Intuition can fail, and this is good news!

A Reply to Crispin Wright

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Introduction

State of the Art in contemporary Literature

- Bealer & Strawson (1992)
- Sosa (1996)
- BonJour (1997)
- Hales (2000), (2012)
- Bengson (2013), (2015)
- Chudnoff (2019)

Introduction

Intuition as a Source of Epistemic Justification

- No color without extension — *Philosophy*
- A square cannot have five sides — *Mathematics*
- Either a sentence or its negation has to be true— *Logic*

Introduction

Opponents of Intuition

Is intuition mysterious, supernatural, and self-congratulatory?

- Wright (2004)
- Earlenbaugh and Molyneux (2009)

Introduction

Features of Intuition

- Educability
- Fallibility
- Analogy with perception
- Necessity provider
- Non-inferential character
- Immediacy

Wright’s Argument

The Analogy between Intuition and Perception

Intuition : Intuitional truths = Perception : Empirical truths

NB: the analogy has *non-symmetric* flavor **from Perception to Intuition**

Wright’s cases of study —

Intuition: *Modus Ponendo Ponens* (MPP)

Perception: “I have left my keys in the garage” (K)

Wright’s Argument

“Intuition, whatever exactly it may be, if it is to give us recognition of the validity of MPP, will have to be capable of going to work in the context of an antecedent understanding of the conditional and an open-mindedness about the status of MPP — just as perception can go to work in the context of an understanding of the proposition that I have left my keys in the garage and an open-mindedness about the truth-value of that claim. The point is, however, that there is no such possible context. It is constitutive of an understanding of the conditional to acknowledge, at least implicitly in one’s practice, the rule of MPP”.

Wright (2004), p. 167.

Wright’s Argument

Understanding and Decision

- **Perception**: *Detachability* of understanding-decision;

Example: I have left my keys in the garage.

- **Intuition**: *Undetachability* of understanding-decision;

Example: *Modus Ponens.*

Wright’s Argument

“An understanding of the conditional cannot coherently be supposed to provide the material for an intuitive recognition that the rule is sound. If it could, there ought to be such a thing as understanding the conditional perfectly yet — because of a failure of one’s intuitive faculty rather than one’s faculty of comprehension — failing to be arrested by the validity of the rule. That there is no such possibility means that here there is no work for intuition to do — there is no space for it to work in”.

Ibid., p. 168.

Wright’s Argument

3 Principles

- **Failure of Decision** — For a faculty F to have a role in the decision of a sentence S, there must be a situation in which it is possible to understand the meaning of S but, because of a failure of F, not knowing its truth-value;
- **Two Steps** — The decision of the truth-value of a sentence S should consist of two different steps: 1) the understanding of S; 2) the application of a faculty F to decide its truth-value;
- **Two faculties** —The decision of any sentence S involves a faculty F different from the one used to achieve its understanding.

Wright’s Argument

First Formulation: The Analogy between Perception and Intuition

1. If intuition works in some way, it has to work as perception does (from Analogy);

2. For any empirical sentence S in which perception is at work it is possible to distinguish between two steps:

A. The understanding of S;

B. The decision of the truth-value of S — where B. entails A. but not viceversa (from Two steps)

3. Logical knowledge has not the structure described in 2 (from MPP)

Hence, Logical knowledge is not based on intuition.

Wright’s Argument

Second Formulation: Possibility of Failures

- For any sentence S related to perception, i) there is at least a case in which S is understandable but cannot be decided, and ii) S cannot be decided because of a failure of perception (from K);

Hence, perception has a direct role in the decision of empirical sentences (from Failure of Decision).

By contrast,

- We have no cases in which i) MPP is understandable but cannot be decided, and ii) MPP cannot be decided because of a failure of intuition (from MPP)

Hence, intuition plays no role in the decision of MPP.

Sentences which do *not* fit Two Steps

Husserl's material *a priori* & Benardete's analytic *a posteriori*

- If an object is completely red, then it cannot be completely green;
- No colour without extension.

Husserl (1901, § 11)

- A sound has an amplitude;
- Each occurrence of lightness is associated with a saturation.

Benardete (1958)

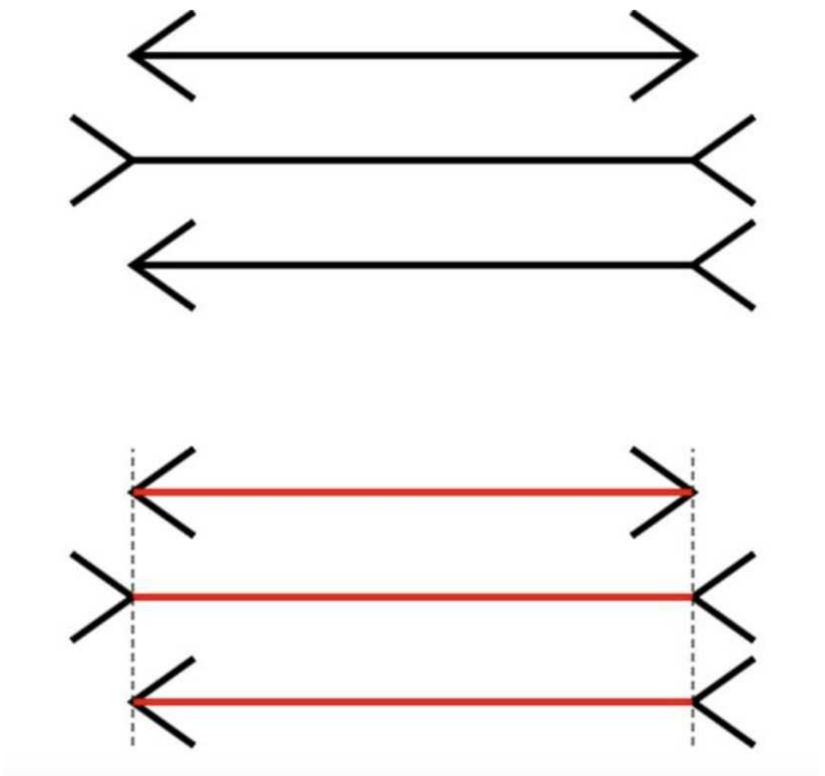
Systematic and accidental Failures

Systematics failures

Systematic failures — Errors that a given faculty cannot avoid making. They are part of its standard working procedure, even though they lead to erroneous beliefs. These failures are independent of both the behavior of the epistemic subject and the environment in which they occur. Hence, they cannot be rectified. Example are Müller-Lyer’s arrows, Adelson’s checker shadow illusion.

Systematic and accidental failures

Müller-Lyer’s arrows



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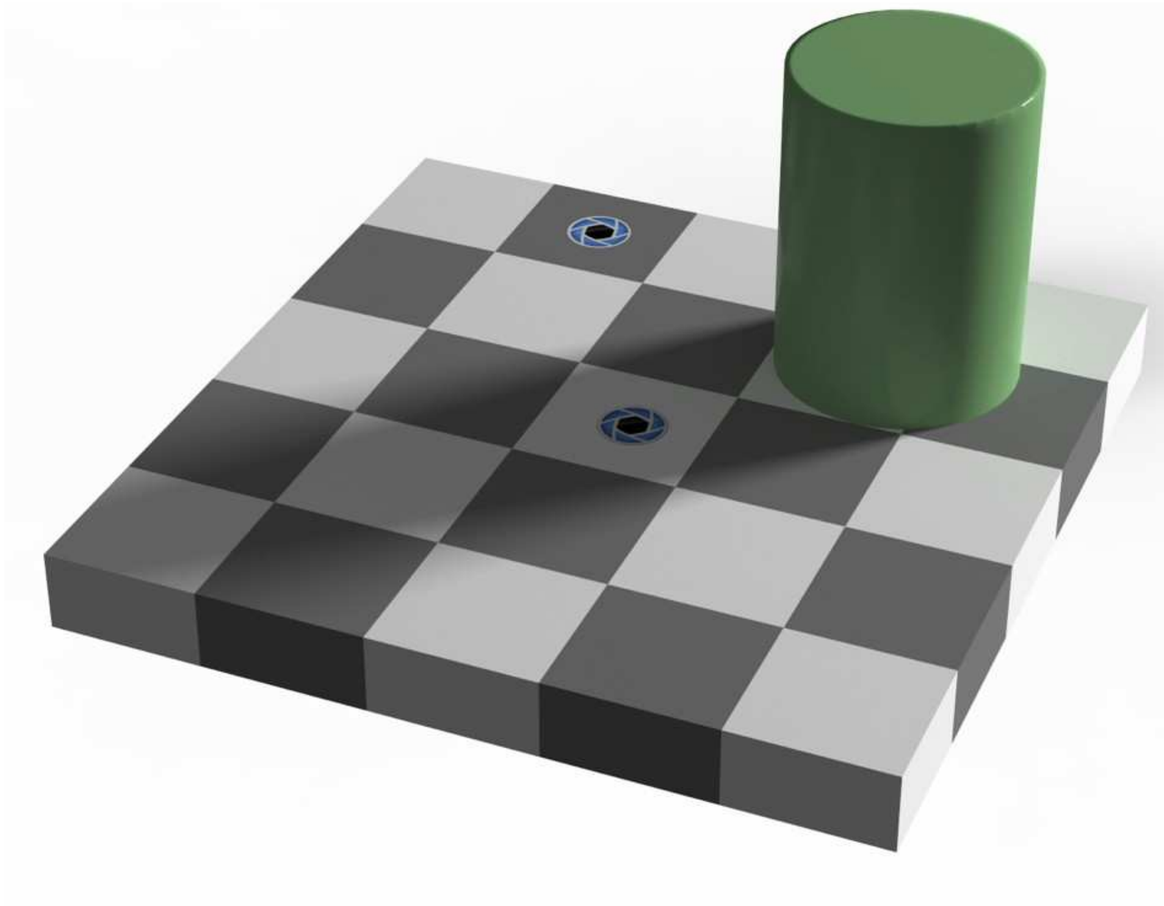
Systematic and accidental failures

Adelson’s checker shadow illusion



Systematic and accidental failures

Accidenal failures

Accidental failures — Errors that can be rectified. They occur either when a given faculty does not work as intended, or because of certain environmental causes. Examples are blindness, amnesia, and hallucinations.

Sentences which *do* fit Two Steps

Systematic failures of intuition

- Unrestricted version of Comprehension Principle;
- Universal set;
- Infinite set;
- Definition of knowledge as justified-true-beliefs (JTB).

Sentences which do *not* fit Two Steps

Is there room for intuition?

- If an object is completely red, then it cannot be completely green;
- No colour without extension.
- A sound has an amplitude;
- Each occurrence of lightness is associated with a saturation.

are decided either *a priori* (by intuition or linguistic competence) or *a posteriori* (by perception).

Sentences which do *not* fit Two Steps

Against justification by linguistic competence

- They do not have the shape of linguistic truths — See Chisholm (1976, pp. 18-20)
- They are true in every language — See BonJour (1997, pp. 51-58)
- They cannot be grounded on conceptual containment — See Benardete (1958)
- That their decision is required to be a competent speaker does not speak in favor of their linguistic character — Compare to the case of “1+1=2” for the non-logicist.

Sentences which do *not* fit Two Steps

Against justification by perception

Is there any failure of perception that could prevent the decision of these sentences?

- Suppose that after having learned what is a color, you go blind. Consider also that you have experimented certain colors, but not all of them. Consider in particular that you do not have experimented cyan. Then, someone asks you whether a single spot of cyan has a brightness or not, and whether a single spot of color can be both cyan and yellow. Of course, even if blind, you can reply.

Hence, intuition or conceptual competence is enough to decide the sentences in question.

- Justification by perception is already ruled out by Wright’s argument.

Against Wright’s argument

Why Wright’s Argument does not go?

Wright’s Argument against intuition is both

- INEFFECTIVE because intution can suit Two Steps;
- WRONG because intuition should not suit Two Steps in all its applications.

Against Wright’s argument

Suspicious inversion

Wright’s argument seems to rest on a “suspicious inversion” from the very plausible claim

From Failure to Role: If a failure of a faculty F impedes to decide the truth-value of a sentence S letting its understanding possible, then F has a role in deciding the truth-value of S;

to the much less plausible claim

From Role to Failure: If a faculty F has a role in deciding the truth-value of a sentence S, then it must be possible for F to fail, and this failure must impede the decision of S.

What can we learn from ruling out Wright's argument?

- The relevance of failure for intuition;
- The distinction between fallible and infallible intuitions;
- How intuition interacts with linguistic competence.

BonJour's *internally* and *externally* correctable mistakes

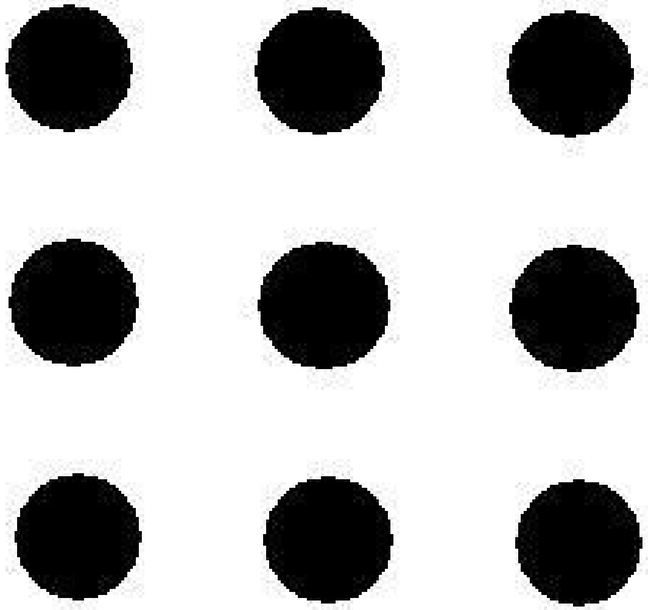
- A mistake is *internally* correctable if just by being more careful and analyzing the erroneous judgment, it is possible to find it out and correct it.
- A mistake is *externally* correctable if it is correctable and can be individuated only by appealing to something external to the cognitive process which is in play.

NB: Intuition is not Belief — Sosa (1996), Bengson (2015).

BonJour doesn't focus enough on this distinction.

Intuition can be educated! Hales (2012), Chudnoff (2019)

Maier’s Nine-Dot Problem



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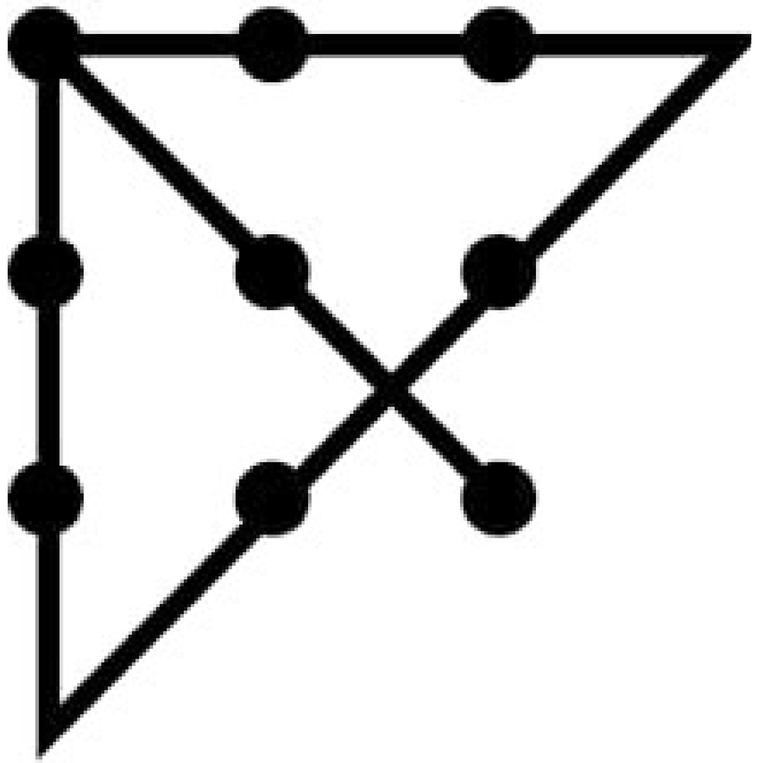

Open issues of educability of intuition:

- These are examples of education of intuition or of education of imagining (the visual character seems very relavant)?

- How systematic errors interacts with educability (consider perception)?

Modest Foundationalism

Hales (2000)

Certain sentences are directly justified by intuition;

Hence, contrary to modern foundationalism, fallibilism is accepted.

Conclusions

- If we take immediacy to be the negation of **Two Steps**, both non-immediate and immediate applications of intuition are plausible;
- Immediacy of intuition (where applies) is not good evidence of its linguistic/conceptual nature;
- Failures of intuition must be distinguished from failure of judgment (internal correctability and social educability of intuition);
- Failures of intuition ask for a modest version of foundationalism.

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Merci beaucoup!