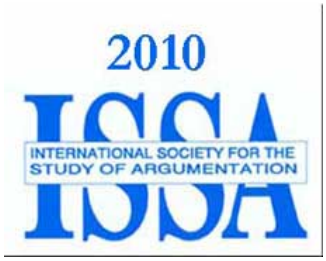
ISSA Proceedings 2010 – Reason & Intuition: The Kisceral Mode Of Communication



There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 166.

1. I have facts, you have axioms, she has intuitions
In 1994 when I first wrote about multi-modal argumentation I described four modes arguers employ when putting forward arguments, making points, defending positions, and so on. The first three were the logical, the emotional, and the visceral, this last involving physical and contextual communication. The fourth mode, and the one I viewed as most likely to cause trouble and discomfort was the kisceral mode. Let me quote myself.
The term 'kisceral' derives from the Japanese word 'ki' which signifies energy, life-force, connectedness. I introduce it as a generic, non-value-laden term to cover a wide group of communicative phenomenon. The kisceral is that mode of communication that relies on the intuitive, the imaginative, the religious, the spiritual, and the mystical. It is a wide category used frequently beyond the halls of academe.

I will not reiterate here my arguments for pursuing the study of kisceral arguments within Argumentation Theory, except to say that from a descriptivist point of view, we need to examine all forms of argumentation used by real arguers. (Vide Gilbert, 1997; Willard, 1989).
My purpose here is to describe a number of forms of kisceral argument some of which are very familiar and academically acceptable in order to examine the difficulties that arise when we try to find order in what some think to be chaos.

To begin with, the kisceral, especially in the form of intuition has a long and proud philosophical tradition. Notable appeals to intuition have occurred within philosophy as put forth by Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, Gödel and Kuhn to name but

a few of many. Mathematics as well relies on intuition, and without it we would not be able to select a set of axioms. This tradition is deeply entrenched as it is regularly used in Philosophy, Mathematics, and a myriad of other disciplines. (Economics, after all, is entirely intuition.) Kisceral arguments are not only frequently used, but they are essential as well. Were it not for kisceral arguments we would always be facing infinite regress: first principles, axioms, loci, common knowledge all provide us a means for establishing other, more consequential and frangible truths (or, as I prefer, beliefs) that appeal back to and depend for their alethic status on intuitions that are not independently provable.

A long witness to the importance of intuition as an ultimate arbiter is Euclid's Fifth Axiom. The issue at stake was that this particular axiom was not deemed to be as obvious and intuitive as the other four. What is most crucial about this debate is not the results which, as we know were ultimately astounding, but, rather, *the fact of the debate itself.* The debate concerned, more than anything else, a sense of intuition, a *feeling* about what was right, what made sense, and what fit. As C. I. Lewis has said, "… we must, of course, appeal to intuition. A point of logic being in question, no other course is possible" (1932). So two important points emerge: first, an appeal to intuition is philosophically, mathematically, and scientifically acceptable, and, secondly, these intuitions are amenable to argument.

Like Euclid's Fifth, other undefended intuitions, i.e., kisceral arguments, go far back in philosophical history. *Tertium non datur*, The Law of the Excluded Middle [LEM], has been around since Aristotle, and remains unproven, i.e., it is a basal assumption that does not itself have independent backing. Indeed, there are those who would question its soundness and argue that it is not a worthy first principle. This group includes the philosophers C. I. Lewis, J. Lukasiewicz, L.E.W. Brouwer, and N. Belnap and A. Anderson, as well as a many other logicians and mathematicians. There have, in fact, been long and detailed debates about the LEM with attacks, defences and counter arguments. These arguments involve appeals to intuition that point for example, to consequences of the LEM and their absurdity. If we deny the authority of axiom A, the argument goes, then the result is consequence C, which is absurd, so, ergo, the LEM is true. Put formally, ~LEM à C, but ~C, so LEM. Unfortunately, this proof is an instance of *reductio ad absurdum* which itself depends on the LEM for its acceptability. As Sosa states, "opposition to the reliability of intuition appears to involve a self-defeating appeal

to intuition" (Sosa, 2006 643). In other words, it is circular reasoning in its most blatant form.

Consider also, the very idea of rejecting a consequence as absurd. The *OED* says that 'absurd' is derived from the Latin "ab" meaning "off" and "surdus" meaning "deaf." In other words, something sounds wrong, and is, "Out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical" (OED, 1971 11). Thus an absurdity is something that sounds wrong, or, using other senses, doesn't feel right, looks strange, or smells funny. But this just means that *identifying the absurd is exactly a kisceral activity.* It is our intuition that something is incongruous that allows us to apply the label. Unfortunately, individual intuitions vary widely across cultural, social, political, and other groups as well as between individuals. Even when conceptual frameworks are fairly well shared, intuitions can, as in the above logical and mathematical examples, disagree. (I say "unfortunately," but really, if we all agreed on everything it would be very boring, and there would be no such thing as philosophy.)

2. My Intuitions Are Sound, Yours Are Ill-Founded, Hers Are Mystical

We find ourselves in a dilemma. As philosophers and scientists we must rely on kisceral arguments in order to create our theories; they are the foundations of our intellectual edifices. It is the kisceral, that which is true (or accepted) but unproven that prevents the inevitable infinite regress that would otherwise appear in every argument we have. On the one hand we ourselves have principles that are accepted without argument, but on the other we want to limit the sorts of things that can be put forward as acceptable. Witness Parsons:

If we think of intuition as a fundamental source of knowledge, then in theoretical matters intuitions should be stable and intersubjective, but in many inquiries what is regarded as intrinsically plausible may depend on that particular context of inquiry, and moreover disagreements in "intuitions" are very common in most fields. (Parsons, 2000, pp. 304-305)

In other words, to use Toulmin's terminology (1958), different *fields* use different *warrants*, which in turn rely on different and potentially incompatible *backing*. And this brings us to the nub of the problem: we know we have to admit certain intuitions – there's simply no choice – but we do not want to admit others that we find highly objectionable. We want to accept without quibble, for example, that $1 + 1 = 2$, and that for any integer n, $n + 1$ is also an integer. But at the same time we want to reject the intuition that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad

luck, or that AIDS is a punishment from God brought down on homosexuals. This is a serious dilemma, and there is both good news and bad news. The bad news is that in many ways we cannot defeat the bad kisceral arguments while holding onto the good ones, but the good news is that we can reject them based on the qualities of the frameworks from which they flow.

First of all, we have to be clear that any and every assumption, every intuition, every kisceral insight or argument can be questioned – both the "good" ones and the "bad" ones, i.e., both the ones we like and the ones we do not like. There are arithmetics, for example, in which 1 + 1 = 2 does not work, i.e., addition as we normally apply it fails. Adding, for example, two drops of water to each other results in one drop of water; adding one colour plus one colour plus one colour does not result in three colours, but rather in one colour. These are not tricks, but examples of non-Diophantine arithmetics, a legitimate study in mathematics (Burgin, 2001). It is important for the ascendancy of what *we* might want to consider reasonable assumptions or strong kisceral arguments, that it is accepted that *all* intuitions, assumptions, and axioms rely upon and work within a conceptual framework. This may appear counter-intuitive, but when it comes to setting aside intuitions the strongest arguments can be made for or against the meta-level.

In most cases, intuitions are actually corollaries of higher level conceptual assumptions. That is to say, they are indeed supported by their own intuitional veracity or obviousness, but also flow from higher level intuitions. Axiomatic systems form the most obvious examples of such intuitional systems, with mathematics being a paradigm. Innumerable philosophical issues depend upon conflicts of foundational intuitions, which is why so many seem irresolvable. Within our own field of Argumentation Theory, the various schools also make foundational assumptions:

According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst, argumentation is a phenomenon of verbal communication which should be studied as a specific mode of discourse, characterized by the use of language for resolving a difference of opinion. The quality and possible flaws of argumentation are measured against criteria that are appropriate for the purpose of such discourse. (Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck Henkemans, 1996 275)

Compare this framework creating assumption to one propounded by an eristic sophist. In Pragma-Dialectics fallacies are those argumentative maneuvers which

interfere with the reasonable progress of a critical discussion, while in the latter theory they are tools to be used to win arguments.

In light of this I want to suggest a number of criteria that can be used to judge intuitions. I hasten to point out that these criteria are themselves intuitions, and all depend upon the basal axiom that, *no matter how strongly I believe something I may nonetheless be wrong.* Indeed, I am fond of telling my students that if, after their university education is complete, they can truly embrace that statement, then irrespective of anything else, their time was well spent. This axiom, which we may call the Principle of Defeasibility [PD], is exactly what separates a reasonable from an unreasonable intuition. Notice also that PD is reflexive and may itself be false; and that this paradox is part and parcel of PD, though an appeal to Gödel may help explain but not eliminate the *petitio*. PD then, is the foundational value for intuitions: a good intuition must be considered defeasible. This first point of judgment directly confronts one of the major concerns about intuitions which many of us regard as false, wrong, or silly.

It must be understood that the Principle of Defeasibility does not require one to believe that one *is* wrong, or even that one *will be* proven wrong; rather it requires that one believe that one *could* under some conceivable circumstances be wrong. How this comes about is immaterial: one might find empirical reasons, a more compelling but inconsistent intuition, or an unpalatable consequence leading to a *reductio*. One need not, as I suggested previously (Gilbert, 2008), even be required to know what circumstances would lead to the abandonment of the intuition. It suffices to accept that one *could,* under some, perhaps unforeseen, conditions abandon the assumption. (This, by the way, means that all theists are not, per the PD, made into agnostics.)

Sosa (2006) discusses the prejudice many have against intuition and in favour of perception. He makes an analogy between intuition and eye-witness testimony, pressing the point that observers are frequently mistaken about their perceptions and that witnesses to the same event can have dramatically varying accounts. Intuitions must be considered as frangible as eye-witness accounts, and the difference in intuitions among persons is no less to be expected than differing eye-witness testimony. He states,

whether one is having an intuition can serve as a legitimate ground for belief, … variation in intuition is (as with perception) reasonably understood as possibly a function of different perspectives, the fact of variation in intuition,

unaccompanied by constancy of justification, does not begin to undermine the claim that intuitions are systematically justificatorily relevant, and the epistemic role of intuition is not easily filled by other familiar abilities. (Sosa, 2006 643)

I want to take the juridical analogy somewhat further. Just as one might be convinced on the basis of a series of perceptions that are consistent and compelling that a is true *beyond a reasonable doubt,* so an intuition f might similarly be so believed, even though one is still accepting the Principle of Defeasibility. In other words, believing beyond a reasonable doubt is different from believing dogmatically. This results from other corollary consequences of the PD of which time does not permit a thorough discussion. Instead, I will simply mention some other aspects with only brief comments.

Persuasibility: Most frameworks have basal assumptions which cannot, in truth, be attacked. Mathematics has several, as does religion. Note that within the basal assumption many sorts of variations are possible. Thus, in one mathematics parallel lines never cross, while in another they eventually meet. Similarly, in some religions God responds to individual prayer, while in others She does not. In our own field we believe that argument is a better alternative than violence. However, in each of these areas, the basal assumption notwithstanding, a "good" framework is one that allows for discussion and *persuasibility*. In other words, since the Principle of Defeasibility says that any assumption might ultimately be false, it follows that one might be persuaded to change one's assumption.

Consquentiality: All frameworks have assumptions and all assumptions have consequences. One must, therefore, be prepared to accept the consequences of one's assumptions. Those consequences themselves are subject to intuitional inspection, and, so, one might have conflicting intuitions. Granted, that some frameworks allow for this and even embrace it, most do not. Of course, the strongest position one can take is to accept completely all the consequences of a position without qualm. This is especially easy in abstract or idle discussion, much less so in real pragmatic decision-making.

Evidential Responsibility: Part of having a reasonable attitude toward intuitions is a willingness to accept certain sorts of evidence as relevant. The parents who "just know" their child did not commit the crime alleged, may, at some point, yield in face of the evidence. The theist may abandon her belief when confronted with certain tragedies. The point is that when evidence speaks against an intuition it

must be addressed. *If* one is going to have a reasonable approach to kisceral arguments, a form we all use all the time, then we want to distinguish between reasonable and foolish intuitions.

3. Physics rests on reality, economics rests on models, astrology rests on superstition.

I have been arguing in the above that all knowledge depends on core intuitions, axioms or assumptions. Within various contexts, i.e., frameworks, fields, arenas, different assumptions hold sway. In order to argue within those arenas, in order to investigate those intuitions, we sometimes enter an arena for the purposes of argument. One way of considering my point is to suggest that if such an endeavour is impossible, then the framework is not a good one, and the intuition ought be eschewed. Of course, before anyone else can say it, let me point out that this relies on intuition itself. I have, elsewhere, argued that there are restrictions on what we can believe and how arguments may work (Gilbert, 2007), and these considerations apply here as well.

There is a great deal about intuition I have not touched upon, and a great many people working on it from different aspects. The process of having an intuition can be viewed in many different ways from the mystical combined with devotion and meditation (Chang, 1954), to cognitive processes essential to survival (Damasio, 1994). My approach is to examine its role in argumentation. The issue is not whether kisceral arguments are used, but, rather, how we can distinguish good ones from bad ones, *even allowing that the argument for such differentiating criteria must per force be circular.*

Moreover, the reduction approach, i.e., alleging that intuitions or hypotheses are closet rational processes will not work. By this I simply mean that the rationalist is usually very good at recasting any purportedly non-rational experience into a rational one. Indeed, whole clubs of rationalists band together to do just this, and a book entitled, *How We know What Isn't So*, by. Gilovich, (1991) for example, is completely devoted to an attack on such beliefs as ESP and alternative medicine. But consider Fricker:

It must be made clear that in describing the workings of intuition as typically subconscious I am not suggesting that the intuitive mode of thought is just thinly rational thought executed subconsciously. That view would be no more compelling (or, rather we should say, no more obligatory, for some people do hold

the view in question) than saying that when tennis players hit the ball they must be subconsciously making calculations about where to move and when to hit the ball, using split second estimates of its velocity, weight, shape, etc. This is surely unconvincing. (Fricker, 1995 p. 183)

We must, in other words, remember that the justification of an intuition is not its discovery, but its openness to investigation, plausibility, utility, and ability to withstand inquiry.

Many of us have reservations about intuitions, and to a great extent they are legitimate. However, the intuitions that give us pause are those that defy the Principle of Defeasibility and are not open to inspection or question. The dogmatic, the obsessed, the delusional are wrong, but we cannot defeat them other than by pointing out that non-defeasible axioms are dangerous and have historically never proven reliable.

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