

Conference *Intuitions in Ethics*

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Until relatively recently, only few philosophers regarded reliance on intuitions as a serious option in moral philosophy. Influential critics such as Richard Hare, Richard Brandt and Peter Singer dismissed moral intuitions as uncritical or mere prejudices, and John Mackie's influential critique of intuitionist epistemology is still a major point of reference in current debates.

The last few decades, however, have seen a dramatic change in the debate on intuitions in ethics. Following John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, many ethicists have come to believe that relying on intuitions is perfectly acceptable and even that doing ethics without reference to intuitions is impossible. Extensive discussion of classical and more recent forms of intuitionism has also shown that standard objections to the appeal to intuitions in moral philosophy are far from conclusive.

Yet, despite the widespread agreement that ethics cannot dispense with intuitions, many important questions about intuitions remain unanswered. There is no common understanding of the nature and role of moral intuitions and philosophers disagree as to which theoretical assumptions are presupposed by assigning weight to intuitions. Whilst some ethicists see reliance on moral intuitions as part of the attempt to achieve reflective equilibrium between an ethical theory and considered moral judgements, others understand intuitions to be analogous to perceptions or regard them as a form of a priori judgement. At the same time, new challenges to intuitions' purported justificatory or methodological role have been formulated on the basis of psychological and neurological studies, questioning traditional views about the epistemic status of intuitions.

A notable feature of the renewed interest in moral intuitions is the frequent reference to ancient ethics, in particular to elements of Aristotelian ethics. The method of reflective equilibrium, for example, can be seen as a revival of Aristotle's view that ethical theories should be tested against 'reputable opinions' (*endoxa*), and philosophers who understand intuitive moral judgement as analogous to perception find a model in Aristotle's good judge, the *phronimos*, or in his notion of direct perception (*aisthesis*).

This conference aims to bring together moral philosophers interested in moral epistemology to discuss questions concerning the methodological and justificatory role that intuitions can play in ethics: What are moral intuitions? How (if at all) can intuitions transfer warrant onto moral beliefs? What is the relation between the method of reflective equilibrium and epistemological intuitionism? How do moral intuitions relate to moral emotions? Which metaphysical assumptions are compatible with or implied by views that ascribe to intuitions a justificatory role for moral beliefs? Can different forms of intuitionism survive the major challenges, from metaphysical worries and scepticism concerning the reliability of intuitions to the charge that reference to intuitions leaves everything unexplained? Does epistemological intuitionism in ethics have implications for normative ethics?

Furthermore, the conference aims to investigate the observed appeals to ancient ethics, specifically with regard to their systematic import: How far have current systematic inquiries into moral intuitions been shaped by engagement with ancient ethics? Have elements from ancient ethics been transformed when relocated into the modern debate on intuitions? To what extent can current debates on intuitions in ethics be advanced by drawing on ancient philosophical resources?

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