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# Relying on Intuitions: Where Cappelen and Deutsch Go Wrong

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**ABSTRACT** *In Philosophy without Intuitions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Herman Cappelen challenges the ‘almost universally accepted’ thesis of ‘Centrality’: ‘philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence (or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories’. Cappelen takes there to be two arguments for Centrality and rejects both. According to the first, Centrality is supported by the way philosophers characterize key premises in their arguments as ‘intuitive’. Central to Cappelen’s rejection of this is his lengthy argument that philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk is very hard to interpret, indeed often ‘meaningless’. I argue, in contrast, that this talk is easy to interpret. The great mass of philosophers who would endorse Centrality mean by ‘intuition’ just what it ordinarily means: ‘immediate judgment, without reasoning or inference’. Cappelen claims further that philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk, however it is interpreted, does not support Centrality. I argue that this talk, interpreted in the ordinary way, does indeed support Centrality. According to the second argument, Centrality is supported by the very practice of philosophy. Cappelen rejects this with a thorough examination of several philosophical arguments. Deutsch has attacked Centrality similarly, in effect, with a thorough examination of one famous argument from Kripke. How are we to tell whether philosophical practice relies on intuitions? Cappelen, and Deutsch to some extent, answer by looking to the opinions of intuition-theorists about the nature of intuitions. This approach is quite mistaken. Rather, we should look to our ordinary ability to recognize intuitions. Adopting this approach, and discussing Deutsch’s Kripke example in most detail, I argue that Centrality gets support from all of these examples of philosophical practice.*

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## I. Introduction

### I.i. The theses

In his splendidly iconoclastic book, *Philosophy without Intuitions*, Herman Cappelen challenges a thesis that he rightly thinks is ‘almost universally accepted’ (1):<sup>1</sup>

Centrality (of Intuitions in Contemporary Philosophy): Contemporary analytic philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence (or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories. (3)

Cappelen’s challenge to Centrality is impressively detailed and includes a great deal of interesting material about intuitions, ‘intuition’, and philosophical practice. I have found struggling with his rich discussion very rewarding. Nonetheless, I think his rejection of Centrality is terribly misguided.

Cappelen takes there to be two arguments for Centrality, ‘The Argument from “Intuition”-talk’ (‘AIT’) and ‘The Argument from Philosophical Practice’ (‘APP’). According to AIT, Centrality is supported by the way philosophers characterize key premises in their arguments as ‘intuitive’. According to APP, Centrality is supported by the way philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence in their philosophical practice (even when they do not describe what they rely on as ‘intuitions’). Cappelen criticizes each argument in turn. I will defend AIT from his criticisms in Section II, APP, in Section III. I argue that Centrality is true.

A main thesis of Cappelen’s book is that there is a very serious problem in interpreting philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk and hence Centrality. In response, I shall argue, in part II, that there is no such problem. Indeed, Cappelen’s lengthy discussion of this alleged problem strikes me as a storm in a teacup.

If my arguments are good, Cappelen has not come close to his primary goal of showing that Centrality is false. This raises an interesting question: What has gone wrong? I have two main diagnoses. Diagnosis (1): a pervasive cause of error is the extensive attention that Cappelen gives to the opinions of ‘intuition-theorists’. My diagnosis, presented at several places in this paper, is that Cappelen has been misled by these theorists in his criticisms of the arguments for Centrality. The views of intuition-theorists are largely irrelevant to assessing Centrality. Diagnosis (2): Cappelen has missed why philosophers *think* that their intuitions are evidence for their theories. They think this, or at least *should* think it, not simply because of the *intuitiveness* of those intuitions but because of their supposed *reliability*. I shall discuss this in Section II.xii.

Max Deutsch, in a series of articles,<sup>2</sup> has made a more modest, albeit even more vigorous, challenge to Centrality along similar lines to Cappelen’s

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<sup>1</sup>All such unidentified page references are to Cappelen’s book.

<sup>2</sup>Deutsche, ‘Experimental Philosophy and the Theory of Reference’; Deutsche, ‘Intuitions, Counter-Examples, and Experimental Philosophy’; and Deutsche, ‘Kripke’s Gödel Case’.

criticism of APP. Deutsch attacks the widely accepted view that a famous argument of Saul Kripke relies on intuitions as evidence.<sup>3</sup> Deutsch is, in effect, criticizing a version of APP that uses Kripke's argument as a paradigm of philosophical practice. I will focus on that Kripke paradigm in my defense of APP in part III. I shall argue that Deutsch's challenge is also mistaken.

As can be seen, I have serious disagreements with Cappelen. Still, I shall start my discussion of his book on a note of agreement. For, Cappelen has targets other than Centrality, and from my naturalistic perspective, his criticisms of these are very congenial.

### I.ii. Cappelen's other targets

(1) Cappelen rejects Centrality and yet clearly thinks that *were it true* that would be bad news for philosophy. That is, Cappelen thinks that philosophy *ought not to be* relying extensively on intuitions as evidence. My own view is that philosophers rely on intuitions far too extensively. My criticisms have been aimed particularly at the role of intuitions in the philosophy of language. I argue that instead of relying on our intuitions about reference which, at best, could be only indirect evidence, we should be seeking more direct evidence in the reality of reference itself: we should be examining linguistic usage.<sup>4</sup>

(2) Cappelen describes some targets as follows:

The targets in this work are those philosophers who endorse Centrality and construe it as an instance of philosophical exceptionalism (or at least exceptionalism about disciplines traditionally thought to be a priori). (16)

I share these targets.<sup>5</sup> But the view that philosophy is marked out as exceptional partly because of Centrality is, of course, different from Centrality itself.

(3) Cappelen thinks that proponents of Centrality typically assume that philosophers use 'the method of cases'.

This encourages the view that when we discuss cases, the subject matter is *the description given of the world* or some kind of theoretical construct, not *the described feature of the world*. But that, of course, is deeply mistaken. (190–1)

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<sup>3</sup>Cappelen credits Deutsch with partly inspiring the case studies that form an important part of his book (19).

<sup>4</sup>Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*; Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*; Devitt, 'The Role of Intuitions'; and Devitt, 'Testing Theories of Reference'. I have argued similarly against the reliance on intuitions in linguistics: Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*; Devitt, 'Linguistic Intuitions Revisited', and Devitt, 'Linguistic Intuitions Are Not "the Voice of Competence"'.  
<sup>5</sup>Devitt, 'No Place for the A Priori'.

Relatedly, Cappelen opposes ‘conceptual analysis’ and apriorism:<sup>6</sup>

no one can seriously engage in any activity labeled ‘conceptual analysis’ without a theory of what concepts are, and the philosophical debate about that topic is one of the least aprioristic fields of philosophy. (207)

Cappelen is in effect criticizing ‘the linguistic turn’ in philosophy. I have frequently criticized it myself. The idea that what philosophers are doing in their armchairs is examining the nature of their concepts or language seems to me quite mistaken. Indeed, if that were what they were doing, they would have discovered very little because knowledge of these natures is very hard to come by. What philosophers are doing in their armchairs, I have argued, is probing not their knowledge of concepts but their knowledge of the kinds that the concepts are about:

Thus, in a famous example of the method, ‘the analysis of knowledge’, the philosopher, as expert as anyone in identifying cases of knowledge, confronts descriptions of epistemic situations and considers whether the situations are cases of knowledge. On the basis of these empirical intuitions about cases she constructs an empirical theory about the nature of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

(4) I have already noted that the views of intuition-theorists loom very large throughout Cappelen’s book. He is often critical of those views. I think that he is mostly right in his criticisms (but wrong in the pre-eminent role he gives to those theorists).

In sum, I think that Centrality is a mistaken target. Cappelen’s arguments really count against other targets. And I am mostly with him on those.

## II. The argument from ‘intuition’-talk

### II.i Introduction

Cappelen has two major objections to the argument from ‘intuition’-talk (AIT): first, he argues that philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk is very unclear; second, he argues that the talk, however it should be interpreted, does not support Centrality.

Cappelen is very concerned with the task of interpreting ‘intuition’-talk:

one of the underlying themes of the book is that understanding ‘intuition’ and its use among philosophers is an indispensable stepping stone for understanding intuitions and their role in philosophy. (24)

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<sup>6</sup>In contrast, Deutsch seems rather sympathetic to the a priori: Deutsch, ‘Experimental Philosophy’, 460.

<sup>7</sup>Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*, 105–6.

He finds understanding ‘intuition’ *very* difficult. He thinks that the components of Centrality, particularly its ‘intuition’-talk, are ‘spectacularly vague’ (18). He talks of ‘the complexity and difficulty of interpreting philosophers’ use of “intuition”-vocabulary’ (71); ‘for each case we look at it is massively underdetermined what exactly is contributed by “intuitively”’ (77). Because ‘the distinctly philosophical use of “intuitive” is semantically defective’ we should engage in its ‘charitable reinterpretation’ (61).

An important part of Cappelen’s concern is that philosophers who embrace Centrality disagree over whether it uses ‘the “intuitive” of English’ or ‘the “intuitive” of a special idiolect, *Philosophers’-English*’ (7). Now I think that it is often appropriate to have such concerns about philosophical terms and have expressed them myself about ‘meaning’<sup>8</sup> and ‘reference’.<sup>9</sup> Still, I shall argue that there is hardly any philosophical disagreement over ‘intuition’. Cappelen’s view to the contrary arises from his having been misled by intuition-theorists.

### II.ii. A paradox?

A preliminary point. There is something rather paradoxical about Cappelen’s rejection of AIT. He thinks, rightly, that almost all philosophers would assent to Centrality, a thesis that uses ‘intuition’. He also thinks, rightly, that many of these philosophers go in for a lot of ‘intuition’-talk in their philosophical practice: they characterize premises in their arguments as ‘an intuition’ or ‘intuitive’. Now in the absence of *very* powerful evidence to the contrary, we should surely assume that, whatever these philosophers mean by ‘intuition’, they mean the *same* thing by it in Centrality and in their practice that involves ‘intuition’-talk; they are not equivocating. So, how could their practice not support Centrality?

I will not return to the matter of whether philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk is Centrality-supporting until Section II.x. Until then I will be concerned with the matter of interpreting that talk. I start with my own view on the matter.

### II.iii. My interpretation of philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk

(A) Doubtless *some* philosophers give ‘intuition’ a special technical meaning, but the thousands of philosophers who would endorse Centrality, thus *constituting* its near universal acceptance, would *almost always* mean by ‘intuition’ just what it ordinarily means.

Certainly this should be the default interpretation of their endorsement, the interpretation to be adopted in the absence of persuasive evidence that it is

<sup>8</sup>Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*.

<sup>9</sup>Devitt, ‘Lest Auld Acquaintance be Forgotten’.

wrong. One example of persuasive evidence would be widespread explicit acceptance among philosophers that ‘intuition’ is a technical term with such and such meaning. Another example would be widespread application of the term by philosophers to things that would not ordinarily (‘intuitively!’) be called intuitions and/or widespread failure to apply it to things that would be so-called. I know of no such evidence.

So what is this ordinary meaning of ‘intuition’? We should surely look to dictionaries for guidance (where else?). The five dictionaries I consulted speak pretty much with one voice on the matter. Here is my gloss on what they say. First, ‘intuition’, like ‘thought’, ‘supposition’, and many other such nouns is ambiguous. It can mean the *mental event/state* of ‘immediate’ ‘apprehension’, ‘cognition’, ‘perception’, or ‘insight’, one without ‘rational processes’, ‘reasoning’, or ‘inference’. Or it can mean the *content* of such immediate apprehension, etc., what philosophers like to call a ‘proposition’. Interestingly, none of these dictionaries note that the content might be something that the intuiter does not believe but only *inclines* to believe. Yet that seems to be the case, as Peter van Inwagen observes.<sup>10</sup> Thus, I have the intuition that the two lines in the Muller-Lyer illusion differ in length even though I know enough not to believe it: the illusion *inclines* me to believe it. But, for our purposes here, we can ignore this fine point. None of the dictionaries use ‘judgment’ in its account though ‘judgment’ seems as apt as the nouns that they do use and it is the noun that Cappelen and I favor in talking about intuitions. So I shall go with it.

(B) My working account of the ordinary meaning of ‘intuition’ is: *immediate judgment, without reasoning or inference*. One might well put this briefly by saying that ‘intuition’ means *unreflective judgment*. This judgment can be the mental event/state or the propositional content of that event/state.

The ambiguity of ‘intuition’ is important in the discussion in Section II.x on whether philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence.

Six points to note. (i) I am not, of course, offering my dictionary-based account as a *semantic theory* of ‘intuition’, a theory of what *constitutes* its meanings. Indeed, it is naïve to suppose that one can find the right semantic theory by consulting a dictionary. In particular, should a word not be covered by a description theory—for example, ‘gold’, if Kripke is right (which he is)—dictionaries are near useless for a semantic theory. Still, dictionaries do tell us *what a word conventionally applies to*, an empirical matter on which lexicographers are expert. (ii) Dictionaries say not a word about ‘intuition’ applying only to a judgment that *has or needs no* support from argument. They simply say that the judgment *seems true without any* such support. (iii) I take it that

<sup>10</sup>van Inwagen, ‘Materialism and the Psychological-Continuity Account’, 309.

lexicographers have in mind that ‘intuition’ applies to mental states arrived at without *conscious* inference, etc. implying nothing about what may be going on subconsciously or subpersonally. (iv) The ordinary meaning places no restriction on the propositional contents that can be intuited, nor on whether intuiting arises from perception, memory, or ‘thought experiment’.<sup>11</sup> (v) We should expect a person’s intuitions about an area of reality to improve as she becomes more familiar with the area: less reflection is required for her to arrive at the truth. And that is what we generally do find. This is the basis for the so-called expertise defense against the findings of experimental philosophers.<sup>12</sup> (vi) Because of this effect of familiarity, we find considerable variation among people in the propositions that they find intuitive.

Now if (A) and (B) are right, there seems to be *no* serious problem of interpretation. Since, Cappelen thinks there is a *very big* problem, we expect to find lots of disagreement with (A) and/or (B). We find that with (A). But let us start with (B).

#### II.iv. Cappelen’s view of ordinary ‘intuition’-talk

In Chapter 2, titled “‘Intuitive’, ‘Intuitively’, ‘Intuition’, and ‘Seem’ in English”, Cappelen initially seems to be in total accord with (B). After a discussion of many examples that nicely demonstrates the range of things/events that we ordinarily describe as ‘intuitive’ or grasped ‘intuitively’ (31–3), he comments:

one feature that stands out when these cases are considered: *there is some kind of ease, effortlessness, or spontaneity involved*. Another way of putting this is that *the acts involved don’t require a lot of reflection or effort* ... I doubt that there is much more to say *in general* about intuitiveness. (33; emphasis in original)

The first part of this captures the dictionaries’ talk of immediacy, the second, the unreflective nature of what is intuitive. What about ‘intuition’? Cappelen explains this in terms of ‘intuitive’ and ‘intuitively’ using two ‘rough principles’:

C: ‘*A* has the intuition that *p* (at *t*)’ is true just in case *p* is intuitive to *A* (at *t*).

CC: ‘It is intuitive to *A* that *p* (at *t*)’ is true just in case *A* judges that *p* intuitively (at *t*). (39)

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of these different sources of intuitions, see Devitt, ‘Testing Theories of Reference’, Sec. 5.

<sup>12</sup>See Devitt, ‘Whither Experimental Semantics?’, for references and discussion.

I think that this is spot on.

So far, so good. But then, we find the following in the conclusion that Cappelen draws to this chapter on ‘intuition’-talk:

It should be clear that there is no well-disciplined or well-understood unique function or meaning we can assign the terms ‘intuitively’, ‘intuitive’, ‘seem’, etc., as they are used in ordinary English. (47)

This is very puzzling because what this chapter primarily shows, and shows very well, is nearly the opposite of this! For, the chapter gives a nice description of the ordinary meaning of ‘intuition’-talk. I see no support for the claim that this meaning is not ‘well-disciplined or well-understood’ and I don’t know what to make of that claim. There is some vagueness to ‘intuition’-talk, as to all talk, but nothing in the chapter shows ‘intuition’ to be any less disciplined and understood than words are in general: ‘intuition’ means, briefly, *unreflective judgment*, and is well-understood to mean that, successfully conveying just that in countless messages. Now it is true that Cappelen does more in Chapter 2 than simply describe the meaning of ‘intuition’-talk, but the rest does nothing to undermine what he rightly says about that meaning. Thus, he notes a bit of ‘context sensitivity’ in ‘intuitive’ (35–6) and has a nice discussion of the relation between ‘seem’ and ‘intuitive’ (42–7). And he helpfully describes how ‘intuition’-talk can function as ‘a hedge’ (36–8). But, as he emphasizes, the view of this that he proposes ‘is not that the semantic value of “intuitively” is given by its hedging function’ (38). In other words, the hedging function of ‘intuition’-talk is quite compatible with that talk having the meaning described. In sum, I see no grounds for his puzzling conclusion.

Cappelen’s mistaken conclusion is perhaps one small cause of his dark view of philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk. For, if the ordinary meaning of ‘intuition’-talk really was not ‘well-disciplined or well-understood’, then *to the extent that philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk has that meaning*, it would be difficult to interpret. This brings us to (A).

#### **II.v. Cappelen’s view of the extent to which philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk is ordinary**

In Section II.i, I noted Cappelen’s view that philosophers disagree over whether their ‘intuition’-talk has its ordinary English meaning or some special philosophical meaning (7). To what extent does *Cappelen* think this talk is not ordinary, and hence, to what extent is he at odds with my (A)? The answer is not as immediately apparent as one would like.

Cappelen says that ‘philosophers who use “intuitively” often do use it with its ordinary English meaning’ (29); that ‘unreflective philosophers can often be interpreted as using “intuitively” more or less as it is used in English’ (65). ‘Often’ so using ‘intuitively’ is, of course, compatible with (A)’s ‘almost

always' so using it. Cappelen claims that 'there are some philosophers who use "intuitive" in ways different from how it is used in ordinary English' (49). That 'some' philosophers so use it is, of course, compatible with almost all philosophers not doing so. So far, then, there is no clear disagreement with (A). However, the following passages seem to settle that Cappelen is very much in disagreement. He claims that

philosophers' use of 'intuition' seems problematic: There is no agreed upon definition of 'intuition'. There are no agreed upon paradigms. There is minimal unity in usage between different schools and subdisciplines and there is no group of experts within the discipline who agree on how the term should be used. (52)

And he says that the 'typical unreflective' philosopher 'doesn't want to use "intuition" with the meaning it has in English' (59). Rather it is meant to be a special theoretical term. So I take Cappelen's view to be that although *some* philosophers use 'intuition' with its ordinary meaning the *great majority* do not. So, he rejects (A). And that does a lot to explain why he has such a problem of interpretation and, indeed, why he rejects AIT.

I have claimed that we should take philosophers to be using 'intuition' with its ordinary meaning, not some special philosophical meaning, in the absence of persuasive evidence that they are not so using it. What does Cappelen offer as evidence? Primarily, he appeals to intuition-theorists.

## II.vi. Intuition-theories and the alleged special meanings of 'intuition'-talk

In Section I.i, I offered Diagnosis (1) of where Cappelen has gone wrong: he has been misled by intuition-theorists. In saying this, I mean to cast no aspersions on the practice of theorizing about intuitions. Indeed, I have indulged in that practice a lot myself,<sup>13</sup> some might say excessively. My point is that the views of intuition-theorists, so prominent in Cappelen's discussion, are largely irrelevant to assessing Centrality.

Here is a way to get an initial feel for this irrelevance: note first the obvious point that these theorists are theorizing about *the nature of intuitions*; note second that Centrality is equivalent to the following doctrine:

Centrality\*: Contemporary analytic philosophers rely on intuitions, whatever they may be, as evidence (or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories.

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<sup>13</sup>See, e.g. Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*; Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*; Devitt, 'The Role of Intuitions'; and Devitt, 'Testing Theories of Reference'.

Centrality\*'s 'whatever they may be' makes it obvious that the nature of intuitions is beside the point.

The first support for Diagnosis (1) comes from the evidence that Cappelen provides of special meanings of 'intuition'-talk. For, he finds this evidence in intuition-theories. His introductory discussion of AIT begins:

I present a simple initial overview of some meanings some of the terms have been given by defenders of Centrality and I contrast these with some alternative interpretations that are more problematic for Centrality. (7)

He then makes his first substantive claim in his criticism of AIT:

Those who endorse Centrality don't agree on what 'intuition' denotes—they don't even fully agree on what language Centrality is formulated in. While some think it is the 'intuitive' of English that occurs in that formulation, others think it is the 'intuitive' of a special idiolect, *Philosophers'-English* (for more on this see Chapter 2). (7)

(I discussed Chapter 2 in Section II.iv.) I am interested in what immediately follows this claim about the meaning of 'intuition'-talk. The very next sentence is 'The taxonomy of intuition-theories can be done in different ways' (7–8). Cappelen then goes on to give his own taxonomy, citing the works of George Bealer, Joel Pust, Peter van Inwagen, David Lewis, Timothy Williamson, Alvin Plantinga, Laurence Bonjour, Ernest Sosa, Kirk Ludwig, Kurt Gödel, Jennifer Nagel, and Charles Parsons (8–12). Question: What have these differences among *theorists of intuitions* got to do with what they, let alone anyone else, mean by 'intuition'? Presumably Cappelen intends the differences to support his allegation of disagreement over the meanings of 'intuition'-talk. Meanings are, after all, what this 'initial overview' is supposed to be about. So it looks as if Cappelen is inferring a difference in meanings of 'intuition' among philosophers from a difference in theories of intuitions.

There are two things wrong with this inference. First, although differences in theories that use a term *might be evidence* of differences in the meaning of the term, there is *never* a simple inference from the former difference to the latter. This is as true of terms of philosophical interest like 'explanation', 'reasoning', 'pain', and 'intuition', as it is of others like 'the Sun', 'tiger', 'atom', and 'price'. To suppose otherwise is to presume a description theory of reference for the term. We should not presume this because there are some terms, indeed *must* be some terms, for which description theories are false.<sup>14</sup> Different theories using '*F*' can sometimes be theories of the same things, *F*s. A

<sup>14</sup>There must be some terms that are not covered by a description theory because such theories are '*essentially incomplete*', passing the buck of explaining the reference of a term to the task of explaining the reference of its associated descriptions. The buck must stop somewhere with a nondescription theory (Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*, 160).

person's use of 'F' can sometimes refer to *F*s even though the person is very ignorant or wrong about *F*s. And we seldom, if ever, know nearly enough about reference to know that this is not true of any given 'F'. We should have learnt all this from the revolution in the theory of reference started by Kripke.<sup>15</sup> So, *maybe*, the theorists of intuitions cited by Cappelen all share a meaning of 'intuition', disagreeing only about the nature of the entities referred to. But, do they *in fact* share a meaning? This is a tricky question, to which I will return in Section II.viii. Second, only a very few of the thousands of philosophers who would endorse Centrality are on record as *having* a theory of intuitions. (No surprise about that, of course: one no more needs a theory of intuitions before using 'intuition' than one needs a theory of water before using 'water'.) So we cannot look to *their* theories of intuitions even for evidence of what they mean by 'intuition'. In sum, *differences in theories of intuitions are largely irrelevant to the interpretive task.*

The first error above is facilitated by Cappelen's choice of the phrase 'what "intuition" denotes' in order to make his allegation about what 'intuition' *means*. For, he uses that very same phrase also in describing what are, explicitly, *theories of intuitions*: he often presents these as theories of what 'intuition' denotes. For example:

Many philosophers, including proponents of Centrality, take 'intuition' to denote a psychological (mental) state or event. Those who hold this view can be divided into two categories: those who think of intuitions as *sui generis* mental states and those who think of intuitions as a subset of some other kind of mental state.

Some prominent philosophers, including van Inwagen, Lewis and Williamson (at least on one reading) take 'intuition' to denote *any* belief or inclination to believe. (9)

This sort of 'semantic ascent', as Quine would call it, can be harmless but it rather looks as if here it has misled Cappelen into thinking that these differences between theorists entail differences in the meanings of 'intuition'.

I am indicating an ambiguity in Cappelen's statement that 'those who endorse Centrality don't agree on what "intuition" denotes', an ambiguity that facilitates the slide from talk of different theories to talk of different meanings. Perhaps that statement is most naturally construed as claiming that those philosophers disagree over *the meaning of 'intuition'*, the explicit concern of Cappelen's 'initial overview'. But, given the reasonable presumption that *intuitions* are 'what "intuition" denotes', the statement could also be construed as claiming that the philosophers disagree over the nature of intuitions. This

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<sup>15</sup>Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.

would be a disagreement over what intuitions are, reflected in their *theories of intuitions*. These disagreements are largely beside the interpretive point.<sup>16</sup>

The passages I have been discussing come from the very beginning of Cappelen's discussion of AIT. But the mistaken inference from different intuition-theories to different meanings of 'intuition' re-emerges later. As part of my evidence that Cappelen thinks that philosophers' 'intuition'-talk is problematic, I quoted earlier (Section II.v), a passage where he talks of 'no agreed upon definition of "intuition" ... no agreed upon paradigms ... minimal unity in usage' and so on. Cappelen goes straight on: 'For those who doubt that "intuition"-talk is correctly characterized in these ways, consider the following' (52). What follows is a range of different theories in the literature about the nature of intuitions (52–3).

In conclusion, Cappelen seems to have been misled by differences among intuition-theories into wrongly inferring differences and disorder in the meaning of 'intuition'-talk among philosophers in general. Yet those theoretical differences alone do not even show a difference in meaning among intuition-theorists and are largely irrelevant to the issue of what philosophers in general mean by 'intuition'.

### II.vii. The opinions of intuition-theorists about special meanings of 'intuition'-talk

I have just criticized the role that Cappelen gives to the opinions of intuition-theorists *about intuitions*. Cappelen also takes very seriously their opinions about *what philosophers in general mean by 'intuition'-talk*. He poses 'the Interpretative Question' as follows: 'When "intuition"-terminology is used, is the correct interpretation of it Centrality-supportive?' He continues:

To approach these issues, two questions must be distinguished:

Q1: What is the denotation of 'intuitive' (and cognate terms) in English? Surprisingly, Q1 is not the question most theorists of intuition focus on. They assume that there's a special philosophical usage of the term 'intuition'. I'll call the alleged idiolect of those who use the word in this special philosophical way, 'English $p$ '. The question they ask is Q2:

Q2: What is the denotation of 'intuitive' (and cognate terms) in 'English $p$ '? (27)

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<sup>16</sup>I'm not suggesting that there is *no* connection between the meaning of 'intuition', as described in dictionaries, and theories of intuitions. Theorizing about *F*s must begin by *identifying F*s (as I have emphasized: Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*, 72). Dictionary definitions tell us what '*F*' applies to and thus can often be a help with the identification. We can then regard these definitions as *proto*-theories of *F*s. In my view, such a dictionary-based proto-theory should be the starting point, though not necessarily part of the end point, of a theory of intuitions, in the ordinary sense (and was of my own theory; see Section II.xi).

Cappelen provides some quotes that provide fairly persuasive evidence that Ludwig and Pust, at least, make the assumption that ‘intuition’-talk has a special meaning in philosophy. However, I’m not as convinced by this evidence as Cappelen clearly is because the quotes exhibit the same slide between talk of the nature of intuitions and the meaning of ‘intuition’ that I have just noted. Set this aside. My first objection is that these quotes are rather thin evidence that *most* intuition-theorists make this assumption about philosophical usage. My hunch is that only a few intuition-theorists do and most don’t.<sup>17</sup> But my more important objection is this. Why, when posing ‘the Interpretative Question’, does Cappelen immediately look to a few intuition-theorists for answers? Those answers can at best provide *indirect* evidence of the meaning of ‘intuition’-talk among thousands of philosophers. What we need is *direct* evidence. To find direct evidence that this talk does indeed have a special meaning among philosophers in general, we have to look at philosophical usage not the opinions (‘intuitions’?!) of a few theorists about that usage. We need evidence, for example, of widespread explicit acceptance of ‘technical’ definitions of ‘intuition’ or of widespread application of the term at odds with its ordinary meaning (Section II.iii).

Now Cappelen is not entirely convinced by the opinions of these intuition-theorists about philosophical usage: ‘I think the attempt to quarantine philosophers’ usage from other usage ultimately fails’ (28). Nonetheless, he takes these opinions far too seriously, in my view. Unless they are accompanied by persuasive evidence of special meanings they are of little value.

So far, then, we have found no such evidence and hence nothing that counts against (A). Can we find some elsewhere?

### II.viii. Evidence of special meanings of ‘intuition’-talk

Cappelen does provide evidence that *some intuition-theorists* have a special sense: passages from Bealer and Pust<sup>18</sup> show that they restrict ‘intuition’ to *necessary* truths, what they call ‘rational intuitions’ (8). Yet, in its ordinary sense, ‘intuition’ is certainly not so restricted; it applies, for example, to many judgments we make of contingent truths about other minds. Cappelen claims that some other intuition-theorists ‘follow Bealer and Pust in thinking that we can have an intuition that  $p$  only if  $p$  is a necessary truth’ (10) and cites a couple (52).

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<sup>17</sup>For example, I’ll bet that my favorite intuition-theorist, Hilary Kornblith, who goes unmentioned in this context, does not have this opinion of what philosophers generally mean by ‘intuition’.

<sup>18</sup>Bealer, ‘Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy’; and Pust, *Intuitions as Evidence*.

So there is evidence that *some* intuition-theorists use ‘intuition’ with a special sense. But I doubt that there is evidence that *most* do<sup>19</sup> and, in the absence of evidence, we should take the default position and assume that they don’t. In any case, the usage of intuition-theorists is largely beside the point. What matters to our assessment of (A) is the usage of the great mass of philosophers who would endorse Centrality and yet are *not* intuition-theorists. Is there any persuasive evidence in Cappelen’s book that the ‘intuition’-talk of philosophers in general has special meanings and hence that (A) is wrong? I can’t find any. By around the beginning of Chapter 3, Cappelen seems already convinced that most philosophers do not use ‘intuition’ with its ordinary meaning. This leads to a lot more discussion of what philosophers *do* mean but nothing that shows that Cappelen is right to be convinced.

I shall now turn to part of that discussion, but first, an aside. (1) The special meaning of ‘intuition’ that we have identified is dependent on its ordinary meaning. For, it is a restricted version of that meaning, one that we might capture briefly as *unreflective judgment of a necessary truth*. (2) I shall claim later (Section III.iv) that if ‘intuition’ is interpreted in this restricted sense, and Centrality is taken to concern philosophers’ reliance on intuitions as evidence for *necessary* truths, then Centrality is still true.

## II.ix. Cappelen’s ‘verbal virus theory’ and ‘charitable reinterpretation’ of ‘unreflective’ philosophical usage

As evidence that Cappelen rejects (A), in Section II.v I noted his view that the ‘typical unreflective’ philosopher ‘doesn’t want to use “intuition” with the meaning it has in English’ (59). He explains ‘unreflective’ as follows:

By ‘unreflective’ I mean speakers that satisfy at least these conditions: the speaker, at the time of speaking, didn’t have a particular theoretical, stipulated definition in mind and didn’t intend for her use to be anchored to a particular canonical text or tradition. (58)

This is helpful: Cappelen’s ‘unreflective’ uses are those that I had in mind as the uses of the great mass of philosophers who would endorse Centrality but are not intuition-theorists. So his view of these uses is particularly significant for me.

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<sup>19</sup>One that Cappelen often cites (9, 27, 84, 114) as if he does is Lewis. The citation is based on the following passage: ‘Our “intuitions” are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same. Some are commonsensical, some are sophisticated; some are particular, some general; some are more firmly held, some less. But they are all opinions, and a reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium’ (Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, x). The view that intuitions are opinions is quite compatible with ‘intuition’ having its ordinary sense. The view that *all* opinions were intuitions would not be. But Lewis does not claim that and his mention of philosophical theories implies that it is not his view. So I think Cappelen is wrong about Lewis.

His first response to this alleged special use is provocative indeed. Philosophers' unreflective use of 'intuition' 'is a kind of intellectual/verbal virus (or tick)' (50).<sup>20</sup> Partly because of the noted disagreements among intuition-theorists (52–3), he finds it 'exceedingly plausible' (60) that 'such uses are defective: they fail to secure a semantic content for "intuition"-vocabulary ... they are, strictly speaking, meaningless' (59), 'a linguistic practice bordering on gibberish' (61).

In light of this gloomy view of philosophers' 'intuition'-talk, Cappelen feels obliged to come up with three strategies for 'charitable reinterpretation' (60). One of these strategies (65–8) is striking. Cappelen introduces it by noting that 'unreflective philosophers can often be interpreted as using "intuitively" more or less as it is used in English'. This leads to the following strategy:

*Snap-Judgment:* So understood, 'Intuitively,  $p$ ' says that the judgment that  $p$  can be reached with relatively little effort and reasoning. (65)

I agree, of course, that philosophical uses should 'often' be interpreted in this way because I think that they should 'almost always' be so interpreted. For, that is what 'intuitively' means in ordinary English! So this is not a charitable reinterpretation but simply the *literal interpretation*.

Cappelen has gone down a baffling route. His starting point is that 'philosophers who use "intuitively" often do use it with its ordinary English meaning' (29). And he gives a description of this meaning that fits well with the one I took from lexicographers: *immediate judgment, without reasoning or inference*. But then, he strangely finds that meaning not 'well-disciplined or well-understood'. This, along with the opinions of intuition-theorists, leads to the provocative 'verbal virus' view of philosophers' usage and the search for a charitable reinterpretation. Finally, from the just-quoted observation of philosophers' usage *that is close to the starting point*, he proposes as a reinterpretation of that usage: *a judgment that 'can be reached with relatively little effort and reasoning'*. But this is much the same as the just-described ordinary meaning!

*Snap* is misdescribed as a strategy for reinterpretation but it does no harm to the defense of Centrality. Neither does another strategy, 'Simple Removal' (63–4), because propositions that are described as 'intuitive' are often *obviously* so with the consequence that the description can indeed be removed without loss. One strategy, however, is not harmless: that of interpreting 'intuitively,  $p$ ' as 'something close to "Pre-theoretically,  $p$ "' (68). Cappelen quotes passages from a number of philosophers whom he thinks should be subject to this strategy (68–71). The philosopher discussed in most detail is Kripke. Cappelen rightly says that

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<sup>20</sup>Cappelen thinks that the virus 'started spreading about thirty to forty years ago ... However ... the virus didn't have much effect on first-order philosophy' (50). The reason for this is that Centrality was true before the virus struck!

Kripke is a paradigm of a unreflective user of ‘intuition’-vocabulary. He uses these terms extensively, applies them to ideas, notions, arguments, and claims ... but he *never* tells us what he means by these terms. (72)

Cappelen goes on to argue ingeniously over three pages that ‘more or less all the occurrences of these terms in *Naming and Necessity* mean something in the neighborhood of “pre-theoretic”’ (72).

I have a really simple response to this argument: (1) If Kripke had *meant* ‘pretheoretic’, he would have *said* ‘pretheoretic’!<sup>21</sup> Kripke is a *very* precise philosopher. (2) Since Kripke engages in ‘intuition’-talk without explaining it, the talk has its ordinary sense.<sup>22</sup> So, trying to reinterpret this talk is a misguided enterprise. And I think that we should say much the same about the ‘intuition’-talk of the other philosophers cited.

In discussing his three strategies, Cappelen gives many passages of ‘intuition’-talk that he thinks need to be charitably reinterpreted. My most important point in response is that none of these passages provide persuasive evidence—like the sort I mentioned (Section II.iii)—against the default interpretation of this ‘intuition’-talk; they do not show that the talk is not a piece of ordinary English and hence not in need of reinterpretation. I have given some support for this point. I cannot give more here.

In sum, Cappelen’s first objection to AIT fails. His problem of interpretation is a storm in a teacup. What almost all philosophers mean by ‘intuition’ is *intuition*, as characterized in standard dictionaries. (A) is true.

I have suggested two causes of Cappelen’s interpretative storm. The first is Diagnosis (1), the influence of intuition-theorists. The second is, perhaps, the puzzling conclusion that ‘intuition’ lacks a well-disciplined and well-understood meaning in English. I shall now suggest a third cause: Cappelen’s view that if ‘intuition’ had its ordinary sense, philosophers *could not think that intuitions were evidence for theories*. This brings us to Cappelen’s second objection to AIT and the issue of whether philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk is Centrality-supporting.

## II.x. ‘Intuition’-talk as centrality-supporting

Cappelen sets out his position on whether ‘intuition’-talk, as ordinarily understood, supports Centrality as follows:

if ‘intuition’ as it is used in the formulation of Centrality is the ordinary English term, then Centrality has a false presupposition. There is no kind

<sup>21</sup>This takes no position, of course, on the extent to which propositions that are intuitive are pre-theoretic or vice versa.

<sup>22</sup>I had no doubt about this interpretation but still I checked it with Kripke: he confirmed it and rejected the alternative of *pre-theoretic*.

of mental state or event that is picked out by the relevant set of English terms and those terms are not used to denote a kind of evidential source. (47)

if the term ‘intuitive’ is used to describe a conclusion that is reached without careful reflection, to describe a point that is presented as easy to grasp for the audience, or to denote a conclusion or a view that’s reached quickly ... [it] is not used to denote an evidential source and so no evidence for Centrality is forthcoming. (47–8)

There are serious problems with both of these claims. To see what, it will help to return to Cappelen’s definition of Centrality:

Contemporary analytic philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence (or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories. (3)

This exemplifies a distinction that plays, as Cappelen says, ‘an important role at certain points’ in his book. He claims that Centrality leaves

open whether it claims that philosophers rely on intuitions as *evidence* or as *sources of evidence* ... On the first view it is *A has the intuition that p* that serves as evidence. On the second view, *p* is the evidence and the source of that evidence is *that A has an intuition that p*. (13)

I think that this is confused. We should remember that ‘intuition’ in English has two related meanings: a mental event/state or the propositional content of that event/state (Section II.iii). When philosophers talk of intuitions as *evidence*, urging ‘the first view’, they are, or should be, talking of intuitions-as-propositional-contents. When they talk of intuitions as *the source of evidence*, urging ‘the second view’, they are, or should be, talking of intuitions-as-mental-events/states. The ambiguity of ‘intuition’ gives us two ways of stating what is in effect the same doctrine of Centrality: one way claims that philosophers rely on intuitions-as-propositional-contents as evidence; the other, that philosophers rely on intuitions-as-mental-events/states as the source of evidence. (And the one token of ‘intuition’ should not have been used, in the one breath in stating Centrality, to denote both the propositional content intuited and the mental event/state of intuiting it.)

In light of this, first, it is simply false that ‘there is no kind of mental state or event that is picked out’ by ‘intuition’ if ‘intuition’ is understood as picking out intuitions-as-mental-events/states. So understood, ‘intuition’ obviously denotes a kind of mental state or event, just as do countless other mental nouns (‘thought’, ‘supposition’, etc.). The kind in question is distinguished particularly by its immediacy and lack of inference. Dictionaries tell us that this is one of the meanings of ‘intuition’. Second, set aside for a moment whether,

understood in this way, ‘intuition’ *really does* ‘denote a kind of evidential source’. What matters to Centrality is whether philosophers *rely on* what ‘intuition’ denotes as an evidential source, because *that* is what Centrality claims. And relying on that source is just what philosophers seem to do: they seem to rely on the propositional contents of these mental events/states as evidence (as we shall see in part III).

### II.xi. ‘Psychologizing the evidence’

This is the appropriate moment to address ‘psychologizing the evidence’, an issue in which Cappelen is ‘separately interested’ (114). His interest is partly prompted by Williamson’s view that philosophers are pressured into psychologizing the evidence.<sup>23</sup> Cappelen agrees with Williamson that we should resist the pressure but finds ‘hardly any evidence that anyone doing first-order philosophy has given into it’ (203). I’m with Cappelen on this. Nonetheless, Cappelen’s account of psychologizing the evidence makes it too easy to find examples of philosophers giving in to it. They are said to be doing so if they ‘take their beliefs and inclinations to believe as evidence when talking about non-psychological subject matters’ (114). But this amounts to psychologizing the evidence only if ‘beliefs’ has its mental-event/state meaning. Taking beliefs-as-propositional-contents to be evidence is *not* psychologizing the evidence. In light of this, Cappelen is far too ready to present psychologizing the evidence as one of his ‘diagnoses of how x-phi goes wrong’ by testing the intuitions of the folk. He rightly says:

It is not *thinking that C* that’s the evidence for C. In the Thompson case, the relevant piece of evidence is *It is wrong to kidnap the subject and hook her up to a violinist* (it is not *that we think it is wrong*). In Kripke’s Gödel-Schmidt case, the evidence is *that the subject refers to Gödel and not to Schmidt* (not *that we think it*).<sup>24</sup>

It seems to me uncharitable to suppose that x-philosophers, or other philosophers, who appeal to intuitions as evidence disagree: they likely think that the propositional contents of their intuitions are evidence.

### II.xii. Intuitions as a source of evidence

With the ambiguity of ‘intuition’ firmly in mind, I do not find any evidence in Cappelen that philosophers are not in fact relying on what they call ‘intuitions’ as a source of evidence and hence no evidence that Centrality is false. But I have not yet taken account of something that counts heavily with Cappelen.

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<sup>23</sup>Williamson, *Philosophy of Philosophy*, 235.

<sup>24</sup>Cappelen, ‘Replies to Weatherson, Chalmers, Weinberg, and Bengson’, 593.

He thinks that intuitions in this ordinary sense are *obviously not* a source of evidence, as we shall now see. So, he thinks charitably, philosophers could not be relying on them as evidence. So Centrality in that sense is obviously false. Furthermore, philosophers could not be endorsing Centrality in that sense. So, as noted (Section II.ix), he thinks that philosophers must have some other sense in mind.

If I tell you that  $p$  is a claim that's *easy to process* or *the answer you'd come to without thinking very carefully*, those are not features that in any relevant sense constitute a *source of evidence*. (81)

Why would anyone, philosopher or not, think that *in general*, spontaneous unjustified judgments should have special evidential import? It is, literally, an absurd position to hold in its full generality. (82)

According to this version of Centrality, Snap judgments constitute a source of evidence. If  $E$  is my evidence for  $p$ , then at least in some contexts it would be appropriate to give  $E$  as a reply when asked 'Why  $p$ ?' However consider the following answer to 'Why  $p$ ?': 'Because I judge that  $p$  without thinking about it and can give no reasons for it'. What a dreadful reply that would be! (82, n. 23)

Deutsch has a similar view. He thinks that 'the causal source of Kripke's judgments about the Gödel case is intuition'. But he goes on: 'the judgment's intuitiveness is not evidence that the judgment is true'.<sup>25</sup>

This prompts Diagnosis (2), my second main diagnosis of what has gone wrong in Cappelen's, perhaps also Deutsch's, discussion. Cappelen has missed *why* philosophers think that intuitions are a source of evidence. It would, of course, be preposterous to think that intuitions were a source *simply because they are arrived at easily and spontaneously, without careful thinking*. But surely no philosopher does think that. What philosophers *do* think, or at least *should* think, is that intuitions are a source of evidence *because they are reliable*. And if they really are reliable, which does not of course require them to be infallible, then they are indeed a source of evidence. (And, one might add, this is true of *any* judgment, whether intuitive or not.)

We should assess whether a person's intuitions are a source of evidence much as we do the output of a scientific instrument. We take the reading of, say, a voltmeter as evidence of the voltage of an electrical circuit when we think the voltmeter is *reliable about such matters*. We should take a person's intuitions similarly. Thus, we take most people's intuitions about when a man is angry as evidence that he is angry because most of us are reliable about such matters; this sort of quick insight into other minds is common. But clearly we very often do not take a person's intuitions about certain other matters to

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<sup>25</sup>Deutsch, 'Experimental Philosophy', 451.

be reliable; think about political, medical, and probability intuitions, for example. Indeed, consider anyone we know well. Although we may think that her intuitions about some matters are reliable, we will almost certainly think that her intuitions about some others are quite unreliable.

In light of this, consider Cappelen's view that Centrality, if it concerns intuitions in the ordinary sense, is obviously false, and so philosophers could not believe it. Cappelen's view is wrong *if philosophers think, for whatever reason, that their intuitions (in that sense) about philosophical matters are reliable*. It is overwhelmingly plausible that philosophers do think this. That, I suggest, is an insight we all have into the minds of our colleagues. Finally, Cappelen is wrong to suppose that the wide-spread acceptance of Centrality shows that its 'intuition'-talk is not ordinary.

If philosophers do indeed think that their philosophical intuitions are reliable, then two questions arise. (i) Why do they think it? (ii) Is it true? Are their intuitions in fact reliable? I have been much exercised by these questions for many years.<sup>26</sup> I reject the typical apriorist or Cartesian answer to (i). I argue that 'intuitive judgments are empirical theory-laden central-processor responses to phenomena, differing from many other such responses only in being fairly immediate and unreflective, based on little if any conscious reasoning'.<sup>27</sup> In answer to (ii), I think that work needs to be done to show that philosophers' intuitions are reliable but, nonetheless, I think that they mostly are; to take an example dear to my heart, I think that philosophers' referential intuitions are mostly reliable.<sup>28</sup> Intuitions are 'a special kind of evidential source' (91) for philosophical theories only in that they are unreflective judgments that are often reliable.

This concludes my discussion of AIT, the first argument for Centrality. Contrary to Cappelen's second objection, philosophers do indeed rely on what they call 'intuitions' as evidence: Centrality is supported. They rely on intuitions because they think that they are reliable. Although work needs to be done to show that they *are* reliable, I think we should be optimistic that they mostly are.

It is time to turn to the second argument for Centrality, the one from Philosophical Practice.

### III. The argument from philosophical practice

#### III.i. Cappelen's and Deutsch's theory-based 'diagnostics' for intuitions

In discussing Cappelen's criticisms of AIT, I have often found support for Diagnosis (1): he has been misled by intuition-theorists. Still, other factors have also led him astray. When it comes to the argument from philosophical

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<sup>26</sup>Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*; Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*; and Devitt, 'The Role of Intuitions'.

<sup>27</sup>Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*, 103.

<sup>28</sup>Devitt, 'Testing Theories of Reference'.

practice (APP), however, almost the entire explanation of the failure of his criticisms is the influence of intuition-theorists.

According to APP, whether or not philosophers *call* the judgments they rely on for evidence ‘intuitions’, the judgments they rely on are as a matter of fact intuitions. Now to assess APP, we clearly need to be able to tell whether philosophers *are* relying on intuitions. Cappelen confronts this epistemic issue as follows:

How can we find evidence of a reliance on the intuitive? Answering these questions is made difficult by the extensive disagreement among Centrality proponents about what intuitions are. It is difficult, maybe impossible, to find a set of diagnostics that fully capture all the phenomena different intuition-theorists appeal to. I focus on three complex features that, according to at least a fairly wide range of intuition-theorists, are characteristic of appeals to the intuitive. (111)

There are three significant moves in this passage. First, our epistemic problem of telling whether philosophers rely on intuitions is said to be made difficult by extensive disagreement among Centrality proponents over what intuitions are. This must be a mistake because the great mass of Centrality proponents are not on record as having a view of what intuitions are. (This is something else that should not surprise us: one no more needs a theory of what intuitions are before relying on them than one needs a theory of what water is before drinking it.) In the second move, the alleged difficulty from disagreement among *Centrality proponents* becomes a difficulty from disagreement among *intuition-theorists*. But *what has this disagreement among theorists got to do with our epistemic problem?* In the third move, Cappelen answers this question: those theories yield our diagnostics for intuitions and hence solve the epistemic problem (as well as it can be solved).

In response, I claim that the opinions of intuition-theories have little if anything to do with our epistemic problem. Assessing Centrality’s thesis about the role of intuitions no more needs a theory-based set of diagnostics for intuitions than assessing, say, a sociological thesis about the role of dogs in human lives needs a theory-based set of diagnostics for dogs. Testing these theses simply requires *abilities to recognize* intuitions and dogs, abilities that almost everyone, including proponents of Centrality, surely have. Judgments about what is an intuition or a dog are—dare I say?—intuitive to almost everyone! In sum, Centrality does not need to be supported by a theory-based set of diagnostic for intuitions. We can simply rely on our ordinary ability to recognize intuitions.

But suppose someone has difficulty in recognizing intuitions, couldn’t a theory help? Yes, *but only if it is true*. The extensive disagreement among theorists that Cappelen emphasizes is reason alone for being dubious that we can get help here. I have argued that the intuition-theories that Cappelen draws

on for his diagnostics are mostly false.<sup>29</sup> If I'm right, most of Cappelen's diagnostics are false of intuitions; in particular, *it is not the case that intuitions have 'a characteristic phenomenology', 'need no justification', or are 'based solely on conceptual competence'* (112–3). It is not surprising that, burdened with these diagnostics, Cappelen finds no intuitions in philosophical practice. These diagnostics based on intuition-theories lead Cappelen seriously astray, thus confirming Diagnosis (1).

Deutsch also looks to intuition-theorists for what is, in effect, a diagnostic. But where Cappelen focuses on disagreement among theorists, Deutsch focuses on agreement. Deutsch thinks that 'despite many disagreements over details, there has emerged something of a consensus about the nature of intuitions'. Part of this alleged consensus should be uncontroversial: that an intuition is a 'non-inferential propositional attitude'. But Deutsch claims that the consensus is also 'that intuitions are not perceptions, memories, or introspections; they have their own source, perhaps "rational insight"'.<sup>30</sup> I doubt that there is any consensus on this. In any case, I think that this part of the alleged consensus is wildly false.<sup>31</sup> So Deutsch's diagnostic is likely also to be a hindrance to identifying intuitions.

A better place to look for help, if one really needs it, is a dictionary. As noted (Section II.iii), it will tell you something along the lines of: intuitions are *immediate judgments, without reasoning or inference*. This dictionary diagnostic should be all the help you need to identify intuitions.

### III.ii. The plan

Cappelen uses his theory-based diagnostics to test Centrality on a broad range of well-known examples of philosophical practice. Deutsch uses his on cases in a famous argument of Saul Kripke's that I have called 'Ignorance and Error'. Their discussions are insightful but their conclusions that their respective cases do not support Centrality are, in my view, quite false. In Cappelen's case, at least, the source of error is his reliance on inappropriate diagnostics from intuition-theorists: Diagnosis (1). If we set aside those diagnostics, use our ordinary ability to recognize intuitions, aided by the dictionary diagnostic, Centrality gets support from all of these well-known cases.

I obviously cannot discuss all these cases here in the detail that Cappelen and Deutsch give to them. I shall be very detailed about only the Kripke cases examined by Deutsch (but not by Cappelen), and even there I shall presume familiarity. I choose these cases for three reasons: because of the enormous importance of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*; because that book is so often

<sup>29</sup>Devitt, *Coming to Our Senses*; Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*; and Devitt, 'The Role of Intuitions'.

<sup>30</sup>Deutsch, 'Kripke's Gödel Case', 9.

<sup>31</sup>See particularly, Devitt, 'Testing Theories of Reference', 39–45.

cited as an example of heavy reliance on intuitions; and because these cases are the ones that I am most familiar with. After discussing these cases in Section III.iii, I will discuss some of Cappelen's cases in much less detail in Section III.iv and some not at all. However, I trust that by then it will be fairly predictable what more I would say about those cases.

### III.iii. Deutsch on Kripke's 'Ignorance and Error' argument

The Ignorance and Error argument is one of the two totally novel arguments that Kripke makes against description theories of proper names.<sup>32</sup> Deutsch examines this argument in great detail,<sup>33</sup> attending particularly to the famous Gödel case, which has been the target of experimental semanticists.<sup>34</sup> The view that this argument relies on intuitions as evidence is surely 'almost universally accepted' just as Cappelen rightly claims Centrality is. But Deutsch will have none of this popular view. Indeed, he finds 'the claim that Kripke means us to accept the Gödel Judgement on the basis of it being intuitively true downright laughable'.<sup>35</sup> And I am charged with being 'the worst offender' among those who make this 'laughable' claim.<sup>36</sup> I am unrepentant.

Here are some clear examples from the Ignorance and Error argument of Kripke using intuitions as evidence.

(a) Kripke jokingly supposes that everyone in his audience could differentiate Feynman from Gell-Mann, but then goes on:

However, the man in the street, not possessing these abilities, may still use the name 'Feynman'. When asked he will say: well, he's a physicist or something. He may not think that this picks out anyone uniquely. I still think he uses the name 'Feynman' as a name of Feynman.<sup>37</sup>

The last sentence expresses a referential intuition. This passage is surrounded by three others that implicitly express more referential intuitions: (i) in a passage before, the intuition that 'most people', who 'just think' of Cicero as 'a famous orator', nonetheless are referring to him by 'Cicero';<sup>38</sup> (ii) in a passage after, the intuition that those who think that Cicero denounced Catiline, but cannot independently identify Catiline, nonetheless refer to Cicero by 'Cicero';<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup>The other is 'Lost Rigidity'. Kripke also offers the semi-novel 'Unwanted Necessity' argument and draws attention to two other already-known arguments; for details, see Devitt and Sterelny, *Language and Reality*, 48–59.

<sup>33</sup>Deutsch, 'Experimental Philosophy'; and Deutsch, 'Kripke's Gödel Case'.

<sup>34</sup>Machery et al., 'Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style'.

<sup>35</sup>Deutsch, 'Kripke's Gödel Case', 17.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>37</sup>Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 81.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

(iii) in a passage after that, the intuition that those who think that Einstein ‘discovered the theory of relativity’ but ‘don’t know enough’ to state that theory nonetheless refer to him by ‘Einstein’.<sup>40</sup> But does Kripke use these intuitions *as evidence*? He certainly does: on the basis of them, and one or two similar intuitions, he draws the following conclusion: ‘So Thesis (2) [a central thesis of description theories] seems to be false’.<sup>41</sup>

Two questions. First, how do I know that the cited passages are expressions of Kripke’s intuitions? Well, I *recognize* them as such and so, I suggest, do philosophers in general. There is nothing surprising or mysterious about this. Humans typically have the ability to recognize expressions of a wide range of propositional attitudes, beliefs, desires, hopes, suppositions, etc. Still, I can support my claim. The issue is whether Kripke’s judgments seemed immediately true to him, without reasoning. So I asked him. He said, ‘Yes, they did’. Further support for the view that these judgments are intuitive comes from the fact that they seem immediately true to philosophers in general. How do I know? Well, if they did not so seem, then that would have led quickly to many challenges to these judgments. Yet, so far as I know, there were *no* such challenges. This is particularly striking since these judgments were rightly seen as devastating for nearly all received theories of names. Rather than challenging these judgments, those who wanted to save description theories tried to come up with new versions that were compatible with Kripke’s judgments.<sup>42</sup> So, the evidence is overwhelming that philosophers in general took these judgments to be immediately true, without reasoning. That is all that is needed to make them intuitions.

Second question. Why does Kripke draw this conclusion from his intuitions? Not because he is so silly as to think that being unreflective makes a judgment evidence; rather, because he thinks that his referential intuitions are reliable.

(b) Kripke contemplates a move to save a description theory of ‘Einstein’: those ignorant of the theory of relativity might determine ‘the reference of ‘the theory of relativity’ independently by referring to an encyclopedia’. Kripke’s judgment on this move is ‘The reference might work even if there had been no encyclopedia at all’.<sup>43</sup> This is another referential intuition. Kripke soon restates his conclusion, but more firmly: ‘we have already established that Thesis (2) is wrong’.<sup>44</sup> There should be no doubt that Kripke takes the intuitions to have established this.

(c) After outlining his fantasy about Gödel, Kripke points out that, according to the obvious description theory, ‘we, when we talk about “Gödel”, are in fact always referring to Schmidt’. Kripke follows with his intuition: ‘But it seems to me we are not. We simply are not’.<sup>45</sup> There is a similar intuitive response to

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>See Devitt and Sterelny, *Language and Reality*, Sec. 3.5, for discussion.

<sup>43</sup>Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 82.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 82–3.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 84.

the case of Peano. Peano did not actually discover ‘Peano’s axioms’ and so, according to the obvious description theory, ‘you were really all the time talking about Dedekind. But you were not’.<sup>46</sup>

(d) Kripke reports that ‘he often used to hear that Einstein’s most famous achievement was the invention of the atomic bomb. So when we refer to Einstein, we refer to the inventor of the atomic bomb’. Kripke’s intuitive response is ‘But this is not so’. Similar errors about Columbus should, according to the description theory, mean that people using ‘Columbus’ really refer to somebody other than Columbus. Kripke’s intuitive response is ‘But they don’t’. The paragraph concludes ‘So it does not seem that if most of the  $\phi$ s are satisfied by a unique object  $y$ , then  $y$  is the referent of the name. This seems simply to be false’.<sup>47</sup> Once again, Kripke is drawing a conclusion against a central thesis of descriptions theories using referential intuitions as evidence.

Deutsch disagrees. He finds it ‘laughable’ that Kripke’s Gödel argument rests on intuitions. And, talking about Kripke’s discussion of the actual cases of ‘Peano’, ‘Einstein, and ‘Columbus’ in contrast to the hypothetical case of ‘Gödel’, Deutsch claims ‘There is ... an assertion of—*not* an intuition about—the correct characterization of the actual cases’.<sup>48</sup> What are Deutsch’s reasons for these claims? There seem to be two.

First, Deutsch claims that ‘a theory of reference is tested against the referential facts, many of which we already know (e.g. that “Einstein” does not refer to the inventor of the atomic bomb)’.<sup>49</sup> He seems to think that, given Kripke’s insightful report about what he ‘often used to hear’, this referential fact about ‘Einstein’ is sufficient to refute the description theory of the name.<sup>50</sup> But that referential fact is not sufficient. That fact holds in virtue of two others: (i) that there is a convention,  $C$ , of using the name ‘Einstein’ to refer to a certain identifiable historical figure,  $X$ ; (ii) that  $X$  did not invent the atomic bomb. What Kripke often used to hear yields another fact: (iii) that the only identifying description that many people associate with ‘Einstein’ is ‘the inventor of the atomic bomb’. Let’s take the description theory that Kripke is trying to refute to be as follows: when a person participates in  $C$ , her use of ‘Einstein’ conventionally refers to  $X$  in virtue of her associating with ‘Einstein’ a certain description ‘ $F$ ’ that uniquely identifies  $X$ . Now if Deutsch were right, facts (i)–(iii) should be sufficient to refute this theory. But those facts alone clearly are not sufficient. For, a description theorist might simply deny that *those overheard people* refer to  $X$  by ‘Einstein’: indeed, the theorist can say that the failure to associate ‘ $F$ ’ *shows* that they are not participating in  $C$ . Perhaps only the intelligentsia participate in  $C$  and so only they refer to  $X$  by ‘Einstein’; perhaps, the overhead people don’t refer to anything; or perhaps they refer to the

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Deutsch, ‘Kripke’s Gödel Case’, 12.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 12, 21.

inventor of the atomic bomb because they are participating in *another* convention for ‘Einstein’ (after all, any name is typically involved in many conventions and hence has many bearers). To complete the refutation, *Kripke needs a further premise*: (iv) that *those overheard people* are referring to X, and hence not to the inventor of the atomic bomb. And that, in effect, is Kripke’s intuition. Without it, there is no refutation. Now Deutsch may think that this further premise is an obvious fact. Indeed, so far as I know, no description theorist has actually denied it. But that only shows the soundness of Kripke’s intuition. It does not belie the fact that Kripke’s argument rests on a premise that is a referential intuition.

The following passage reveals Deutsch’s second reason for denying that Kripke’s relies on intuitions as evidence: ‘there really is an *argument* in Kripke’s book, as opposed to a simple appeal to intuition, for what he takes to be true in the Gödel Case’.<sup>51</sup> It is ‘the presence of the rather long and multi-faceted argument’ about this case that makes the view that Kripke relies on intuitions ‘downright laughable’.<sup>52</sup> And, of course, there *is* an argument. As Deutsch points out, Kripke’s judgment about ‘Gödel’ is supported by his judgments about ‘Peano’, ‘Einstein’, and ‘Columbus’.<sup>53</sup> and by Kripke’s ‘Causal Picture’.<sup>54</sup> And he is right again in claiming that ‘evidence for an implicit evidential appeal to intuition would be lack of genuinely argumentative support for the Gödel Judgement’.<sup>55</sup> Where he goes wrong is in assuming that the *presence* of an argument shows that Kripke is *not* relying on intuitions. As I pointed out in Section II.iii, *being intuitive does not imply not having or needing an argument*. A judgment’s being intuitive simply implies that it seems true without argument. And, we should note, the contrary view—that for a judgment to be an intuition, it must lack an argument—is not part of the alleged consensus that Deutsch describes in his Section III.<sup>56</sup> So, in finding ‘no hint that Kripke is, or intends to be, making evidential appeals to intuitions’, Deutsch is not, as he claims, failing to find appeals to intuitions as ‘described ... in Section III’:<sup>57</sup> he has introduced, without argument, a requirement on such appeals that is inappropriate and not part of his alleged consensus.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 12. Deutsch strangely thinks that I disagree: ‘On Devitt’s view, the hypothetical cases and the actual cases function independently of each other, each a separate intuitive counterexample to descriptivism’ (Ibid., 20). Deutsch cites no basis for this attribution, and there is none. Intuitions about one case in the Argument from Ignorance and Error obviously support intuitions about another and my presentations of the Argument have never suggested anything else. (In the papers that Deutsch is discussing, Devitt 2011b,c, I do argue that intuitions about actual cases provide *better* evidence than those about fanciful hypothetical cases.)

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 17.

In sum, neither of Deutsch's reasons for thinking that Kripke does not rely on intuitions is good. Turn now to some cases that Cappelen examines.

### III.iv. Cappelen on some other arguments

Cappelen discusses very many arguments. I shall consider one in a bit of detail and then some very briefly.

*John Perry on the problem of the essential indexical* (132–9). Cappelen starts his examination with Perry's delightful case of Perry following a trail of sugar in a supermarket.

Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch. I believed at the outset that the shopper with a torn sack was making a mess. And I was right. But I didn't believe that I was making a mess. That seems to be something I came to believe. And when I came to believe that, I stopped following the trail around the counter, and rearranged the torn sack in my cart. My change in beliefs seems to explain my change in behavior.<sup>58</sup>

This passage expresses a series of intuitions. How do I know that they are intuitions? Just as with the Kripke cases, I *recognize* them as intuitions. Consider Perry's judgments about his dawning moment: that at that moment he came to believe that he himself was making a mess and that this change in his beliefs seemed to change his behavior. These judgments are immediate and seem true to him without reasoning. I get confirmation of this from noting that I also make those judgments about Perry's dawning moment immediately without reasoning. And so, I'll bet, does just about everyone. That is all that is needed to make these judgments intuitions.

So this view is quite compatible with a number of sound observations that Cappelen makes about this case. In particular, just as Deutsch emphasizes that Kripke has an argument, Cappelen emphasizes that Perry has. Kripke and Perry, like philosophers generally, do not simply rest with the intuitions. Perry's argument is prompted by the problem that his intuitions about the dawning moment are at odds with his favorite theory of propositions. He could abandon that theory or abandon his intuitions. He chooses the latter, giving reasons for thinking that he didn't really change his belief at the dawning moment. He may be mistaken—indeed I think he is<sup>59</sup>—but the fact that he presents reasons for abandoning his initial judgment does not count against that judgment being an intuition and used as evidence. Judgments that seem unreflectively true, and hence are intuitions, are frequently subject to reflection, argument, and evidence. This might show that they really are true but it also might show that

<sup>58</sup>Perry, 'The Problem of the Essential Indexical', 3.

<sup>59</sup>Devitt, 'The Myth of the Problematic *De Se*'.

they are false or uncertain. It is easy to come up with examples of reflection falsifying intuitions. Thus, further investigation convinces us of the error of our intuitive judgment that the two lines in the Muller-Lyer illusion differ in length; our intuition that a man is angry is abandoned in the face of information about his character and previous behavior. Intuitions are fallible and revisable in the face of evidence and argument (like all judgments, in my view). Yet they are used by philosophers as evidence for and against theories, just as Centrality claims and Perry illustrates. And they are often rightly so used, in my opinion, because they are often from reliable intuiters.

Finally, I shall attend briefly to some more of Cappelen's cases. I would argue along the same lines, and so predictably, that the following expressions are examples of intuitions being used as evidence for a position (perhaps not the final position of the author):

*Tyler Burge on 'Arthritis'* (139–48). Burge's claim in the counterfactual case about 'arthritis' that 'the patient ... lacks the occurrent thoughts or beliefs that he has arthritis in the thigh, that he has had arthritis for years, that stiffening joints and various sorts of aches are symptoms of arthritis, that his father had arthritis, and so on'.<sup>60</sup>

*Judith Jarvis Thomson's Violinist* (148–58). Thomson's comment on an argument, parallel to an argument against abortion, with the conclusion that a person plugged into a famous violinist in order to keep the violinist alive can never be unplugged: 'I imagine you would regard this as outrageous'.<sup>61</sup> (This is a somewhat indirect expression of the intuition that the argument is indeed outrageous.)

*Judith Jarvis Thomson and the Trolley Problem* (158–63). Thomson's comment on the question 'Is it morally permissible for you to turn the trolley?' thus leading to the death of one person but saving five: 'Everybody to whom I have put this hypothetical case says, Yes, it is'.<sup>62</sup>

*Judith Jarvis Thomson and the Harvesting of Organs* (159–60). Thomson's comment on the question 'Is it morally permissible for you to operate?' on a healthy young man by harvesting his vital organs to save the lives of five people who need transplants: 'Everybody to whom I have put this second hypothetical case says, No, ...'.<sup>63</sup>

I trust that it is now predictable how I would respond to the rest of Cappelen's cases. This concludes my defense of Centrality, taking its use of 'intuition' to have its ordinary meaning. But I allowed earlier (Section II.viii) that a few

<sup>60</sup>Burge, 'Individualism and the Mental', 78.

<sup>61</sup>Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion', 49.

<sup>62</sup>Thomson, 'The Trolley Problem', 1395.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

endorsers of Centrality might use ‘intuition’ with a more restricted meaning, taking it to apply only to necessary truths. Centrality would still hold. Presumably, the key judgments in some of Cappelen’s cases are about necessary truths; Thomson’s judgments are plausible examples. If so, my argument shows that these judgments are intuitions in this restricted sense and that philosophers are relying on them. Indeed, they are relying on them just as much as they are relying on intuitions in the ordinary sense in cases where the judgments are about contingent truths; for example, the cases in the Argument from Ignorance and Error.

#### IV. Conclusion

In his engaging book, *Philosophy without Intuitions*, Cappelen challenges the ‘almost universally accepted’ thesis of ‘Centrality’: ‘philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence (or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories’ (3). Cappelen takes there to be two arguments for Centrality, ‘The Argument from “Intuition”-talk’ (‘AIT’) and ‘The Argument from Philosophical Practice’ (‘APP’). He rejects them both. I have defended both arguments and hence Centrality.

Cappelen first major objection to AIT is that philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk is very hard to interpret. He claims that the typical unreflective philosopher ‘doesn’t want to use “intuition” with the meaning it has in English’ (59). Rather, that philosopher’s use of it ‘is a kind of intellectual/verbal virus (or tick)’ (50); ‘it is, strictly speaking, meaningless’ (59), ‘a linguistic practice bordering on gibberish’ (61). I have argued that this is totally wrong.

(A) The great mass of philosophers who would endorse Centrality, thus constituting its widespread acceptance, *almost always* mean by ‘intuition’ just what it ordinarily means. (B) And what it ordinarily means is as clear as just about any word: it means *immediate judgment, without reasoning or inference*. I don’t find any persuasive considerations in Cappelen’s book that count against (A) and (B). Cappelen’s lengthy discussion of this alleged problem of interpretation strikes me as a storm in a teacup.

So where has Cappelen go wrong? This question prompted my ‘Diagnosis (1)’: Cappelen has been misled by intuition-theorists. From differences among these theorists *over intuitions*, Cappelen infers differences and disorder *in the general meaning of ‘intuition’ among philosophers*. Yet, I have argued, those differences over intuitions alone do not show even a difference in meaning among intuition-theorists and are largely irrelevant to the issue of what philosophers generally mean by ‘intuition’.

I have also offered ‘Diagnosis (2)’, partly prompted by Cappelen’s second major objection to AIT. He argues that philosophers’ ‘intuition’-talk, however it should be interpreted, does not support Centrality. My diagnosis is that Cappelen has missed *why* philosophers think that intuitions are a source of evidence. He rightly thinks that it would be absurd to suppose that philosophers

rely on intuitions *because they are arrived at without reflection*. What Cappelen misses is that philosophers rely on intuitions *because they think that they are reliable*. Interpreted in the ordinary way, I have argued, philosophers' 'intuition'-talk does indeed support Centrality.

According to APP, the second argument for Centrality, the judgments that philosophers rely on for evidence are as a matter of fact intuitions (whether or not philosophers call them 'intuitions'). This raises an epistemic question: How should we tell whether philosophers are relying on intuitions? Cappelen answers with a set of 'diagnostics' *based on the opinions of intuition-theorists*. I argued that these opinions have little if anything to do with our epistemic question. We do not need a theory-based diagnostic to identify intuitions, we can simply rely on our *abilities to recognize* intuitions, abilities that almost everyone, including proponents of Centrality, surely have. And since, as I have argued elsewhere, the intuition-theories on which Cappelen's diagnostics are based are mostly false, they lead Cappelen seriously astray in the identification of intuitions. Diagnosis (1) again: Cappelen has been misled by intuition-theorists. This is almost the entire explanation for Cappelen's mistaken criticism of APP.

Using our ordinary ability to recognize intuitions, perhaps with a little help from dictionaries, I argued that Centrality gets support from all of the well-known philosophical cases that Cappelen discusses. In arguing this, the case I discussed in most detail is not one of Cappelen's but one of Deutsch's:<sup>64</sup> Kripke's 'Ignorance and Error' refutation of description theories of reference. Deutsch uses this case in, what is in effect, his more modest challenge to Centrality along similar lines to Cappelen's criticism of APP. Deutsch attacks the widely accepted view that Kripke relies on referential intuitions. I argued that he is wrong. In particular, he has wrongly assumed that because Kripke *argues* for his refutation, he is not relying on intuitions: being intuitive does *not* imply not having or needing an argument. A judgment's being intuitive simply implies that it seems true without argument.

I have argued that Cappelen is very wrong to target Centrality. But he has other targets, including philosophical exceptionalism, conceptual analysis, and apriorism, and here I think he is mostly very right.<sup>65</sup>

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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<sup>64</sup>Devitt, 'Experimental Philosophy'; Deutsch, 'Intuitions, Counter-Examples, and Experimental Philosophy'; and Deutsch, 'Kripke's Gödel Case'.

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