

theorization. If so, then Robertson's criticism of Slote's claim about paradoxes actually serves in part to support Slote's claim that theorization is necessary for ethics.

If Robertson's claim is that deliberative paradoxes are a common, necessary, or welcome feature of the moral life, then I agree. However, Slote's first two paradoxes seem to be logical paradoxes. And it is not clear at all that logical paradoxes are to be embraced or welcomed. Again, one task of philosophy is to root out logical paradoxes, whether of ordinary moral thought or of theorization. However, we cannot just leave it at that. A logical contradiction is an embarrassment for both common sense and ethical theory. It is the task of philosophy to root out, but also to resolve these paradoxes. Failure to do so counts *prima facie* against any position, theoretical or otherwise. That is not to say that we must never, under any circumstances, accept a contradiction. But the reasons for accepting it must be weighty. I think, then, that Slote is right to claim that logical paradoxes are to be avoided. Robertson's claims about deliberative paradoxes seem to miss the point.

Despite these criticisms, I think Robertson's paper offers many good arguments and important insights. He has clearly succeeded in advancing our understanding of the question whether theorization is needed in ethics.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chris Robertson, "Slote on Ordinary Moral Thought and Theorization," *Southwest Philosophy Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> For an intriguing discussion of similar apparent paradoxes, see Thomas Nagel's essay "Moral Luck," reprinted in *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Surely Slote did not intend to use the word 'uncommon' in a purely statistical sense. Otherwise people with very uncommon beliefs, such as the belief that watching *Hee Haw* is morally obligatory, would count as moral theorists.

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## Everything Is What It Is, and Not Another Thing: Comments on Austin

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In his paper "On the Alleged Irrationality of Ethical Intuitionism: Are Ethical Intuitions Epistemically Suspect?" Michael Austin defends ethical intuitionism against several objections having to do with the epistemic credentials of beliefs arrived at via ethical intuitionism. What I want to do here is to highlight two aspects of the overall position to which I take Austin to be committed, and to see whether they can be sustained when subjected to pressure from one of the objections to ethical intuitionism that Austin entertains.

To specify the aspects of Austin's position that I want to focus on, let me start by reviewing some of the things that Austin says in order to characterize ethical intuitionism. He writes, "I take an ethical intuition to be a type of synthetic *a priori* insight into the necessary character of reality specifically concerning that which is right and/or good" (p. 205), and he adds that he regards "ethical intuition as a source of foundationally justified belief" (p. 205). He goes on to write that

One common objection to EI [ethical intuitionism] is that it involves a mysterious faculty of intuition. The claim is that there is a problem with asserting the existence of a faculty which can directly discern moral properties and/or the truth of moral principles. (p. 205)

The implication, clearly, is that there is *not* a problem with asserting the existence of such a faculty.

So there is a lot going on in ethical intuitionism as Austin understands it. But I want to focus on just the following thesis, which I take to be a small part of Austin's overall position: There is a faculty of intuition, one that can directly discern the truth of moral principles in a way that makes these principles foundationally justified. Later, I'll be particularly interested in the following two aspects of Austin's position, which are implicit in the claim I just mentioned: (1) the *directness* of the way in which the truth of moral principles is discerned, and (2) the *foundational* character of the justification of the principles whose truth is thus discerned.

Having identified the aspects of Austin's view on which I want to focus—and I'll return to them below—I now want to turn to one of the objections that Austin entertains. The objection I have in mind is what W. D. Hudson says about what it takes for a person to credibly claim to know something—in particular, (1) Hudson's requirement that in order for a person to credibly claim to know something, she must be able to give a satisfactory response to the question of *how* she knows it, which is Hudson's third condition for knowledge, and (2) Hudson's allegation that an answer to this question consisting of "I know it by intuition" is basically vacuous (Austin, pp. 205–206).

In response to this objection, Austin claims that Hudson wrongly assumes that when someone claims to know something by intuition, then she has nothing more

to say about how she knows it.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Austin writes,

If to know...x by intuition is to know...x in virtue of an apparent rational insight into the necessary character of reality, then the intuitionist account is neither vacuous nor redundant, and does do at least some explanatory work with respect to the third condition for knowledge. Whether or not it is a satisfactory account is a separate issue, but it at least is a substantive answer to the question. (p. 206)

How well, though, does the intuitionist account fare in specific cases that we might consider? I worry that if we consider some examples of things that people might claim to know by intuition, and if we consider how the intuitionist account fares as an answer to Hudson's question, then we will not be much reassured, by Austin's remarks, that the intuitionist really has a satisfactory answer to Hudson's question.<sup>3</sup>

In order to set the stage for an assessment of the adequacy of Austin's intuitionist account as an answer to Hudson's question in the context of moral judgments, which is the context with which Hudson is particularly concerned, I want to reflect, for a moment, on some non-moral things that I think one might fairly reasonably claim to know by intuition. These things that I'm going to mention are from Lawrence Bonjour's book *In Defense of Pure Reason*, which Austin cites frequently in his endnotes and which, I infer from Austin's citations, espouses a version of intuitionism that Austin finds congenial. But obviously the usefulness, for our purposes, of the following statements is independent of whether Austin accepts or rejects any or all of Bonjour's positions; I'm just mentioning these statements as examples of things in regard to which, it seems to me, the appeal to intuition is a reasonably good answer to Hudson's question. So here are Bonjour's examples:

nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time. (p. 100)

if a certain person A is taller than a certain person B and person B is taller than a certain person C, then person A is taller than person C. (pp. 102–103)

there are no round squares. (p. 103)

two plus three equals five. (p. 104)

all cubes have twelve edges. (p. 105)

[If] either David ate the last piece of cake or else Jennifer ate it and...Jennifer did not eat it [then] David ate the last piece of cake. (p. 105)

Now if a person says any one of these things, and claims to know it by intuition, or (in Austin's phrase) claims to know it in virtue of an apparent rational insight into the necessary character of reality, or says something else along these lines, then that might be all right. Or, at least, these seem to be statements of the sort in regard to which the intuitionist account is most satisfactory as an answer to Hudson's question. But now suppose that our person says that she also knows, again by intuition, the following *moral* judgments:

[the principle of egoism:] [One's] own happiness is an end which it is irrational for [one] to sacrifice to any other.

[the principle of utilitarianism:] [T]he conduct which, under any given circumstances, is objectively right, is that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness on the whole.

By far the most valuable things, which we can know or imagine, are certain states

of consciousness, which may roughly be described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects.

[K]nowledge, and in a less degree what we may for the present call 'right opinion', are states of mind good in themselves.

Now all four of these statements are, *verbatim*, things that moral philosophers have claimed to know by intuition: the first two were claimed by Sidgwick<sup>2</sup>—who was more than a little troubled by the fact that they're incompatible (p. 386, n. 4)—the third by Moore (p. 237), and the last by Ross (pp. 138–139). Now my worry, as far as the plausibility of ethical intuitionism is concerned, is that in each of these cases, invoking one's faculty of intuition in answer to Hudson's question of "How do you know that?" seems far less satisfying than it did in regard to the non-moral statements I mentioned above, and may well be so much less satisfying that it is, alas, quite unsatisfactory.<sup>3</sup> And since each of the statements I just cited were ones that classical, card-carrying ethical intuitionists (Sidgwick, Moore, and Ross) thought were precisely the sorts of things that could be said to be known by intuition, the apparent inadequacy of invoking one's faculty of intuition in answer to Hudson's question in regard to *these* moral judgments suggests that invoking one's faculty of intuition in answer to Hudson's question in regard to *any* moral judgment is going to be at least as unsatisfactory.

I can think of several responses that Austin might offer in defense of the intuitionist's answer to Hudson's question, but here I'll mention just the one that seems to me to be most plausible. This response is to claim that invoking one's faculty of intuition is actually a much more substantive answer to Hudson's question than I have so far acknowledged. Austin might claim that exercising one's faculty of intuition involves things that I have neglected to mention, such as testing a general principle that we're trying to determine the truth of against the specific judgments that we are inclined to make in regard to particular cases. Indeed, here is what Austin writes in response to the charge that ethical intuitionism offers no resources for resolving disagreements such as the one between consequentialists and deontologists:

Consequentialists and deontologists disagree on what is fundamentally important in ethics. However, the methodology used in seeking to resolve this disagreement is an *intuitionist* methodology. Philosophers seek counterexamples to the definition of morality provided by the proponents of these moral theories. The deontologist proffers cases in which the morally correct action does not seem to be that which will produce the best consequences, as in the case where we consider the morality of taking one person's life in order to dispense her organs to save the lives of several other people. This is precisely how the intuitionist says we should proceed. . . . This is a common practice in moral philosophy, a practice which exhibits how the intuitionist says we should proceed and illustrates the resources of EI for dealing with conflicting moral beliefs. (pp. 208–209)

Now if this method is characteristic of intuitionism, then invoking one's faculty of intuition is a much more substantive answer to Hudson's question than I have so far acknowledged. For when one asserts the utilitarian principle, for example, and answers Hudson's question by invoking one's faculty of intuition, then what one means by that may well be something like the following answer: "I've considered

the implications of utilitarianism in regard to a wide range of moral issues, such as recycling, truth-telling, famine relief, progressive taxation, mandatory education for children, and unilateral nuclear disarmament, and its implications all seem perfectly acceptable to me. So I know, by intuition, that the utilitarian principle is true." So it would appear that invoking one's faculty of intuition is a much better answer to Hudson's question than I have been suggesting.

Now it is clear that the kind of answer just considered is a much better answer to Hudson's question than what I have been suggesting is conveyed by invoking one's faculty of intuition. What is *not* clear is that the kind of answer just considered is available to a genuine ethical intuitionist. For the kind of answer just considered is characteristic of the method of reflective equilibrium, in which one checks one's moral judgments against one another in order to get one's moral judgments into some kind of coherent system, and reflective equilibrium is generally understood as an alternative to intuitionism, not as a version of it.<sup>4</sup> More to the point, the kind of answer just considered seems to be precluded by the two features of ethical intuitionism, as Austin understands it, that I highlighted at the beginning of this paper: (1) the *directness* of the way in which moral principles are seen to be true, and (2) the *foundational* justification of the principles whose truth is thus discerned. For the kind of answer just considered seems to include trains of inference sufficiently intricate to violate any reasonable standard of *directness* of the way in which moral principles are seen to be true, and the kind of answer just considered seems more akin to some form of coherentism than to any form of foundationalism.

It seems, then, that the best response to Hudson's question that I can imagine Austin offering—that which characterizes an exercise of one's faculty of intuition as akin to using the method of reflective equilibrium—is not actually compatible with ethical intuitionism as it is understood by Austin. And thus it seems doubtful that Hudson's question can be adequately answered from within the confines of intuitionism.

G. E. Moore was fond of Bishop Butler's remark that "Everything is what it is, and not another thing" (Moore, p. 29 and p. 254). He meant it, I think, in regard to moral statements, since he was so concerned that they not be confused with (by being thought identical in meaning to) empirical ones. But Butler's maxim is apt here as well, not in support of ethical intuitionism, as Moore meant it, but as a caveat regarding defenses of it. For I have argued that although Austin has given us an effective reply to Hudson's objection, the doctrine to which this reply belongs may not, in fact, be the doctrine of ethical intuitionism. And thus I suggest that Austin's task is to establish that ethical intuitionism is what he says it is, and not another thing.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> To be fair, I should note that Austin also queries the propriety of insisting, as Hudson does, that if a person cannot answer the question of how she knows something, then it must be denied that, in fact, she knows it (p. 206). But I shall follow Austin in examining the intuitionist's response to Hudson's challenge on the assumption that Hudson's challenge is a reasonable one.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 498 for Sidgwick's intuitionist endorsement of the principle of egoism, and see p. 411 for Sidgwick's statement of the principle of utilitarianism and p. 387 for his intuitionist endorsement of it.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Williams's judgment is even harsher: "the appeal to intuition as a faculty explained nothing. It seemed to say that [some] truths were known, but there was no way in which they were known. 'Intuition' is not much of an explanation when it is applied to what are necessary truths, but with ethical beliefs it is worse" (p. 94).

<sup>4</sup> On reflective equilibrium's repudiation of intuitionism, see John Rawls (pp. 18–19 and pp. 42–45), William H. Shaw (pp. 129–130), Norman Daniels (p. 4), and Brad Hooker (p. 15).

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