to a moratorium on all papers in which intuitions are appealed to, unless the basis of those appeals is made explicit.”

(Jaakko Hintikka, “The Emperor’s New Intuitions,” pp. 130, 147)

“Nor could one give worse advice to morality than by wanting to derive it from examples. . . . [Such a practice] produces a disgusting hodgepodge of patchwork observations and half-rationalized principles, in which shallow pates revel because it is something useful for everyday chitchat, but the insightful, feeling confused and dissatisfied without being able to help themselves, avert their eyes.”

(Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:408-9)