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THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS AND THE MYTH OF INTUITIVE CONTENT

By

MARCUS MCGAHHEY

Under the Direction of Neil Van Leeuwen, PhD

ABSTRACT

Many contemporary philosophers are committed – either implicitly or explicitly – to *Propositionalism* about thought-experimental intuitions. According to this view, thought-experimental intuitions are (1) phenomenally conscious, (2) spontaneous, (3) and non-theoretical; most importantly, Propositionalists claim that intuitions (4) bear consciously accessible propositional content. The negative project of this essay is a critique of (4), the rejection of which is tantamount to rejecting Propositionalism. In addition, I propose an alternative position – namely, *Interpretationalism*. According to Interpretationalism, intuitions possess the features ascribed in (1)-(3); however, they do not bear consciously accessible propositional content. Instead, intuitions acquire cognitive significance by virtue of being interpreted in light of a subject's background beliefs.

INDEX WORDS: Intuitions, Thought Experiments, Intuitive Content, Interpretation

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By

MARCUS MCGAHHEY

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By

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DEDICATION

For Kobe

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1 INTRODUCTION

Intuitions are commonly thought to play an indispensable role in contemporary analytic philosophical theorizing. In fact, this attitude toward intuitions appears to be part of the standard, or *received*, view of analytic philosophical method. It's perhaps surprising, then, that there is little agreement among philosophers about *what* exactly intuitions are. What scant consensus does exist consists in the following. Intuitions have a distinct theoretical (and functional) role – most notably, they provide evidence for philosophical theses and prima facie justification for beliefs based thereon (e.g., Kripke 1980; BonJour 1998; Goldman and Pust 1998; Pust 2001; Huemer 2001, 2007; Chudnoff 2013; Johnson and Nado 2014). And, secondly, intuitions bear a hallmark bundle of psychological features – namely, they are conscious, spontaneous, non-theoretical, and propositional.

In this essay, I challenge the assumption that intuitions elicited by philosophical thought experiments (henceforth, *thought-experimental intuitions*) essentially bear determinate, consciously accessible propositional content. Although prominent philosophical accounts of intuition are heterogeneous in other respects, all seem to share in this assumption – that is, they all hold that intuition is a conscious propositional attitude such that if *S* intuits that *p*, then *S* is consciously aware that *p*. For this reason, I designate such theories varieties of 'Propositionalism.' Since this essay concerns thought-experimental intuitions, I focus on refuting Propositionalism only insofar as it applies to intuitions of this type. To begin, I will introduce *Propositionalism* as follows.

Propositionalism: the view that intuitions had spontaneously in response to philosophical thought experiments always bear determinate, consciously accessible propositional contents.

Insofar as Propositionalism is committed to the universal claim that all intuitions are propositional (in the manner claimed above), then any counterexample will suffice to refute the theory at large. In addition to challenging the prevailing dogma of Propositionalism, I offer a positive account on which thought-experimental intuitions are assigned cognitive – and, ultimately, justificatory – significance via a process of interpretation. I define my positive, interpretive theory (of thought-experimental intuitions), or *Interpretationalism*, as follows.

Interpretationalism: the view that some intuitions had spontaneously in response to philosophical thought experiments must be interpreted in light of background beliefs before the intuiter can judge what proposition they support.

1.1 Outline

The remainder of this essay is structured as follows. In Section 2, I unpack the *standard view* of intuitions, thought experiments, and analytic philosophical method. Intuitions, I claim, are held to be sources of evidence for/against philosophical theses. In support of this claim, I elaborate on philosophers' reliance on analytic methods, including the so-called *method of cases*. In addition, I consider, preliminarily, why it is that so many philosophers are wont to hold that intuition *is* (and, furthermore, *must be*) a propositional attitude. Next, in Section 3, I unpack Propositionalism into four constitutive commitments: (1) intuitions are phenomenally conscious, (2) intuitions are spontaneous, (3) intuitions are non-theoretical, and (4) intuitions bear consciously accessible propositional content. Each of these claims provides a desideratum for Propositionalist theories of intuition. An optimal Propositionalist theory will not only cohere with these desiderata; it will provide some explanation of the relevant features. Section 4 is then devoted to outlining the varieties of Propositionalism. There I explain why some propositional theories are more desirable than others by appeal to the four claims/desiderata presented above.

Section 5 is a critique of Propositionalism in all its forms. Though this section is – in the first case – negative, it also kicks off a positive project: the problems thus posed to the Propositionalist are answered (if not wholly circumvented) by Interpretationalism. The crucial difference between these theories is the following. Propositionalism accepts, whereas Interpretationalism rejects, that (4) intuitions bear consciously accessible propositional content. In Section 6, I return to a question posed in Section 1: why is it that Propositionalism is so widely accepted among analytic philosophers? Finally, in Section 7, I offer a few closing remarks, all of which converge on the same general conclusion. Stated plainly, we ought to reject Propositionalism.

2 THE STANDARD VIEW: INTUITIONS, THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS, & PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

Before grappling with explicit theories of intuition, I will briefly sketch the picture of intuition that I take to be assumed by most analytic philosophers. This sketch is not intended to be exhaustive; nor is it intended to apply to every analytic philosopher's use of the notion. My aim is twofold. First, I wish to highlight the presumed importance of intuitions – and, in particular, thought-experimental intuitions – to analytic philosophical practice. Second, and most importantly, I wish to identify motivations for the view that intuition is a propositional attitude. Ultimately, I will argue that Interpretationalism also satisfies these motivations in addition to satisfying further desiderata for a theory of intuition.

2.1 Conceptual Analysis

The practice of conceptual analysis is often considered to be emblematic of analytic philosophy.¹ In engaging in conceptual analysis, the analytic philosopher seeks to establish the

¹ Though it is not without its contemporary proponents (e.g., Bealer 1998; Goldman & Pust 1998; Jackson 1998), this characterization of the analytic philosopher as conceptual analyst has largely fallen out of favor. Many prominent philosophers working within the analytic tradition have harshly criticized conceptual analysis. Stich

individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions which constitute (and hence normatively govern the correct application of) some philosophically interesting concept. The concept under investigation is termed the ‘analysandum,’ and the conditions in terms of which it is analyzed the ‘analysans.’ The traditional account of knowledge (or KNOWLEDGE) provides a familiar example of this sort of analysis. According to this account, *S* knows that *p* iff (i) *S* believes that *p*, (ii) *p* is true, and (iii) *S* is justified in believing that *p*. Roughly, such analyses yield universal generalizations concerning category membership. It is not hard to see why one might regard some beliefs derived in this manner as being known a priori, analytically true, and/or necessarily true. The analyst appears to enjoy mastery over the relevant concepts. And, presumably, it is this mastery, or some underlying cognitive feature, which guides her analysis.

2.2 *Evidence & the Method of Cases*

The emerging picture of intuitions’ role in analytic philosophical practice can be expressed in the form of the Evidence Thesis.

Evidence Thesis (ET): Analytic philosophers rely on intuitions as a source of evidence for philosophical claims.² Otherwise put, intuitions serve an *evidential role* in analytic philosophy.

(1994), for instance, argues that the above characterization of philosophical practice as conceptual analysis assumes a psychologically implausible theory of concepts. Contemporary cognitive science, Stich argues, provides good reason to reject views according to which concepts are theories or possess necessary and sufficient conditions. Other philosophers criticize conceptual analysis on the grounds that the proper objects of philosophical analysis are neither ultimately nor penultimately concepts at all; rather, they are features of the world itself. Williamson (2007) rejects conceptual analysis in the process of attacking the view that philosophical reasoning is fundamentally a priori. Kornblith (2002) draws on previous critical work by Quine and Putnam in order to direct his philosophical practice to the study of natural kinds. In order to encompass these approaches, among many others, I could speak instead of ‘philosophical analysis’ – of which conceptual analysis is but one potential kind or interpretation. However, the picture of how analytic philosophy gets done remains largely the same; the metaphilosophical implications and finer details concerning the nature and evidential status of intuitions vary. Ultimately, as far as this essay is concerned, nothing much hangs on this distinction.

² I believe that this thesis accurately describes the practices of many, even most contemporary analytic philosophers. And I will proceed accordingly. To be sure, however, this view is not entirely uncontroversial. Cappelen (2012), for instance, argues at length against this descriptive claim – which he refers to as ‘centrality.’ Though Cappelen’s skepticism is antithetical to the picture of analytic philosophy I present above, this threat falls beyond the scope of

This thesis is broad. It seems that analytic philosophers rely, evidentially, on a host of different intuition types. Nevertheless, the importance of thought-experimental intuitions, in particular, is made apparent by analytic philosophers' broad and varied usage of the method of cases.

Method of Cases: the method whereby philosophical theses are judged according to the extent to which they mesh with (and/or predict) relevant intuitions.

As its name indicates, this method proceeds via the presentation of cases. There are at least two case types – namely, *direct* cases and thought experiments. Direct cases (e.g., *if knowledge is justified true belief, then my belief that '1+1=2' is knowledge*) do not involve vignettes; relatedly, they require imagination only to the extent that is required for relatively straightforward counterfactual reasoning. In deploying direct cases, one apprehends – more or less directly – whether a putative instance or counter-instance of a given type qualifies for category membership under a particular theory, or analysis. Cases of the latter type – namely, thought experiments – are presented in the form of vignettes. It is in this way that they differ from direct cases – thought experiments essentially involve significant episodes of imagining. Still, both thought experiments and direct cases are applied to the same, varying ends. In addition to serving an illustrative role, they are both deployed in the service of positive as well as of negative (i.e., critical) argumentation (Popper 1959).³ Thought experiments are perhaps best known for their use in this last, negative capacity, (e.g., Edmund Gettier's (1963) *10 Coins* Case, John Searle's (1980) *Chinese Room*, Ned Block's (1978) *Nation of China*). Part of the power of

the present essay. Nor will this paper address so-called 'experimentalist critiques,' (i.e., critiques which aim to undermine the normative claim that philosophers ought to rely on intuition as a source of evidence). For a review of these latter critiques, see Ichikawa (2014).

³ My taxonomy differs from that of Popper (1959) in that it distinguishes among token applications of thought experiments. I favor this taxonomy because it is consistent with the fact that one and the same thought experiment can be used to differing ends. The original Gettier cases, for instance, were first applied negatively. However, in much of the epistemology literature from the mid to late 60s (e.g., Clark 1963; Lehrer 1965; Lehrer & Paxson 1969) they are also applied positively – that is, in support of a refined theory of knowledge.

thought experiments is that they allow us to appreciate possibilities that we are otherwise likely to overlook. Often a positive philosophical thesis appears true – even necessarily true – when we reflect on it abstractly; however, upon being presented with a concrete counter-instance in the form of a thought experiment, the thesis appears in a new, less flattering light. The product of negative thought experiments is twofold: most importantly, such thought experiments, if successful, generate intuitions that run contrary to some target philosophical theory (thereby providing evidence against that theory). However, in so doing negative thought experiments also serve to introduce a constraint for future theories of the same phenomenon or concept.

As noted, I am interested in intuitions as they are elicited by cases of the latter sort – that is, thought-experimental intuitions. Going forward, I will focus on negative thought experiments in particular, for the simple reason that intuitions thus elicited are among the most phenomenologically salient. In any case, the model to be outlined is adaptable and can be applied to a variety of intuition and case types with some minor adjustments.

2.2.1 Explicating the Standard View of Negative Thought Experiments

Negative thought experiments are commonly thought to function as follows. First, they present concrete instances or counter-instances of abstract theses. Take Ned Block's (1978) *Nation of China* thought experiment as applied against functionalism in the philosophy of mind. One begins by considering an abstract thesis about the application conditions of some concept (e.g., MIND) – in this case, *an entity is a mind (analysandum) just in case its formal (i.e., physical) states are suitably functionally organized (analysans)*. One then imagines a vignette where either the analysans or analysandum of the concept appears to obtain. In the present case, the vignette is the following.

Suppose we convert the government of China to functionalism, and we convince its officials to realize a human mind for an hour. We provide each of the billion people in

China (I chose China because it has a billion inhabitants) with a specially designed two-way radio that connects them in the appropriate way to other persons and to [an artificial body]. We replace each of the little men with a citizen of China plus his radio. Instead of a bulletin board, we arrange to have letters displayed on a series of satellites placed so that they can be seen from anywhere in China. The system of a billion people communicating with one another plus satellites plays the role of an external “brain” connected to the artificial body by radio. (Block 1978:279)

The thesis being tested is corroborated just in case either both the *analysans* and *analysandum* or neither the *analysans* nor *analysandum* appear to obtain.⁴ Any imaginary case in response to which it appears that, for instance, the *analysans* obtains but the *analysandum* does not obtain (or that the *analysans* does not obtain but the *analysandum* does) is taken to yield evidence against the thesis in question.⁵ So, if in response to the *Nation of China* thought experiment, you were disposed to conclude that the nation – despite being functionally arranged in the manner of a human brain – is not a mind, you would thereby have some defeasible evidence that the above thesis (i.e., *an entity is a mind just in case its formal states are suitably functionally organized*) is false.

The standard account is, roughly, as follows. To intuit is to enjoy a kind of propositional attitude, such that when one stands in the intuiting attitude to a proposition *p* (the intuited), one acquires at least some *prima facie* justification that *p*. In the case of Block’s *Nation of China*, one’s presumed intuition is taken to support the conclusion that functionalism (as presented above) is false. Specifically, the presumed content of one’s intuition is, approximately, that *the Nation of China is suitably functionally organized; nevertheless, the Nation of China is not a*

⁴ I am using the terms *analysans* and *analysandum* as shorthand for properties specified by the *analysans* and *analysandum*.

⁵ Cases in which it appears that the *analysans* obtains but the *analysandum* does not obtain are sometimes taken to indicate that the thesis being tested is merely too liberal or too weak. Cases in which it appears that the *analysans* does not obtain but the *analysandum* does obtain are sometimes taken to indicate that the thesis being tested is too conservative or too strong.

mind. In other words, the intuition states that the analysans of MIND, as provided by the functionalist, is fulfilled; however, the analysandum – MIND – is not.

2.3 Putative Theoretical Roles of Philosophical Intuition

Philosophical intuitions are commonly believed to play the following epistemic and methodological roles (in addition to the aforementioned evidential role).⁶

- (1) The role of justifier: intuitions serve to confer justification upon beliefs.
- (2) The role of starting point: intuitions serve to indicate prima facie plausible starting points for philosophical theorizing. In this way, intuitions tell us which lines of reasoning are worth pursuing.⁷
- (3) The role of adjudicator: intuitions serve as tools for achieving reflective equilibrium. In part, intuitions indicate points of internal conflict (or incoherence) in one's overall philosophical position. Intuitions "adjudicate" in that they provide a standard by which one can judge, and subsequently select among, rival theses. Intuitions even provide a means of fine-tuning a single thesis – that is, intuitions are gauges by which to test the liberalness or conservativeness of theses.
- (4) The pragmatic role of intuitions: the appeal to intuition serves to terminate the practice of offering reasons for a belief.

The notion of intuition seems to be motivated largely by these roles. Given this apparent motivation – that is, the need for a state which plays these roles – it is not surprising that intuition is commonly considered to be a propositional attitude. Specifically, it is not surprising for the following reasons. The vast majority of analytic philosophers maintain that only propositions are

⁶ These roles are highly interrelated and can be individuated (or reconstructed) in multiple ways.

⁷ See Kauppinen (2013).

capable of entering into logical relations.⁸ This view implies that there can be inferential relations among a subject's mental states only to the extent that said mental states bear propositional content. Similar thinking also suggests that a mental state must be propositional if it is to transmit justification. To be clear, this issue does not assume that all justification is inferential. Rather, the operative claim appears to be that a mental state must be propositional if it is to constitute a *reason* for some particular belief. The view that intuition must be a propositional attitude if it is to serve the roles for which it is posited is tempting, especially at first glance. This temptation is exacerbated by the sheer logical heaviness of analytic philosophy, as well as by the pervasive view that theories – including philosophical theories – are sets of propositions. Nevertheless, I shall argue, intuition can fulfill these theoretical roles without itself being a propositional attitude; it need only *yield* propositional content – that is, it need only be interpreted.

3 UNPACKING PROPOSITIONALISM

Propositionalism conjoins four *prima facie* plausible claims about the psychology (and phenomenology) of intuition. Each of these claims serves to identify intuition as the bearer of some psychological property. They are as follows.

(1) Intuitions are *phenomenally conscious*.

“Having an intuition makes a particular contribution to the character of the overall experience of the person who is having it” (Koksvik 2011:10). Put simply, there is something it is like to intuit. This what-it's-likeness guides us in our interactions with philosophical claims and theories. Often when we reflect on some philosophical claim, our thinking is punctuated by a peculiar phenomenology; suddenly, the attendant claim appears worthy of acceptance – though

⁸ This view is famously discussed at length in Sellars (1956), Fodor (1975), and Davidson (1983/1986), as well as in McDowell (1994).

we might not possess explicit, articulable reasons for why this should be so. We experience a surge in phenomenology, a tug, a feeling of attraction. It just feels right. All things being equal, we proceed accordingly. Bealer (1998:207) writes:

When you have an intuition that A, it *seems* to you that A. 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. For example, when you first consider one of deMorgan’s laws, often it neither seems true nor seems false; after a moment’s reflection, however, something happens: it now just seems true.

(2) Intuitions are *spontaneous*.

Intuitions “flow spontaneously from the situations that engender them, rather than from any process of explicit reasoning” (Gopnik and Schwitzgebel 1998:77). Though consciously entertaining a proposition or thought experiment may result in the occurrence of an intuition, the intuitions themselves are not consciously formed. Nor can they be consciously formed, via inference from other conscious mental states or otherwise. As a matter of contingent psychological fact, mental states with the above phenomenology cannot be summoned at will. At most, they can be facilitated by attendance to appropriate intellectual stimuli (e.g., Gettier cases). In any case, as far as first-person experience is concerned, intuitions just happen.

(3) Intuitions are *non-theoretical*.

Imagine that you are being presented with the Muller-Lyer figure for the very first time. You are taken in by the appearance that one line is longer than the other; presumably, you even form the belief that this is so. Shortly thereafter, you experience an unexpected revelation: your experience was an illusion; in fact, neither line is longer than the other. After a quick measurement, you are convinced; your eyes have deceived you. Then you look again. Lo and behold, the appearance remains. Despite firmly believing – nay, knowing – otherwise, one line

just seems longer than the other. No matter how hard you might try to overcome it, the illusion prevails; “the visual attraction to think them *incongruent* remains” (Sosa 2014:41).

Intuitions are commonly thought to behave in an analogous manner. First, like perceptual seemings, intuitions sometimes diverge from – or run contrary to – a subject’s beliefs. Second, intuitions, like perceptual seemings, are not subject to rational revision. In these respects, intuitions are non-theoretical.

Bealer (1998:208) illustrates this point, reporting, “I have an intuition – it still *seems* to me – that the naïve comprehension axiom of set theory is true; this is so despite the fact that I do not believe that it is true (because I know of the set-theoretical paradoxes) [...] Just try to diminish readily your intuition of the naïve comprehension axiom or your intuition that your favorite Gettier example could occur.”⁹ Intuitions, Bealer concludes, just aren’t sensitive to our beliefs and desires. This claim has proved hugely influential. Pust (2000), for instance, adds “[t]he appearance that p [in the Muller-Lyer case] is impenetrable by belief and even though I have the belief that not p , p still perceptually *seems* true. Cases like that of the naïve comprehension axiom show that in an analogous manner, our *intellectual seemings* or intuitions can diverge from our beliefs.” Similarly, Williamson (2007:217) observes, “I am aware of [a] conscious inclination to believe Naïve Comprehension, which I resist because I know better.” And Chudnoff (2013:41) writes of a known falsehood, “[s]till, I claim, when I consider it, I intuit that it is true.”

Here Bengson (2015:721-22) unpacks the perceptual analogy, highlighting the intimate connection between non-theoreticality and spontaneity.

⁹ According to naïve set theory, any well-defined collection of entities is a set. The Naïve Comprehension axiom states, roughly, that for any given property there exists a set containing all and only bearers of that property. This axiom generates powerful set-theoretic paradoxes, the most famous of which being Russell’s paradox.

One mark of the fundamentally non-voluntary (happening) character of presentational states such as perceptual experiences and intuitions is that one is not free to manage or get rid of them in the way that one is, or at least sometimes is, free to manage or get rid of one's beliefs (e.g. by revisiting or resorting old evidence or by seeking new evidence). Similarly, one is not free to pick whether, what, and how to experience or intuit in the way that one is, or at least sometimes is, free to pick whether, what, and how to imagine, guess, hypothesize, or judge. When looking around at one's immediate environment, whether one has a visual experience, what the content of the experience that one has is, or whether the experience is clear and vivid, is not within one's conscious control. Likewise, when reflecting on a putative counterexample, thought experiment, or elementary logical or mathematical proposition, whether one has an intuition, what the content of the intuition that one has is, or whether the intuition is clear and vivid, is not within one's conscious control.

(4) Intuitions bear *consciously accessible propositional content*.

Finally, according to the Propositionalism, intuition is a propositional attitude. To intuit, psychologically speaking, is to adopt an attitude towards a conscious propositionally-structured representation. Intuiting is essentially intuiting-that.

The view that intuitions are propositional can be fleshed out in different ways. In fact, the principal debate among philosophical theorists of intuition concerns what exactly *intuiting* that p consists in. First, there are views according to which intuiting involves believing, judging, or being inclined to believe or judge that p . van Inwagen (1997:309) expresses commitment to such a view, writing, “[o]ur “intuitions” are simply our beliefs – or perhaps, in some cases, the tendencies that make certain beliefs attractive to us, that “move” us in the direction of accepting certain propositions without taking us all the way to acceptance.” Defenders of these views emphasize the conscious accessibility of intuitive content to varying degrees. However, it appears that the majority of mainstream views are committed to such accessibility. For instance, Goldman and Pust (1998:179) – who defend the view that intuitions are spontaneous judgments – suggest that we are generally capable of *reporting* the contents of our intuitions. And Williamson (2007:217), according to whom intuitions are not judgments but conscious inclinations to judge, describes intuitive phenomenology as being directed toward some

particular proposition or other (e.g., “a conscious inclination to believe the Gettier proposition,” “a conscious inclination to believe Naïve Comprehension”).

Second, there are views according to which intuition is a distinct propositional attitude unto itself. Intuition, proponents of these views claim, is “a *sui generis*, irreducible [...] propositional attitude” (Bealer 1998:207). Otherwise put, the attitude of intuiting is “not analyzable in terms of the other mental phenomena” (Cullison 2013:33). To be sure, proponents of the *Sui Generis* view do not merely deny Reductivism; they also put forth a variety of *positive* theses. Intuitions, they claim, essentially involve a kind of (conscious) seeming, presentation, or appearance that *p*. Roughly, in intuiting, a subject is made consciously aware of a proposition. Tucker (2010:53) expounds on the phenomenology of this awareness; he writes, “[t]he phenomenology of a seeming makes it feel as though the seeming is “recommending” its propositional content as true or “assuring” us of the content’s truth.” Bengson (2015:708) also explicitly endorses this positive thesis (as well as the aforementioned negative thesis), claiming, “[i]ntuition is neither a doxastic attitude, such as a belief or judgment, nor a mere tendency to form such an attitude, but rather a *presentation*: a conscious state or event that, like perceptual experience, directly and immediately presents the world as being a certain way.” Presentationality, he elaborates, consists in “its being presented to *x* that *p* (as being the case that *p*, as being true that *p*, etc.), where *p* is a content” (724). He even illustrates this point, remarking that “in having the Gettier intuition, for instance, it is presented to one as being the case that Smith does not know [...] one *has* the impression that Smith does not know, even if one is not *under* the impression that Smith does not know” (719). Chudnoff (2013) similarly attributes *presentational phenomenology* to intuitions: “What it is for an intuition experience of yours to have presentational phenomenology with respect to *p* is for it to both make it intuitively seem to

you that p and make it seem to you as if this experience makes you intuitively aware of a truth-maker for p " (48). Still other Sui Generists adopt a much stronger version of this thesis. For instance, Bealer (1998:207) writes, "necessarily, if x intuits that P , it seems to x that P and also that necessarily that P ." And BonJour (2001:629) asserts that *rational insight* (i.e., intuition) is "a direct grasp of the necessity and consequent truth of a proposition, which may in turn be described as *self-evident*."

As will become apparent, my quarrel with Propositionalism concerns (4) alone. In fact, my rejection of (4) is motivated in part by my acceptance of (1)-(3). I will return to this point in Section 5.

4 VARIETIES OF PROPOSITIONALISM

Let's now consider the varieties of Propositionalism in greater detail. As noted above, these views differ primarily with respect to how they flesh out the claim that intuition is a propositional attitude. Accordingly, there are two classes of Propositionalist theory. On the one hand, there are reductive theories; these theories identify intuitions with judgments or inclinations to judge. On the other hand, there are Sui Generis views which claim that intuition is a distinct and irreducible mental kind. I will present and evaluate theories of each class in turn. In so doing, I will refer back to the remaining tenets of Propositionalism (outlined in the previous section), according to which intuitions are conscious, spontaneous, and non-theoretical. For insofar as the Propositionalist – or theorist of intuition in general – is committed to these claims, each also provides a distinct constraint on Propositionalist theories.

4.1 *Reductive Theories of Intuition*

Reductive theories are appealing in part because they are parsimonious; they account for intuitions wholly in terms of other, already countenanced mental states. In addition, reductive

theories highlight an important putative feature of intuitions: intuitions are capable of justifying beliefs without requiring justification in turn. Intuitions possess this capacity, the Reductivist claims, precisely because they are privileged judgments (or inclinations to judge).

4.1.1 Judgmentalism

The most basic and straightforward reductive theories state that *S* has the intuition that *p* only if *S* judges that *p*. I will refer to such views as ‘Judgmentalist’ theories. According to the Judgmentalist, being a judgment is necessary but not sufficient for being an intuition. All too often the intuition-judgment distinction is assumed without specification. However, some Judgmentalists expressly distinguish between intuition and mere judgment – in whole or in part – in terms of the fulfillment of some further condition. Hilary Kornblith (2002: 20), for instance, claims that intuitions are “phenomenologically basic” (non-perceptual) judgments, whose “inferential heritage is not available to introspection.” Alternatively, Kirk Ludwig (2007: 135) puts forward that an intuition is “an occurrent judgment formed solely on the basis of competence in the concepts involved in it.”

One immediately obvious problem with Judgmentalism derives from non-theoreticality. Recall the analogy with visual perception. Now suppose you encounter the Muller-Lyer lines again. Would you thereby judge that they are in fact unequal? Of course not. Assume for the moment that intuition is a propositional attitude. It seems possible for *S* to intuit that *p* without thereby coming to judge that *p*. To borrow an example from John Bengson (2015), it seems that an ardent physicalist could intuit that *zombies* (i.e., non-conscious microphysical duplicates of conscious beings) *are possible* without thereby coming to judge that *zombies are possible*. In this case, the ardent physicalist might resist forming the follow-on judgment on the grounds that she distrusts her intuition or the thought experiment from which her intuition derives. It appears that

judgment – in addition to not being sufficient for intuition – is not necessary for something's being an intuition.¹⁰

A second potential problem for the Judgmentalist concerns the conscious phenomenology of intuition. There is something it is like to intuit. Judgmentalism is ill-equipped to account for this phenomenology. The feel of intuition is distinct from that of occurrent belief; this difference remains regardless of one's views on cognitive phenomenology.

In conclusion, Judgmentalism falls short – even on the assumption that intuition is a propositional attitude.

4.1.2 *Inclinationism*

According to a second type of Reductivism about intuitions – namely, Inclinationism – intuitions are inclinations to judge. Roughly, Inclinationism states that a subject *S* intuits that *p* at *t* only if *S* is inclined to judge that *p* at *t* (van Inwagen 1997; Sosa 1998; Williamson 2007; Earlenbaugh and Molyneux 2009). To begin on a positive note, Inclinationist views are not susceptible to the objection from intuition without belief, at least not in its above form. On such views, one need not actually judge that *p* in order to intuit that *p*; one need only be inclined to do so. However, Inclinationism does not pass unscathed. Chudnoff (2011, 2013), for instance, argues that intuiters like the ardent physicalist are not even inclined to judge that *p* (despite their having what appear to be genuine intuitions that *p*). This criticism seems fair. Intuiters in such cases are not inclined to believe in any straightforward sense. To be sure, the Inclinationist might reply that the mere occurrence of recalcitrant intuitions shows that we are in some sense inclined

¹⁰ The Judgmentalist might respond by claiming that such intuitions are still beliefs, albeit very short-lived beliefs. Koksvik (2011) argues that reductive theories are problematic in that they result in one's being rationally criticizable for one's intuitions, when said intuitions contradict one's other beliefs. Alternatively, the Judgmentalist might deny that such cases involve having intuitions at all. Both responses strikes me as ad hoc – or, at very least, less attractive than adopting a competing, non-Judgmentalist analysis.

to judge their contents. However, this maneuver is a dead end given that it essentially results in the identification of intuitions, as commonly understood, with unconscious inclinations *to intuit*. Like Judgmentalism, Inclinationism leaves much to be desired.

4.2 *Sui Generis Theories of Intuition*

Proponents of Sui Generis theories reject the Reductivism entirely. *Intuition*, the Sui Generist claims, is a kind unto itself; its tokens cannot be identified with (or reduced to) tokens of other mental state types.¹¹ For dialectical purposes, I will focus on a subset of Sui Generis accounts – namely, Perceptualist theories (i.e., views based in a perceptual model of intuitions).

4.2.1 *Perceptualism*

According to Perceptualism, intuitions are seemings or appearance states. These seeming states are conscious, occurrent propositional attitudes. *S* intuits that *p*, then, only if it consciously appears to *S* that *p*. In addition, intuitions, on this view, do not consist of beliefs; nor must they even result in beliefs. Rather, intuitions are like perceptual experiences in that they are appearance states, and appearance states are *non-doxastic*. It can appear to *S* that *p* without *S* thereby believing that *p*. To be sure, our natural attitude towards the contents of appearance states is one of acceptance. Still, when in possession of reasons to doubt that things are as they appear, we can – and often do – resist forming corresponding, follow-on judgments.

Part of the appeal of Perceptualism is that it provides a plausible model of intuitive justification. After all, the Perceptualist claims that intuition is akin to perceptual experience in that both are appearance states. And there is a host of well-developed theories of perceptual justification on offer. *Phenomenal conservatism*, to give just one example, exploits this

¹¹Recently, some theorists have argued that intuitions are both sui generis and constituted by other, already countenanced mental states. *Intuitions*, on these views, are complex phenomena. Chudnoff (2011, 2013) defends such a view; Kauppinen (2013) extends this notion to moral intuitions. Similarly, Bengson (forthcoming) claims that intuitions, qua sui generis states, need not be wholly unanalyzable.

similarity, effectively extending the scope of *phenomenal dogmatism* (i.e., the view that if it perceptually appears to *S* that *p*, then *S* has at least some degree of justification for believing that *p*).¹² According to *phenomenal conservatism*, “if it seems to *S* that *p*, then *S* has at least prima facie justification for believing that *p*” (Huemer, 2007:30). This condition applies equally to all appearances (or seemings), be they perceptual or intuitive.¹³

At this point, Perceptualism probably looks pretty promising. Still, it is not without its opponents, even among Propositionalists. The principal charge leveled against Perceptualism is that it is ontologically extravagant. The Perceptualist does not identify intuitions with perceptual experiences; nor does she identify intuitions with tokens of any other mental state type. Rather, the Perceptualist moves to expand our mental taxonomy. Given that the Perceptualist circumvents the aforementioned problems faced by Reductivists, it seems that positing a sui generis state of some sort is well worth the ontological cost (one my view, Interpretationalism, will take on as well).¹⁴

Perceptualism also faces other, more serious problems. Intuitions are commonly held to be intentional states – that is, they are thought to possess a mode-content structure. Specifically, intuition is thought to be a propositional attitude – where a propositional attitude just is an intentional mode directed toward a *propositional* content. The dialectic I have presented thus far in this section has been wholly concerned with the mode (or attitude) part of this structure.¹⁵

¹² For a presentation and defense of phenomenal dogmatism, see Pryor (2000).

¹³ In fact, in the very next paragraph Huemer (2007:30) writes, “I take statements of the form “it seems to *S* that *p*” or “it appears to *S* that *p*” to describe a kind of propositional attitude, different from belief, of which sensory experience, apparent memory, intuition, and apparent introspective awareness are species. This type of mental state may be termed an “appearance.” PC holds that it is by virtue of having an appearance with a given content that one has justification for believing that content.”

¹⁴ Importantly, however, Interpretationalism does not assume that the relevant sui generis state is a propositional attitude.

¹⁵ It is generally assumed that intuitions bear determinate, consciously accessible propositional content. I suspect that this assumption is due to the fact that paradigmatic intuitions derive from a subject’s entertaining some analytic and/or necessary claim (e.g., *All bachelors are male*).

According to Perceptualism, the mode in question is *sui generis* and non-doxastic. Again, it is not identical to judgment (or belief); nor, for that matter, does having an intuition cause one to form a follow-on judgment (or belief). Instead, the relation between intuition and judgment is conceived as rational – that is, a subject decides whether to endorse some intuitive content in light of total evidence. Typically, in the absence of defeaters, a subject will accept the content in question, thereby forming a non-inferentially justified judgment (whose content is inherited from the intuition on which it is based) – or so the Perceptualist story goes. The challenge, then, is to explain how intuitions fulfill this rational role. This task, in turn, requires explaining how it is that we have (non-interpretive) self-knowledge of intuitive contents qua propositional seemings. I will argue that, at a minimum, there is no viable account currently on offer. Nevertheless, the burden of providing such an answer falls squarely on the Perceptualist’s shoulders.

Two rival theories purport to explain how it is that we are aware of our occurrent propositional attitudes. According to the first of these two theories, we are made aware of our occurrent propositional attitudes via their associated perceptual phenomenology. The most promising of these candidates, at least for present purposes, are so-called *Inner Speech* models (Jackendoff 1996; Clark 1998; Bermudez 2003; Frankish 2010; Carruthers 2011). Roughly, these views claim that we are made conscious of our occurrent thoughts by virtue of their being linguistically coded and phonologically expressed. One theoretical possibility, then, is that intuitive contents (qua propositional seemings) are presented to consciousness as sentences in inner speech. This proposal is problematic for several reasons. Intuitions are spontaneous – even intrusive – in a way that inner speech is not. Unlike intuitions, inner speech doesn’t happen to us; it’s something we do. Let us suppose that intuitions are an exception to this generalization. Still, an epistemic/methodological problem remains. Even if we assume that intuitions bear

propositional content, there is no obvious means of introspectively distinguishing between intuitive inner speech and inner speech of interpretation; nor is it clear how one might go about distinguishing between putatively intuitive properties of inner speech content and properties acquired between the onset of the intuition and the broadcast of its content via inner speech.¹⁶ For these reasons, it could very well turn out that Inner Speech models of propositional self-knowledge are *more* amenable to Interpretationalism.¹⁷

The second theory to be considered claims that cognitive propositional attitudes (e.g., thoughts, beliefs) – and, most importantly, their contents – bear proprietary, *cognitive phenomenology* (Horgan and Tienson 2002; Pitt 2004; Chudnoff 2013). According to proponents of this rather strong cognitive phenomenology view, we know what we are thinking precisely because there is something it is like to think that *the cat is on the mat* – where what it's like differs not only from desiring that *the cat is on the mat* but also from thinking, say, that *Caesar conquered Gaul*, or even thinking that *the mat is on the cat*.¹⁸ Unfortunately for the Perceptualist, this theory is highly controversial. And even if it were successful for slow, deliberative thinking,

¹⁶ The latter concern derives in part from the view that central cognition is *isotropic* and *Quinean* – or, put simply, *holistic* (Fodor 1983). This concern is also due in part to the fact that introspection is a highly ineffective means of determining the origins of occurrent representations. I shall return to this point in Section 5.1.

¹⁷ Chudnoff (2013) considers a second perceptual model. According to Chudnoff, the contents of thought-experimental intuitions are furnished by more basic mental states (e.g., thought-experimental imagistic imaginings) of which the intuition is composed. In intuiting, what happens is that one of these contents comes to appear true (or false). It is for this reason that he claims that intuitions are both *sui generis* and composed of other mental states. One problem with this proposal is that thought experiments require complex feats of imagining. And it's not clear that introspection alone can provide a means of determining which of a set of propositions is being, so to speak, modified by the intuition. There is also a second, more serious problem. Exactly one feature of thought-experimental intuitions, thus conceived, cannot be explained by appeal to other, more basic mental states. And that is the phenomenally conscious episode – or what Propositionalists conceive as the *intuitive attitude* – by virtue of which some such content appears true (or false). Ultimately, Chudnoff fails to provide any reason not to suppose that this episode, by virtue of which some proposition comes to appear true (or false) is exhaustive of the intuition proper.

¹⁸ Arguments for cognitive phenomenology often take the form of phenomenal contrasts. Typically, these arguments began by attributing identical sensory states to two subjects who differ only with respect to some related cognitive property. The difference in overall phenomenology is then explained in terms of non-sensory, cognitive phenomenology. So, consider, for instance, two subjects who are told 'il pleut,' one of whom is fluent in French, the other being a monolingual Englishman. Though their auditory states are the same, the French speaker's conscious experience is more robust. He understands.

it need not be capable of explaining our awareness of so-called intuitive content. For although thought-experimental intuitions are often quite salient, they are also characteristically short-lived. Most importantly, their phenomenology is far from various enough to serve as the basis for discerning among innumerable, distinct propositional contents.

5 INTERPRETATIONALISM & THE CASE AGAINST PROPOSITIONALISM

I will now present three arguments against Propositionalism – an argument from phenomenology and two arguments from disagreement about intuitive content.

5.1 *Intuitive Phenomenology*

Consider Gettier's (1963) *10 Coins* thought experiment.

Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition: (d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (d) entails: (e) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true. But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. (Gettier 1963:122)

Presumably, upon reading this passage (and imagining the scenario described therein), you were struck with a sense that something is wrong or off. But what exactly is it that strikes you as wrong? According to Propositionalism, you just know what it is. For the mental state you encountered in response to the thought experiment is an intuition. And intuitions – in addition to being conscious, spontaneous, and non-theoretical – bear conscious propositional content. The problem is that the significance of an intuition need not be readily apparent; at very least, discerning such significance often requires additional time, or even mental effort.

Consider the case of Sam, an intelligent college freshman. It's the first day of *Philosophy 101*. And Sam is being presented with the *10 Coins* case for the very first time. Prior to today,

she had never even heard of the Gettier problem. In addition, Sam has little to no background knowledge of the dialectic in which the problem figures. Nevertheless, she exhibits mastery over the ordinary concept KNOWLEDGE. And she is fully capable of understanding the case. When, finally, Sam is presented with *10 Coins*, she has the impression that something is wrong; something just *feels* odd about calling Smith's belief *knowledge*. Moreover, this feeling that something is wrong occurs spontaneously (i.e., it just happens to her as a result of entertaining the case), and it is non-theoretical (i.e., it is not based in her explicit, consciously accessible epistemic beliefs). Despite having such a conscious, spontaneous, and non-theoretical mental state, it is not clear to Sam what exactly is off. A few minutes later, the professor informs the class that the thought experiment is intended to show that knowledge is not equivalent to justified true belief. Having listened to the professor's explanation, the significance of her intuition now seems obvious to her. Smith's belief is justified and true; however, it does not constitute knowledge. The crucial question is the following. Does Sam have a thought-experimental intuition (in response to *10 Coins*) prior to her professor's intervention?

To begin, it is worth noting that nothing about the above case suggests that it is metaphysically impossible. There is nothing incoherent in supposing that Sam's mental state (in response to *10 Coins*) is (1) phenomenally conscious, (2) spontaneous, and (3) non-theoretical, yet does not possess consciously-accessible propositional content. For instance, nothing about the former psychological features entails the latter feature. Nor is there any obvious reasons for supposing that a (non-perceptual) mental state of this kind is psychologically impossible. What is at issue is simply whether this mental state constitutes an *intuition*. If so, then bearing consciously-accessible propositional content is not necessary (or essential) for being a thought-experimental intuition.

Intuition is a psychological kind. This kind is characterized, at least in part, by (1)-(3). Sam's mental state exhibits these features; moreover, there is no obvious, alternate bearer of these properties, such that we might mistake members of that kind for intuitions. In claiming that mental states like Sam's (above) are not intuitions, the Propositionalist inherits the challenge of providing some principled, non-stipulative, grounds for classifying them otherwise.

Alternatively, the Propositionalist could deny that Sam's mental state really lacks conscious propositional content. At very least, one might argue, Sam is consciously aware of a proposition of the form *x is not an instance of knowledge*. For, presumably, Sam's negatively-valenced mental state would have derived from her having tentatively classified Smith's mental state as an instance of knowledge. Though this approach is more promising than the previous option, it still faces a number of problems. Most importantly, thought-experimental intuitions tend to be *very brief* phenomenally conscious episodes. Their cognitive significance is not always readily apparent. And it seems that, in some cases, they remain opaque to us long after the initial conscious episode has terminated. Also, as we shall see, the claim that thought-experimental intuitions derive, in part, from the conscious application of some concept (e.g., KNOWLEDGE) – or target philosophical thesis (e.g., *knowledge is justified, true belief*) – to an imagined entity is perfectly consistent with a *non-propositional*, Interpretationalist account of intuitions.

My aim in this section is to demonstrate that Propositionalism is implausible, both phenomenologically and psychologically. In so doing, I also hope to show that Propositionalism is not nearly as intuitive as philosophers are wont to insist. It is for this reason that I began by offering the above thought experiment. Having set the stage, let us now turn to the arguments against Propositionalism.

Part of what makes Propositionalism implausible is that it precludes the very occurrence of cases of the sort described above. It seems that they can and do occur – even among competent subjects!¹⁹ Such is the basis of the following Phenomenological Argument against Propositionalism. This argument exploits a feature of many of our dealings with thought experiments, a feature that is illustrated in the above case of Sam the college freshman. Often we seem to have thought-experimental intuitions – that is, phenomenally conscious, spontaneous, and non-theoretical mental states in response to a given thought-experiment – where these mental states precede the determination or presentation of any relevant propositional content. The Phenomenological Argument goes like this:

- (1) If Propositionalism is true, then all thought-experimental intuiters are consciously aware of a proposition – namely, the content of their intuition – at the time of intuiting.
- (2) It's not the case that all thought-experimental intuiters are consciously aware of a proposition at the time of intuiting. Therefore,
- (3) It is not the case that Propositionalism is true.

[Note on (2): the Propositionalist cannot claim that a temporally subsequent propositional content is constitutive of the intuition, on pain of running afoul of *spontaneity*.]

This argument takes the form of a modus tollens – and is, therefore, valid. Nevertheless, it is not a knockdown argument. For one, premise (2) rests on anecdotal evidence. Still, it is an argument worth making. The real damage is done when we realize that Propositionalism need not be the only game in town. Enter Interpretationalism.

¹⁹ Ludwig (2014) argues the opposite point. He claims that proper engagement with philosophical thought experiments requires significant philosophical training and sophistication. And so, in a sense, these subjects are just not competent. I think that this move is dubious. If anything we'd expect intelligent non-experts to provide even greater insight into the nature of thought-experimental intuitions. This is because they do not have pre-existing knowledge of what the correct – or canonical – response is supposed to be. On my view – the Interpretationalist view – the important difference is that non-experts do not enter into the thought-experimental setup with an interpretation already at hand.

According to Interpretationalism, the Gettier intuition in question is a conscious (in this case *negatively-valenced*), spontaneous, non-theoretical state. One way of thinking of this intuition is as a kind of *error signal*. Making sense of this signal, in turn, requires extemporaneous theorizing on the basis of both one's background beliefs (some of which may have to be revised or jettisoned in the process) and one's beliefs about the thought-experimental case in question. The process of interpretation begins with the formation of an *experience belief*, followed by a *linking belief*. In the present case, the experience belief is a second-order mental state that a *negatively-valenced* phenomenal episode, or intuition, has occurred. Linking beliefs are also, in part, higher-order mental states; however, they take the following counterfactual form: *Were thought-experimental propositions $\{p_1, \dots, p_n\}$ all true, then the thought experiment wouldn't have prompted a negative intuition.*

But how, one might ask, does Interpretationalism get us cognitive significance at the level of individual propositions? Generally, after all, the aim in assigning a content (or cognitive significance) to the intuition is to determine what it is that the intuition most directly justifies. Here the subject's background beliefs come into play (e.g., beliefs about truth, beliefs about justification). She might ask, is it really the case that *Smith has a justified true belief*? And is it really the case that *knowledge is justified true belief*?²⁰ Let's suppose that our subject, following Gettier, is convinced that the former proposition is true, whereas the latter proposition is false; in other words, having found the first proposition to be true, she now homes in on the second

²⁰ Given that the intuition is negatively-valenced, one might expect its significance to consist in the conjunction of two inconsistent propositions – say, *Smith has a justified true belief* and *Knowledge is justified, true belief*. As it happens, negative thought experiments commonly take the form of reductios. The error signal might be taken, then, to indicate – or otherwise correspond with – *imaginative blockage* (i.e., an inability to imagine in accordance with all the prescribed rules) (Weinberg and Meskin 2006). In accordance with the background supposition (or target philosophical thesis), the subject imagines that all instances of justified true belief are instances of knowledge. The vignette, however, presents an atypical instance of justified true belief. And so, the subject is directed to imagine this instance as knowledge. But something is off. It is as though one is forced to imagine that the belief in question both is and isn't knowledge.

proposition as the source of her intuition.²¹ So, what is it that our subject is warranted in judging? For one, she is warranted in judging that *'knowledge is justified, true belief' is false*. However, she is also warranted in making a more specific judgment about Smith's mental state. Having intuitively corroborated the first proposition and disconfirmed the second, she is now in a position to assign to her intuitive episode the following cognitive significance – *Smith has a justified, true belief but not knowledge*.²² In this way, Interpretationalism provides a means of assigning cognitive significance, even at the propositional level. More importantly, it does so while preserving *phenomenal consciousness, spontaneity, and non-theoreticality*.

5.2 Same Intuition, Different Judgments

Though some thought-experimental intuitions have canonical, or standard, descriptions (e.g., *Smith has a justified true belief but not knowledge*), it is not obvious that these descriptions always accurately reflect psychological reality. Take *10 Coins*. We often speak as though this thought experiment generates exactly one propositionally-structured intuition across competent subjects – namely, the intuition that *Smith has a justified true belief but not knowledge*.²³ It is important to note, however, that this claim is empirical. And experimentation could reveal that different subjects' psychological reports vary considerably. To be sure, this result would not

²¹ Someone with different background beliefs might instead accept the latter proposition while rejecting the former. I consider such an interpretation in Section 5.2 (below).

²² To be clear, it does not follow that our subject will in fact form a first-order judgment with this content. For one, she could terminate interpretation having identified the target thesis as the source of error. Second, she could take the above proposition as giving the cognitive significance of her intuition, yet resist revising her previously held belief that *knowledge is justified, true belief*. In this case, she would form a second-order mental state about the cognitive significance of her intuition (roughly, a judgment that the significance of the intuition is *p* (e.g., *it is not the case that the knowledge is justified, true belief*). Nevertheless, she would not form the follow-on (first-order) judgment that *p*.

²³ Canonical descriptions appear to derive from the standard view of thought experiments. Why think that the content of the *10 Coins* intuition is that *Smith has a justified true belief but not knowledge*? Because the thought experiment is designed to demonstrate that the JTB account of knowledge is wrong. Specifically, it generates false positives. If the JTB analysis were true, Smith's mental state would be knowledge. However, it isn't. Despite meeting the JTB theories' analyses for knowledge, Smith's mental state does not instance knowledge – that is, the analysandum.

definitively establish that there is no shared proposition to which all competent subjects are related. Nevertheless, it *would* suggest that not all competent subjects are related to the same *conscious* (or *consciously accessible*) propositional content.

I will begin by drawing on a different source of evidence against this latter claim – responses to Gettier (1963). When one looks to the vast literature produced in response to Gettier (1963), what one finds is consistent with – even suggestive of – variation across Gettier judgments. On the one hand, there are accounts which clearly add a fourth condition to the traditional JTB account of knowledge (e.g., Clark 1963; Klein 1971).²⁴ On the other hand, there are accounts which appear to revise (e.g., Chisholm 1966; Unger 1967; Zagzebski 1994) or even recast (e.g., Goldman 1967; Nozick 1981) the notion of justification.²⁵ It appears, then, that there are at least two conflicting responses to Gettier (1963): *Smith has a justified true belief but not knowledge* and *Smith's belief is not justified*.²⁶ Ultimately, I argue, this variation undermines the claim that all competent subjects are aware of the same conscious propositional content. The problem for

²⁴ According to Clark (1963), a justified true belief constitutes knowledge if and only if it is not based on false grounds. Modified versions of this account are defended by Lehrer (1965) and Harman (1973). Klein (1971) adds the condition that there is no true proposition q such that were S to believe q , S 's belief that p would not be justified. A similar defeasibility condition is proposed by Lehrer and Paxson (1969).

²⁵ According to Chisholm (1966), " S knows at t that h , provided (1) S believes h at t ; (2) h is true; and h is evident at t for S " (23). h , in turn, is evident (or 'justified') only if there is no true proposition q such that the conjunction of q & r (where $r = S$'s reasons for believing h) results in the defeat of S 's evidence (or justification) for h . Steup (1996) outlines a similar, *factual defeater* view. Importantly, these so-called 'factual defeater' views do not require that S be aware of q in order for S 's justification to be defeated by q ; that q is in fact that case is enough. It is for this reason that these views count Smith's belief as unjustified. In addition, Unger (1968) proposes a significant revision to the traditional notion of justification. According to Unger, S knows that p if and only if S believes that p , p is true, and it is not an accident that S is right that p is the case. Finally, some philosophers (e.g., Sturgeon 1993; Zagzebski 1994) argue that Gettier cases motivate a return to infallibilism about epistemic justification. Now consider the latter set of theories – that is, those that are more accurately described not as *altering* the traditional fallibilist notion of justification but as *reconceiving* it. According to Goldman (1967), " S knows that p if and only if: the fact p is causally connected in an 'appropriate' way with S 's believing" (369). In addition, Nozick (1981) offers the following *truth-tracking* theory: S knows that p if and only if (1) p is true, S believes that p , (3) if p weren't true, S wouldn't believe that p , and (4) if p were true, S would believe that p . Though these accounts diverge from the traditional fallibilist conception of justification, they are nevertheless about the feature by virtue of which some beliefs are tethered to the truth. In this sense, they are theories of justification.

²⁶ Some theorists (e.g., Saunders and Champawat 1964) even consider Gettier cases to be grounds for denying that KNOWLEDGE possesses necessary and sufficient conditions at all.

Propositionalism is that insofar as two or more subjects (can) have the same intuition without being aware of one and the same conscious propositional content, Propositionalism is false.

My first argument is as follows.

- (1) If two or more subjects engage with the same thought-experimental setup and possess the same (relevant) competences, then they will have the same intuition. [premise]
- (2) If two or more subjects have the same intuition, then they will make consistent judgments on its basis (or else they will claim that the intuition is misleading) – assuming, that is, that they both make judgments at all. [premise]
- (3) Philosophers, P1 and P2, engage with the same Gettier thought-experimental setups and possess the same Gettier-relevant competences. [premise]
- (4) Philosophers, P1 and P2, have the same Gettier intuition, GI. [from 1 and 3]
- (5) P1 judges on the basis of GI that Smith has a justified true belief but not knowledge. [premise]
- (6) P2 judges on the basis of GI that Smith's belief is not justified. [premise]
- (7) Philosophers, P1 and P2, will make consistent judgments on the basis of GI. [from 2 and 4]
- (8) Philosophers, P1 and P2, make inconsistent judgments on the basis of GI (and neither P1 nor P2 claims that GI is misleading). [from 5 and 6]

This argument is intended as a reductio of premise (2). I will unpack this premise and the reasoning behind it in just a moment. First let's turn to premise (1).

There is something *prima facie* plausible about premise (1). This is likely part of the reason why the positing of a shared content, such as *Smith has a justified true belief but not knowledge*, doesn't initially strike us as being problematic. In any case, this *prima facie* plausibility is not sufficient for maintaining that premise (1) is in fact true. Fortunately, there is another, more compelling source of evidence – namely, experimental philosophy. Recent experimental studies show that competent subjects exhibit remarkably similar responses when presented with Gettier cases. In fact, regularities in Gettier responses are found both within

cultural/linguistic groups (Nagel et al. 2013), as well as across cultural/linguistic groups (Machery et al. 2015). When prompted, people overwhelmingly agree that Gettier subjects lack knowledge. But why is this so? On the basis of these results, Machery et al. argue that there is a universal psychological feature by virtue of which people are disposed to respond in this way; they term this shared psychological element ‘core folk epistemology.’ It is as a result of possessing this feature, they claim, that competent subjects (i.e., subjects who display comprehension of Gettier cases) are disposed to behave as they do. Given that competent subjects exhibit similar forced responses to Gettier cases and, moreover, the best explanation for this regularity is that such responses are expressions of a shared psychological feature (i.e., core folk epistemology), it is extremely plausible that competent subjects have the same intuition when presented with one and the same thought-experimental setup.

Premise (2), the supposition for reductio, expresses a prediction that one would expect to obtain, were Propositionalism true. According to Propositionalism, if two or more subjects have the same intuition, then said subjects will be aware of the same conscious propositional content. This is because Propositionalism individuates intuitions in terms of their mode (i.e., the attitude of intuiting) and content, where the content in question is both conscious and propositional. Insofar as p is what seems true to S by virtue of having a given intuition, all things being equal, we’d expect S to judge that p .²⁷ At very least, we wouldn’t expect S to contradict p – unless, of course, S had sufficient reason to distrust the intuition itself.

Premise (3) should be uncontroversial. And (4) follows from premises (1) and (3). That brings us to premises (5) and (6), the grounds for which were outlined in the opening paragraph.

²⁷ As noted in the previous section, many contemporary Perceptualists (e.g., Koksvik 2011; Chudnoff 2013; Bengson 2015) are committed to phenomenal conservatism (i.e., the view that if it seems to S that p , then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some justification for believing that p).

Finally, there's (7). Since P1 judges, in part, that Smith's belief is justified and P2 judges that Smith's belief is unjustified, it follows that their judgments are inconsistent. And, importantly, there is no evidence that either party takes their judgment to be at odds with the Gettier intuition itself; in fact, the resulting theories provide explanations of why it is that Smith counts as having justified true belief but not knowledge or, alternately, why it is that Smith's belief counts as unjustified. Though it is open to the Propositionalist to deny any of the above premises, I conclude that premise (2) is false for the reasons outlined above.

Before moving on to the next argument, I will briefly sketch an Interpretationalist theory of intuition-types. To begin, let's suppose that two subjects are presented with the same thought-experimental setup. Both subjects are competent – that is, they understand the case in question (and they master all concepts necessary for constructing the relevant imagining). What must obtain, one might ask, if these two subjects are to count as having type-identical intuitions? According to Interpretationalism, at least three features of intuitions are relevant here – *origin*, *phenomenology*, and *dispositional profile*.

I will begin with *origin*. Following Machery et al. (2015), Interpretationalism locates the origins of intuitions in sub-doxastic systems (e.g., core folk epistemology, folk biology, folk physics, core object cognition).²⁸ These systems serve to guide behavior; nevertheless, they are inaccessible to conscious introspection. Our only access to their contents is indirect. In philosophy, as well as in certain branches of linguistics, we gain insight into the inner workings of these systems by drawing them into action and then monitoring the conscious phenomenology to which they give rise.²⁹ Herein lies the function of philosophical thought experiments. In

²⁸ For a collection of essays on folk biology, see Medin and Atran (1999). For a study in folk physics, see McCloskey (1983). For a review of core object cognition (as well as core number cognition and core agency cognition), see Carey (2009). For more on core cognition in general, see Spelke et al. (1992).

²⁹ This method will no doubt be familiar to anyone acquainted with Chomskyan linguistics.

engaging with philosophical thought experiments, we consciously imagine scenarios, resulting in the deployment of sub-doxastic systems – systems whose function is to guide behavior in response to sensory information.³⁰

This hypothesis explains why it is that thought experiments are often more compelling than arguments at the level of abstract reasoning. It is also equipped to explain intuitive phenomenology, spontaneity, and non-theoreticality. Intuitive phenomenology – regardless of whether it’s a product or byproduct of sub-doxastic systems – brings otherwise unconscious information to bear on our explicit belief structures. Thought-experimental intuitions are spontaneous and non-theoretical in that their production is triggered on the basis of sensory input, unmediated by conscious cognition. Moreover, such intuitions are also non-theoretical in the sense that the intuition-generating behaviors of sub-doxastic systems are immune to rational revision. We might revise our explicit beliefs (or theories) in light of our intuitions; however, we cannot alter our intuitions simply by changing our explicit beliefs.

So what does this have to do with *typing* intuitions? To a first approximation, two intuitions will count as type-identical with respect to *origin* only if they are products of the same (or relevantly similar) sub-doxastic processes. As noted above, Machery et al. (2015) hypothesize that all Gettier intuitions derive from core folk epistemology. This hypothesis, if true, establishes identity at the systems level. Still, it is conceivable that future research will expose more fine-grained distinctions among Gettier intuitions across cultures. Suppose that future research revealed that different populations’ sub-doxastic systems are sensitive to different features of Gettier scenarios. What this would mean is that Gettier intuitions are *not* type-identical across cultures. Importantly, the Interpretationalist criterion in question operates at this

³⁰ Given that the sub-doxastic systems in question serve primarily for guiding behavior, it makes sense that they would be triggered in response to concrete, imagistically-encoded scenarios – be they perceptual or imaginary.

level – that is, the process level. The moral is that identifying type-identity along this dimension (i.e., origin) is an a posteriori, empirical enterprise. It is up to cognitive science and experimental philosophy to investigate the inner workings and intuition-generating behaviors of individual sub-doxastic systems.³¹

The second Interpretationalist criterion for type-identity among intuitions is *phenomenology*. According to Interpretationalism, intuitions vary phenomenally in both valence and strength (or salience). Given that strength often varies due to extraneous factors – most notably, the allocation of attention – I will focus on valence. The phenomenology criterion states that two intuitions are type-identical only if they bear relevantly similar phenomenology. Put coarsely, two intuitions belong to the same type, phenomenologically speaking, just in case they are both positively-valenced or they are both negatively-valenced.

The phenomenology of an intuition also appears to bear importantly on its *dispositional profile*. For one, positively-valenced intuitive phenomenology is typically taken to indicate some form of success (e.g., the correct application of some concept to an imagined entity, the corroboration of some target philosophical thesis), whereas negatively-valenced intuitive phenomenology is typically taken to indicate some form of failure, or error (e.g., the *misapplication* of some concept, the representation of some falsehood or inconsistency). In the latter case but not the former, the intuiting subject will be inclined to ferret out the proposition(s) responsible and even excise it from her belief set.

The final Interpretationalist criterion – namely, identity with respect to *dispositional profile* – is more abstract. Our two intuiters count as having the same intuition on this criterion

³¹ It could, for instance, turn out that some sub-doxastic systems are more domain-specific and/or informationally-encapsulated than others; relatedly, some sub-doxastic systems might operate solely over innate axioms, whereas others operate over acquired (perhaps even culture-relative) associations.

just in case the following counterfactual is true. Were both subjects to possess the same set of background beliefs (and equivalent cognitive acuities), each would assign to his or her intuition the same cognitive significance. Importantly, they need not *in fact* possess the same background beliefs; nor must they *in fact* assign the same significance.

My second argument is based on explicit ‘intuition reports’ made by metaphilosophers and theorists of thought-experimental intuitions. Though these figures all adopt some form of the canonical description (i.e., *Smith has justified true belief but not knowledge*), they disagree about the precise content and logical structure of their shared Gettier intuition. Williamson (2005) claims that intuitions had in response to the original Gettier cases possess the following counterfactually-structured content: “if someone had stood as described to a proposition, then whoever stood as described to a proposition would have had justified true belief without knowledge in respect of that proposition” (5). Malmgren (2011), writing in response to Williamson, argues instead that the content of said Gettier intuitions is a modal proposition of possibility – namely, “[i]t is possible that someone stands to *p* as in the Gettier case (as described) and that she has a justified true belief that *p* but does not know that *p*” (281). Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009) issue yet another report. They claim that the content is a proposition of necessity: *necessarily, if the Gettier vignette is completely true, then someone has a justified true belief but not knowledge* (227). Importantly, these figures take their disagreement to be genuine. The accounts thus offered are intended to be mutually exclusive.³²

This argument is as follows.

³² This exchange between Williamson (2005) and Malmgren (2011) is situated within a much broader theoretical dispute. Williamson argues that there is no interesting a priori/a posteriori distinction. Relatedly, he holds that thought-experimental intuitions are deliverances of the very same capacity as our ordinary counterfactual judgments. Malmgren, by contrast, maintains that intuitions are products of a special-purpose rational (i.e., a priori) capacity.

- (1) Competent subjects have the same type of intuition in response to Gettier cases.
[premise]
- (2) Philosophers generally are competent subjects with respect to the Gettier cases.
[premise]
- (3) Philosophers have the same type of intuition as one another in response to Gettier cases. [from 1 & 2]
- (4) Different philosophers' reports of intuitions in response to Gettier cases do not cohere with one another. [premise]
- (5) Different philosophers report the *same* type of intuition in response to Gettier cases in ways that do not cohere. [from 3 & 4]
- (6) If a mental state type has *consciously accessible* propositional content, persons who have that same type of mental state will report it in ways that cohere with other reports of it. [premise]
- (7) The intuition type that arises from Gettier cases does not have consciously accessible propositional content. [by applying 6 to intuitions (as mental states) and *modus tollens* from 5]

Between my discussion of the previous argument and my presentation of Williamson (2005), Malmgren (2011), and Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009), I've already addressed most of these premises. What remains to be addressed is premise (6).

The Propositionalist claims that intuitive contents are consciously accessible. Otherwise put, the contents of intuition are available to introspection.³³ Or, better yet, we “just know” what they are.³⁴ However, if this is so, then were two or more subjects to possess the same conscious intuitive content, we'd expect their reports of that content to converge. That is not to say that

³³ One theoretical option here is to appeal to Block's (1995) notion of *access consciousness* – where a mental state is access-conscious just in case it is ‘broadcast,’ or made available for consumption, to downstream subsystems (e.g., those responsible for producing verbal reports).

³⁴ The “just knows” claim is explicable in terms of cognitive phenomenology and/or phenomenal intentionality or in terms of occurrent inner speech. See Chudnoff (2013) for a discussion of these options.

their reports would coincide exactly. But at the very least we wouldn't expect them to contradict one another.

Ultimately, the best explanation of this disagreement among philosophers (or metaphilosophers) is not that they have distinct intuitions, but that one and the same intuition is interpreted differently in the presence of different background beliefs. This, of course, is the Interpretationalist explanation. Philosophers tacitly rely on their background beliefs (e.g., beliefs about the logical structure of intuitions) to determine which proposition is most directly supported by the intuition itself. And it is with respect to these *theoretical* follow-on judgments that they disagree. The problem for Propositionalism is that, while this view is deeply plausible, it is contrary to what we'd expect were Propositionalism true.

I will conclude this section by anticipating a potential response. It seems, one might claim, that there is something that is shared by all of the content-attributions discussed thus far – namely, that *Smith's true belief isn't knowledge*. To begin, I do not take myself to have shown that there is no proposition to which all competent intuiting subjects are related, only that no such proposition constitutes the conscious content of the intuition itself. There might be some sense in which competent intuiting subjects represent a common proposition. However, insofar as it is an essential part of the intuition, it is not given directly to introspection; rather, it must be discovered (e.g., through systematic experimental means). In any case, given that this proposal runs contrary to what people actually claim to intuit, insistence on this point appears to be nothing more than a last-ditch effort to preserve Propositionalism.

Second, it doesn't appear that anything is gained by positing conscious propositional content in this case. Metaphilosophers' 'intuition reports' betray some degree of interpretation. The more elegant explanation is that this interpretation goes all the way down. What explains the

convergence that does occur is just that – for some reason or other – Smith’s true belief is not knowledge (or, simply, Smith does not have knowledge) is the most obvious interpretation; the salience of this interpretation is, in turn, explicable in terms of background theory and/or features of the thought experiment itself. In roughly this way, Interpretationalism can explain not only divergence across content-attributions, but convergence as well.

Finally, all things considered, the view that intuitions lack conscious propositional content better coheres with the remaining claims (1)-(3). For if intuitions can occur prior to the determination of consciously accessible propositional content (as in the case discussed in Section 5.1), then said contents are not spontaneous in the same sense as intuitions are spontaneous; nor are they likely to be non-theoretical in precisely the same way. In short, excising the claim that (4) intuitions bear consciously accessible propositional content results in an overall more consistent theory of thought-experimental intuitions.

5.3 Virtues of Interpretationalism

In addition to providing elegant solutions to the above problems, Interpretationalism appears to possess several unexpected theoretical virtues.

5.3.1 Linguistic Intuitions about Fictions

Consider the statement ‘Gandalf has a pink goatee.’ This statement typically generates a kind of wrongness intuition – that is, a kind of intuition characterized by negative phenomenology (and is seemingly responsive to one’s having understood the statement). Interestingly, the linguistic wrongness intuition to which this statement gives rise is characteristically interpreted by philosophers in one of two, radically different ways – despite the fact that said philosophers appear to share the relevant linguistic/conceptual competences, as well as whatever cognitive mechanisms underlie these competences. First, it is commonly

interpreted as indicating the falsity of the sentence. In this case, one might form the follow-on judgment that *'Gandalf has a pink goatee' is false*.³⁵ Second, it is interpreted by referentialists, like Kenneth Taylor (2000), as indicating the pragmatic inappropriateness of the statement; the sentence is not actually false, on this view, since the empty name "Gandalf" robs it of having propositional content at all. In this case, the follow-on judgment's propositional content might be *'Gandalf has a pink goatee' is pragmatically inappropriate*. Importantly, the intuition itself appears to be the same across these cases; it is caused by the same linguistic competence in each case and background knowledge in each case, but *that* intuition is then interpreted differently by theorists with different commitments. And so Interpretationalism explains how it is that philosophers of language can draw radically different conclusions on the basis of one and the same – putatively shared – intuition, despite possessing more or less the same competences.

5.3.2 *Moral Intuitions*

Most theorists of intuitions are very careful to delineate the scope of their theories. Either a given theory of thought-experimental intuitions applies, for instance, to metaphysics and epistemology or it applies to thought experiments deployed in the course of first-order ethical theorizing. This caution is due in part to the rise of sentimentalist theories of moral judgment.³⁶ According to these views, many moral judgments are motivated, in the first case, by emotional responses. Insofar as epistemic and metaphysical intuitions are competence-driven, whereas many moral intuitions are driven instead by affect, it is unlikely that the very same account will do in both moral and non-moral philosophical cases. There is also a second, related cause for

³⁵ See, for instance, Lewis (1978).

³⁶ For empirical research in support of sentimentalism, see Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model and Greene's (2008) dual process theory. For philosophical defenses of sentimentalism, see Nichols (2004), Prinz (2006), and Kauppinen (2013). For an opposing, *rationalist* position, on which moral intuitions are competence-driven, see Audi (2004).

concern. Emotional responses are not always determinate and/or unambiguous. Sometimes they require interpretation in order for their cognitive significance to be apparent (LeDoux 1996).

Interpretationalism claims that the differences between moral and non-moral philosophical intuitions are not as substantial as they might initially appear to be. The Propositionalist implicitly ascribes two thought-experimental functions to conceptual competences. First, such competences are required for understanding thought experiments. This point is obvious enough. Cognizing a given vignette requires a host of different conceptual/linguistic competences. In addition, Propositionalism suggest that conceptual competences are deployed within intuition itself. After all, according to Propositionalism, intuitions bear conscious representations that are propositional and determinate (in addition to being non-perceptual). Interpretationalism, by contrast, denies that intuitions possess such content. Instead, the Interpretationalist claims that intuitions are merely signals issued from subdoxastic systems (e.g., folk epistemology, generative grammar). Regardless of whether a given thought-experimental intuition is moral or epistemic, our consumption of it remains the same. The intuition must be interpreted before it can play a determinate role in downstream cognition.

6 EXPLAINING (AWAY) THE APPEAL OF PROPOSITIONALISM

Propositionalism claims that, in intuiting, a subject is made aware of a consciously accessible propositional content. In the previous section, I argued that this view is problematic for several reasons. Not only can intuitions precede the determination of propositional content; generally speaking, the phenomenology of intuitions is much less fine-grained than that of propositional contents. For these reasons, I rejected Propositionalism in favor of an alternative, Interpretationalist conception of intuitions, according to which an intuition's *cognitive significance* is assigned via a follow-on process of interpretation. I will now bolster my case

against Propositionalism through diagnosis. In Section 2, I gestured towards an explanation of why it is that Propositionalism is so widely endorsed among philosophers. I will now address this question head on.

6.1 *Effortlessness & Automaticity*

There are multiple reasons one might be lured into thinking that thought-experimental intuitions are propositional. The first reason is that, in some cases, the cognitive significance of an intuition appears to be given – no effort required. However, there is a non-Propositionalist explanation. Thought experiments are artefacts; they are designed by philosophers to elicit a particular response. Moreover, their authors guide us toward accepting particular conclusions. This should come as no surprise; after all, philosophers employ thought experiments as a means of concretely illustrating arguments, arguments which are typically presented alongside the thought experiments themselves. In addition, the typical reader of philosophical articles will usually have some pre-existing sense of the dialectic in which both the argument and thought experiment figure, as a result of which she will have some conception of what it is she is supposed to intuit. She may even have some familiarity with the intuition’s canonical description.

Importantly, the process of interpretation posited by Interpretationalism need not always require conscious mental effort. An advantage of Interpretationalism is that it is equipped to explain instances in which interpretation is effortful, as well as those in which it is seemingly automatic. Sometimes when we intuit, we introspect propositional content. Nevertheless, it does not follow that we are thereby acquainted with *intuitive* content. “Introspection is a blunt instrument, and cannot in general be relied on to determine whether a mental state has representational content” (Lycan 2014:69). According to Interpretationalism, the appearance of

intuitive content is – in at least some cases – due to a kind of conflation on the part of the introspecting subject. While introspection might tell us that a given propositional content is present, it is silent as to its origin. This is a familiar point from debates about high-level content in the philosophy of perception. We cannot discern by introspection alone whether semantic categories are deployed in perception itself or in accompanying cognitive states (arrived upon via interpretation of the perception) (Siegel 2010). The same point applies to the intuitions described above, whose significance strikes us as so obvious as to not require interpretation. Any content that can be ascribed to the intuition is also attributable to a post-interpretive thought or judgment. The advantage of Interpretationalism is that it has the means to explain the effortful, as well as the automatic. It can account for one's response upon first encountering the Gettier problem, as well as one's response upon revisiting it for the tenth time.

In addition, epistemology paints a distorted picture of intuitions. Traditionally, epistemologists have focused on *non-thought-experimental* intuitions more than *thought-experimental* intuitions. More specifically, they have focused on intuitions in response to paradigmatic analytic and/or necessary statements (e.g., $1+1=2$, *All bachelors are unmarried males*). Intuitions elicited by such claims are seemingly propositional. This is because, in such cases, one intuits as a result of directly entertaining a proposition. It seems obvious to us that the proposition *causes* the intuition, so we are inclined to think of the proposition as the intuition's content. Thought-experimental intuitions just aren't this straightforward. They involve imagining a host of propositions, any of which could be causally responsible for the intuition. In short, the model of intuitions on which Propositionalism appears to be based does not straightforwardly generalize to thought-experimental intuitions. Intuitions are *heterogeneous* (Nado 2014). This is not to say that any given theory will only be capable of explaining, at most, one type of intuition.

On the contrary, the ability to account for a variety of different intuitions remains an important theoretical virtue. Rather, we should not merely *assume* that any given theory of intuition will be all-encompassing.

6.2 *Justification (& Other Theoretical Roles)*

Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves why intuitions are posited in the first place. First and foremost, intuitions are putative justifiers. More specifically, they are taken to explain how it is that some putatively a priori beliefs are *immediately* justified – that is, how a priori beliefs can be justified without, in turn, being *justified by* other beliefs. In this way, they serve as justificatory regress stoppers. If intuitions are to fulfill this role, one might think, they must be propositional. One option is to claim that intuitions just are the foundational beliefs themselves; here the philosopher might argue that they are self-justifying beliefs. Another option is to claim that intuitions stand to subsequent *intuitive* beliefs much like perceptual experiences stand to subsequent *perceptual* beliefs. In this case, foundational beliefs receive justification from without, from an independent non-doxastic source. Even in the latter case, it is natural to think of intuitions as bearing the same content as the beliefs they justify. Intuitions, then, not only transmit justification; they transmit content. Admittedly, this view is nice and neat; often, however, psychology isn't. Unfortunately, epistemology-driven transcendental reasoning of this sort cannot ensure psychological plausibility. There are good reasons to believe that intuition, like perceptual experience, just isn't this neat; the locution “intuits that” is a misleading, albeit otherwise convenient shorthand.³⁷

³⁷ Consider locutions of the form ‘*S* perceives that *p*’ – for instance, *S perceives that the cat is on the mat*. This manner of speaking is ubiquitous in both philosophical practice and everyday life. And, to be sure, its usefulness for discursive and folk psychological purposes is hard to deny. *Why does Tom believe that the plane landed? Because he saw that the plane landed*. It would be a mistake, however, to shape our conception of perceptual experience – or even our understanding of what philosophers and scientists mean by “perceptual experience” – around such talk. Often philosophers speak in this way as a kind of shorthand. Their intention is not to identify a subject's perceptual experience as the bearer of some conceptually-structured propositional content. Many such philosophers (e.g.,

Still, even if they are messy and require interpretation, intuitions can fulfill a variety of theoretical roles. We can still appeal to our intuitions when our articulable reasons bottom out. We can rely on them to determine whether some theories are more worth pursuing than others. And we can still draw on them to launch and/or fine-tune philosophical theories. In each case, we need only interpret them first. Finally, insofar as one takes an intuition to support some proposition, one thereby acquires some *prima facie* justification for believing that proposition. In fact, if we assume that intuitions serve the above evidential and justificatory roles, then the process of determining an intuition's cognitive significance will coincide with that of determining which proposition(s) it defeasibly justifies. As for whether Interpretationalism can ensure *immediate* (or *foundational*) justification, that is another essay for another time.

7 CONCLUSION

Propositionalism offers a nice and neat account of thought-experimental intuitions. One need only attend to a thought experiment and – lo and behold – a proposition comes to mind, appearing true (or false, as the case may be). The appeal of such a quixotic picture is hard to overstate. How simple things would be, if only it were true. Unfortunately, the inner workings of our minds need not conform to even our best transcendental considerations; much less must it fold to the wishful thinking of epistemologists. This brings us to my negative project. The arguments presented in Section 5 converge on the same general conclusion – Propositionalism (or, more specifically, the claim that intuitions bear consciously accessible propositional content) is psychologically implausible.

Peacocke 1992; Crane 2009) outright deny that perceptual experiences are conceptually or even propositionally structured. Insofar as such philosophers are engaged in ascribing content in such contexts, the objects of their content-ascriptions are not perceptual experiences, strictly speaking, but rather downstream cognitive states, such as outputs of perceptual recognition (where perceptual recognition typically involves the automatic application of conceptual background knowledge to a percept) (see, for instance, Tye (1995)). Intuition reports, on my view, are relevantly similar. When someone makes an utterance of the form 'S intuits that *p*,' what is being reported is not in fact the intrinsic content of an intuition; it is, if anything, the content of a post-intuitive cognitive state.

Enter the positive project. For too long, Propositionalism has been thought to be the only game in town. And so it has been treated, for better or worse, as the sole occupant of the space of theoretical options. By introducing Interpretationalism, I have brought to light a non-Propositionalist alternative. This alternative not only circumvents the objections posed in Section 5; it exhibits additional theoretical virtues. It is even equipped to explain away the appearance of intuitive content.

Ultimately, Interpretationalism preserves much of what we think we know about thought-experimental intuitions. For one, Interpretationalism maintains that intuitions are (1) phenomenally conscious, (2) spontaneous, and (3) non-theoretical. It merely excises (4), which – as argued in the previous section – results in a more coherent conception of intuition itself. Secondly, intuitions (as conceived by Interpretationalism) are still capable of fulfilling a variety of theoretical roles. They can still justify, adjudicate, and so on. One need only add a step. In these ways, Interpretationalism retains the strengths of Propositionalism while jettisoning its weaknesses.

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