Intuitions, Paradox Cases, and Rationality

Non-reductive accounts of intuitions maintain that intuitions are a *sui generis* kind of psychological state. According to Timothy Williamson's *reductive* account, intuitions are simply beliefs or inclinations to believe. Whereas it is obvious that a belief is not *sufficient* for an intuition, I argue that a belief is not *necessary* for an intuition either. Non-reductionists like George Bealer and Ernest Sosa have argued that if we solve a paradox and come to believe that one of the premises *p* is false, we sometimes keep the intuition that *p*. Therefore, intuitions are not beliefs. But the reductionist's challenge is not that easy to master. The reductionist might simply deny that she keeps having the intuition that *p* when she has solved the paradox and believes that *not-p*. My argument therefore focuses on our representation of unsolved or hard-to-solve paradoxes (such as *The Lottery Paradoxes,* or *The Preface Paradox*).

According to an account that reduces intuitions to beliefs, since '*S* has the intuition that *p*, and the intuition that *q*, and the intuition that *r*' is true in a paradox case, it is also true that *S* has the belief that *p*, and the belief that *q*, and the belief that *r*. If *S* believed *p*, *q*, and *r* altogether, *S* would be irrational. However, we are not irrational if a set of contradictory propositions is intuitive to us. Therefore, intuitions are not beliefs.

I discuss several ways of how the reductionist can face this challenge. Williamson's account of intuitions offers one way. To have the intuition that *p* is either to believe that *p* or to be consciously inclined to believe that *p*. If *S* has no contradicting belief *not-p*, her intuition that *p* is just a belief that *p*. But if *S* has a belief *not-p*, her intuition that *p* is a conscious inclination to believe *p*. *S* can have an inclination to believe *p* even if *S* firmly believes *not-p* and is not in the least danger of giving way to her inclination. In paradox cases, at least one of the attitudes towards *p, q,* and *r* are inclinations to believe, whereas the others are beliefs.

I argue against this account as follows. Suppose that *S* firmly believes *not-p* and has no evidence whatsoever against it. To believe *p* then would simply be irrational. I moreover take it that it would be irrational for *S* to be inclined to form an irrational belief. If *S* firmly believes that Geneva *is not* the capital of Switzerland, it would be irrational for her to believe that Geneva *is* the capital of Switzerland. It would be equally irrational for her to be inclined to believe that Geneva is the capital of Switzerland. However, S can have the belief that Geneva *is not* the capital of Switzerland and the intuition that Geneva *is* the capital of Switzerland without thereby being irrational.

I therefore propose the following analysis for intuitions. When *S* has the intuition that p, *S* is *not committed to the truth of p*. Since *S* cannot rationally believe *p* and not be committed to *p* being true, intuitions are not beliefs. If *S* believes that *p*, *S* is committed to a further belief, namely to the belief that the content of the belief is true. *S* is furthermore committed not to believe *not-p* and to believe *q* if *q* is entailed by *p* – given that *S* believes that *q* is entailed by *p*. For instance, if *S* believes that Paris is the capital of France, *S* is committed to believe that London is not the capital of France, that Berlin is not the capital of France etc., given that she believes that Paris is neither London nor Berlin etc. This is not so in the case of an intuition. *S* is not committed to the belief that the content of her intuition that *p* is true, and *S* is not committed not to believe *not-p* or to believe *q* if she believes that *q* is entailed by *p*.

There is a further feature of intuitions that distinguishes them from beliefs and guesses, which is that intuitions are *more resistant to conflicting evidence* than rational beliefs and guesses. I argue that the conjunction of both features distinguishes intuitions from beliefs and guesses and explains why we are not irrational in paradox cases.