

INTUITIONS AS EVIDENCE: AN ABDUCTIVE DEFENSE OF CENTRALITY

Las intuiciones como evidencia: Una defensa abductiva de Centralidad

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Abstract

This paper offers an abductive defense of *Centrality*, the thesis that intuitions are used as evidence or as a source of evidence within the method of cases. It is argued that Centrality provides a better explanation for key features of philosophical practice than its main rival, the *Mischaracterization Objection* (MISC+), which contends that philosophers rely on arguments, not intuitions, for their verdicts about thought experiments. The first section introduces the debate and clarifies the competing positions. The second section develops a *source-content model* of Centrality, defining intuitions as non-inferential intellectual seemings that grant *prima facie* evidential status to their propositional content. The third and final section presents the main abductive argument. It holds that Centrality offers a superior explanation for two essential practices of the method of cases: on the one hand, the immediate dialectical force of Gettier-style counterexamples; on the other, the practice of “biting the bullet” by accepting a counterintuitive conclusion and offering a corresponding error theory, as exemplified by Nozick’s rejection of the Closure Principle. The paper concludes that because Centrality offers a more parsimonious and explanatorily powerful account of these philosophical practices, it stands as the superior metatheory.

Key words: Intuitions; Evidence; Centrality; Mischaracterization Objection; Abductive Argument.

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una defensa abductiva de *Centralidad*, la tesis de que las intuiciones se utilizan como evidencia o como fuente de evidencia dentro del método de casos. Se argumenta que Centralidad proporciona una mejor explicación para características clave de la práctica filosófica que su principal rival, la *Objeción de la Caracterización Errónea* (MISC+), la cual sostiene que los filósofos se basan en argumentos, y no en intuiciones, para sus veredictos sobre experimentos mentales. La primera sección introduce el debate y clarifica las posiciones en competencia. La segunda sección desarrolla un modelo “fuente-contenido” de Centralidad, definiendo las intuiciones como pareceres intelectuales no

inferenciales que otorgan un estatus evidencial *prima facie* a su contenido proposicional. La tercera y última sección presenta el argumento abductivo principal. Este sostiene que Centralidad ofrece una explicación superior para dos prácticas esenciales del método de casos: por un lado, la fuerza inmediata de los contraejemplos tipo Gettier; por el otro, la práctica de “morder la bala” al aceptar una conclusión contraintuitiva y ofrecer una correspondiente “teoría del error”, como sucede con el rechazo de Nozick al Principio de Clausura. El artículo concluye que, debido a que Centralidad ofrece una explicación más parsimoniosa y con mayor poder explicativo para estas prácticas filosóficas, es la meta-teoría superior.

Palabras clave: Intuiciones; Evidencia; Centralidad; Objeción de la caracterización errónea; Argumento abductivo.

1. Introduction: A Tale of Two Methodologies

The role of intuitions in philosophical methodology has been a subject of intense and sustained debate. For decades, the “standard picture” was that philosophical inquiry relies heavily on intuitive judgments.¹ As Cappelen (2012) puts it:

The claim that contemporary analytic philosophers rely extensively on intuitions as evidence is almost universally accepted in current metaphilosophical debates and it figures prominently in our self-conception as analytic philosophers. No matter what area you happen to work in and what views you happen to hold in those areas, you are likely to think that philosophizing requires constructing cases and making intuitive judgments about those cases (p. 1).

This view holds that through the method of cases, verdicts about hypothetical scenarios function as genuine evidence, providing crucial, albeit defeasible, support for or against philosophical claims and theories (see, e.g., Bealer, 1998; Pust, 2000; Goldman, 2007; Chalmers, 2014).

¹ This description of a “standard picture” is more than just an impression shared by commentators; it reflects philosophers’ own reports about their methodology. Initial direct evidence comes from Kuntz and Kuntz (2011), who found that a slight majority of respondents (50.9%) agreed that intuitions are useful for justification in their work. More recently, the results of the 2020 PhilPapers Survey (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023) reinforce that this methodology remains dominant: when asked which philosophical methods they consider valid, 49.5% of respondents explicitly stated they accept or lean toward “intuition-based philosophy,” compared to 29% who leaned against it. This consistency in self-descriptions over the course of a decade makes it difficult to maintain any descriptive thesis that denies the centrality of intuitions in current philosophical practice.

Paradigmatic examples of this method include Gettier's (1963) cases designed to refute the traditional analysis of knowledge, Kripke's (1980) scenarios challenging descriptivist theories of reference, and Jackson's (1982) "Mary's Room" thought experiment arguing against physicalism.

The focus on intuition intensified with the turn-of-the-millennium emergence of experimental philosophy (x-phi). Its "negative program,"² in particular, accepted the standard picture that philosophy relies on intuitions, but challenged this methodology by questioning the reliability of those intuitions. Empirical studies suggested that intuitive verdicts are worryingly sensitive to a range of epistemically irrelevant factors, including cultural background (Weinberg, Nichols, & Stich, 2001), the order in which cases are presented (Swain, Alexander, & Weinberg, 2008), framing effects (Petrinovich & O'Neill, 1996), subjects' personality traits (Feltz & Cokely, 2019), and even their gender (Buckwalter & Stich, 2014).

While the normative question of whether intuitions are a reliable source of evidence, or should be used as evidence, is vital, I will bracket that issue here. My aim is not to defend the normative claim that intuitions *should* be used as evidence, but to focus on the prior, descriptive question of whether they *are* in fact treated as evidence in our philosophical practices. This descriptive question is the core of a fundamental disagreement. On one side stands the standard picture, often called *Centrality*. As formulated by Cappelen (2012), the thesis is:

Centrality (of Intuitions in Contemporary Philosophy): Contemporary analytic philosophers rely on intuitions as evidence (or as a source of evidence) for philosophical theories (p. 3).

It is important to clarify the precise scope of this thesis. Centrality makes a specific claim about a particular historical period and a particular philosophical practice. Historically, it addresses analytic philosophy from roughly the mid-twentieth century onward, a period marked by the methodological influence of figures like Gettier (1963) and Kripke (1980).³

² Experimental philosophy is commonly seen as having two distinct approaches. The "positive program" uses empirical methods to investigate the nature of folk concepts and contribute to traditional philosophical debates on topics such as free will, intentionality, and knowledge (see, e.g., Knobe & Nichols, 2008). In contrast, the "negative program" uses empirical findings to challenge the evidential reliability of the intuitions used in philosophical methodology (see, e.g., Alexander, 2012).

³ While the contemporary debate on intuitions focuses on modern analytic philosophy, some scholars argue that a reliance on intuitive judgments about cases has a much longer historical pedigree. For instance, Boyd and Nagel (2014) contend that using epistemic

Methodologically, its scope is intentionally limited to the method of cases, leaving aside the separate question of whether intuitions are used to directly support general principles or play other roles in philosophical inquiry.⁴

Centrality, however, is directly challenged by what has been termed the *Mischaracterization Objection* (MO), developed primarily by Deutsch (2015) and Cappelen (2012). They argue that a careful look at philosophical texts reveals that philosophers do not treat intuitions as evidence, but instead provide arguments for their verdicts about cases. As Deutsch (2015) puts it:

Analytic philosophy is chock-full of hypothetical examples and thought experiments, of course, but analytic philosophers *argue* for their claims about what is or is not true in these cases and thought experiments. It is these arguments, *not* intuitions, that are, and should be, treated as evidence for the claims (p. xv; emphasis in original).

Recently, Horvath (2026) has provided a more refined version of the MO, which he labels (MISC+). Because it represents the most sophisticated and clearly articulated formulation of the objection, this paper will adopt (MISC+) as its primary target. This version is not only the strongest challenge to Centrality, but it also helpfully clarifies the key terms of the debate, defining precisely what is meant by “direct” and “crucial” evidence. Horvath puts the thesis as follows:

(MISC+) Analytic philosophers of the last few decades do not appeal to intuitions or intuitive judgments about thought experiment cases as direct and crucial evidence (in a broad sense of ‘evidence’); instead, they give reasons and arguments (in a broad sense) for their verdicts about particular hypothetical thought experiment cases (p. 1922).

The primary methodology of MO proponents is a close exegetical analysis of paradigmatic philosophical texts where the method of cases is employed.

intuitions as evidence is part of a practice stretching “from Plato’s time to the present day” (p. 109). On this view, Plato’s method in his dialogues—where Socrates tests proposed accounts (e.g., of justice or piety) by applying them to specific, hypothetical cases—represents an early and influential form of the method of cases that relies on intuitive judgments as evidence for or against a philosophical theory.

⁴ For a discussion of such non-evidential roles, see Gendler (2007). She analyzes how thought experiments function as “devices of persuasion,” not by providing intuitions as formal evidence, but by eliciting responses that reframe a subject’s understanding. She identifies specific uses such as a “device of representation” and a “tool for clarification.”

They argue that these texts do not show explicit appeals to intuition as the evidential basis for case verdicts. Instead, they contend that the verdicts are supported by “reasons and arguments,” even if these are partially implicit or enthymematic.

While the MO’s exegetical methodology is valuable for forcing a close reading of philosophical texts, settling the debate on purely textual or empirical grounds has proven difficult. The textual dispute itself is a case in point. While MO proponents frequently argue from an apparent lack of explicit “intuition-talk” in case verdicts,⁵ defenders of Centrality contend that common phrases—such as “it seems that” or “clearly, it would be the case that”—are in fact the markers of an appeal to intuition (e.g., Bealer, 1998). It is possible that, as Langkau (2019) suggests, whether one finds evidence of intuition-use or argument-use may depend on one’s prior theoretical commitments. Moreover, turning to direct empirical evidence does not resolve the issue, as the recent literature on whether arguments actually affect case verdicts provides mixed results, with some studies suggesting they have no effect (Wysocki, 2017) and others suggesting they sometimes do (Horvath & Wiegmann, 2023). This impasse on both the textual and empirical fronts makes the kind of abductive defense of Centrality offered in this paper particularly necessary. Methodologically, this paper advances what Cappelen (2012) terms an “argument from philosophical practice.” Rather than relying on corpus analysis to quantify how often philosophers use intuition-talk, it analyzes the underlying dialectical structure of paradigmatic philosophical arguments to show that Centrality provides the superior explanation for how those arguments function.

To proceed, understanding the logical structure of (MISC+) is essential. While rhetorically presented with the connective “instead”—insinuating that we are forced to choose between intuitions and arguments—logically, it is a conjunction of a negative thesis (philosophers do not appeal to intuitions as direct and crucial evidence) and a positive

⁵ The term “intuition-talk” refers to the explicit use of the word “intuitive” and its cognates (e.g., “intuitively,” “unintuitive”). Cappelen (2012) offers the most sustained deflationary account of this practice. He argues that the widespread use of such language in philosophy is not evidence of a reliance on a special kind of evidence, but is rather a “verbal virus”—a rhetorical habit that proliferated in analytic philosophy, possibly influenced by the work of Chomsky in linguistics and Rawls in political philosophy from the 1960s onward (pp. 22–23). Instead of serving an evidential function, Cappelen argues that this language serves various other dialectical purposes. For example, “intuitively” can be used as a hedge to weaken the speaker’s commitment to a claim, as a way to signal that a judgment is a snap or unreflective one, or as a marker for a pre-theoretic claim that is part of the common ground before serious argumentation begins (see Cappelen 2012, ch. 4).

thesis (philosophers do give reasons and arguments for their verdicts). To show that the entire conjunction is false, one need only demonstrate that one of its conjuncts is false. This paper will argue, abductively, that the negative conjunct is likely false by showing that Centrality better explains key features of philosophical methodology.

Notably, the positive conjunct—the claim that philosophers give reasons and arguments for their case verdicts—is perfectly compatible with Centrality. A philosopher may appeal to an intuition as direct and crucial evidence and, to improve her dialectical position, also provide a supplementary argument for the same claim (Bengson, 2014; Chalmers, 2014; Langkau, 2019). Furthermore, these supplementary arguments might often be abductive in form. That is, rather than deducing the nature of a philosophical target from intuitive responses, those responses serve as the data providing abductive evidence for the philosopher’s theory about the target. The defender of (MISC+), however, cannot easily make a similar concession. To concede that intuitions are also used as evidence in a direct and crucial way would be to falsify their own negative conjunct, thereby abandoning the core of their objection. Their entire case rests on using the textual presence of arguments (the positive thesis) as the primary evidence for the absence of intuition-use (the negative thesis).

To set the stage for the abductive argument, we must clarify how (MISC+) defines its key terms, following Horvath’s (2026) clarifications:

- “Evidence” is understood very broadly to include “any appeals to something that has epistemic, justificatory, or argumentative relevance for the case judgments in question” (p. 1920). Crucially for the argument to follow, Horvath clarifies that this broad definition includes not only positive support but also negative appeals. As he notes, philosophers sometimes “appeal to intuitions in a purely negative way, for example, by rejecting a case judgment as ‘counterintuitive’” (p. 1920).
- Evidence is “direct” when it is established in “the absence of any explicit inferential or argumentative step(s) from some intuition or intuitive judgment to one’s verdict about the relevant hypothetical case” (p. 1921).
- Evidence is “crucial” when “the alleged intuitive support is epistemically and/or argumentatively indispensable for the relevant case verdicts” (p. 1922).
- “Reasons and arguments” are also understood broadly to capture “the whole spectrum of *ordinary ways of arguing* for or against a claim” (p. 1920; emphasis in original), including

inductive, probabilistic, implicit, and enthymematic arguments and reasons.

With these terms clarified, the fundamental conflict comes into sharp focus. The negative thesis of (MISC+) denies that intuitions provide “direct” and “crucial” evidence, committing its defenders to the view that the evidential standing of case verdicts must always be inferential—derived from “reasons and arguments.” For Centrality to be a genuine rival, it must posit that this evidential standing can be, in pivotal instances, both direct—that is, fundamentally non-inferential—and crucial—that is, epistemically indispensable for the verdict. To defend this latter picture, however, a clear and defensible model is needed.

Cappelen’s formulation of Centrality is a disjunction—positing that philosophers rely on intuitions “as evidence” or “as a source of evidence”—and the next section (section 2) will defend the second disjunct. It will do so by articulating a *source-content* model that explains precisely how intuitions can function as a source for evidence that is both direct and crucial in the sense (MISC+) denies. This account will provide the necessary foundation for the main argument of this paper. In the sections that follow (section 3), I will argue that a version of Centrality based on this model offers a better explanation for two key features of philosophical practice when compared to the purely argument-driven picture offered by (MISC+).

2. A Model of Centrality: Intuitions as a Source of Evidence

To build the case for Centrality, we must first clarify its two core components: what an “intuition” is and what it means for one to be “used as evidence.” Philosophy is replete with contested concepts, and “intuition” is no exception.⁶ Accounts vary widely: some describe intuitions as a species of belief (Lewis, 1983), others as attractions to assent (Sosa, 2007), and still others, as I will do here, as a state of “seeming” (Bealer, 1998; Huemer, 2005; Chudnoff, 2013).

⁶ The persistent failure to analyze core philosophical concepts has led some to question the viability of the entire project of conceptual analysis, so central to much of twentieth-century philosophy. Michael Huemer (2015), for instance, argues that the history of philosophy demonstrates that “no correct philosophical analysis has ever been produced” (p. 52). He attributes this failure to a mistaken “Lockean” view that concepts are composed of other, simpler concepts in a way that permits definition by necessary and sufficient conditions. Whatever the ultimate fate of the analytic project, Huemer’s diagnosis underscores the profound difficulty of the task.

My aim is not to provide a definitive analytic definition of intuition by specifying its necessary and sufficient conditions. Such a project is well beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, the goal is to offer a minimal, working characterization—one that is thin enough to be broadly acceptable to most participants in the debate, yet robust enough to capture the target phenomenon. This minimal, “thin” characterization avoids taking on “thicker,” more controversial commitments, such as the claim that intuitions are products of a *sui generis* faculty that grasps modal necessity (Bealer, 1998) or that they are based solely on conceptual competence (Sosa, 2007).

Stipulatively, then, I will consider an intuition to be a mental state with a propositional content p , where:

- i. It seems to the subject that p
- ii. This seeming is not consciously experienced by the subject as the conclusion of an inference or as the direct output of perception, introspection, memory, or testimony

The first condition characterizes intuitions as *intellectual seemings*, a common way to describe their distinctive phenomenology. These are non-sensory, non-inferential states in which a proposition strikes a subject as being true or correct.⁷ A proposition seeming true is different from believing it. This is famously illustrated by perceptual cases like the Müller-Lyer illusion, where two lines continue to seem to be of different lengths even when we believe, based on measurement, that they are the same. A similar divergence can occur with intellectual seemings; some philosophers report that the naive comprehension axiom of set theory still seems true, even after learning of Russell’s paradox and coming to believe it is false (Bealer, 1998, p. 208).⁸

⁷ For a comprehensive collection of essays on the epistemic role of seemings, see the volume edited by Chris Tucker (2013), *Seemings and Justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism*.

⁸ One might object that beliefs, not only seemings, can be recalcitrant in the face of contrary evidence. A crucial normative distinction, however, is that while we typically treat a recalcitrant belief as an epistemic failure, we do not do so for a recalcitrant seeming. For instance, we would judge someone as epistemically failing for continuing to believe in a person’s innocence despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (see Bortolotti, 2020). Conversely, a person is not failing epistemically if one line in the Müller-Lyer illusion continues to seem longer, even after they have formed the belief that both are of equal length. The argument in this paper relies on this distinction, characterizing a philosopher’s appeal to a proposition’s enduring “intuitive appeal” as a report of a recalcitrant intellectual seeming—a valid phenomenological report—rather than an admission of holding a recalcitrant (and thus epistemically failing) belief.

The second condition provides the crucial negative characterization that distinguishes intuitions from other familiar epistemic sources. By specifying that the seeming is not consciously experienced as the output of inference, perception, introspection, memory, or testimony, it isolates the phenomenon as non-inferential at the phenomenological level. This definitional strategy—isolating a target phenomenon by what it is not—is a common and useful way of characterizing intuitions in contemporary metaphilosophy (see Chalmers, 2014; Nado, 2016; Climenhaga, 2018).

With this characterization in hand, we must now clarify what it means to say that such intuitions are “used as evidence.” To do so, it is essential to draw the distinction—emphasized by philosophers like Lycan (1988) and Deutsch (2015)—between the mental state of having an intuition (the *intuiting*) and the propositional content of that state (the *intuited*). An intuiting is the mental state, the seeming-true; an intuited is the proposition that seems true. For example, in the Gettier 10 Coins Case, the intuiting is the mental state of its seeming that Smith does not know, while the intuited is the proposition that “Smith does not know.” Overlooking this distinction is a common source of confusion in the debate.⁹

Some philosophers have explicitly endorsed the view that the intuitings themselves are the evidence. The clearest proponents of this model are Goldman and Pust (1998), who begin by stating that their approach “obviously takes *intuitings* that *p* to be (prima facie) evidence, or data.” They justify this by arguing that a proposition’s evidential force arises entirely from the psychological act of being intuited, concluding, “It must be the intuiting of *p* that is the crucial datum, not the intuited proposition *p* per se” (p. 196, fn. 5). In contrast, other prominent defenders of intuitions insist that only the intuiteds—the propositional contents—are the evidence. Bealer (1998), for instance, is explicit on this point: “When I say that intuitions are used as evidence, I of course mean that the contents of the intuitions count as evidence” (p. 205).

I will defend a version of Centrality that sides with the latter view in a nuanced way: the intuiteds are used as evidence, but their epistemic standing is sourced by the intuitings. On this “source-content” model,

⁹ This distinction reflects a wider debate in the epistemology of evidence, which Comesaña (2020) frames as a conflict between Psychologism and Factualism. Psychologism is the view that evidence consists of mental states (e.g., experiences, beliefs), while Factualism holds that evidence consists of facts or true propositions. In this terminology, the view that intuitings are the evidence is a form of Psychologism, as it treats the psychological state of “seeming” as the evidence itself. The view that intuiteds are the evidence aligns with Factualism, as it treats the propositional content as the evidence.

the connection between the psychological state and its propositional content is governed by a principle we can call the *Principle of Evidential Seemings* (PES): if it seems to a subject *S* that *p*, then *S* thereby has a *prima facie*, defeasible entitlement to treat the proposition *p* as evidence.¹⁰ This principle explains how the psychological state of seeming performs its crucial function. It also aligns with the broader epistemological claim that evidence must be propositional to stand in the logical and probabilistic relations required for argumentation (Williamson, 2000). The mental state itself—the intuition—plays its crucial epistemic role in the background by making its content available for use in an argument.

This model aligns with views from philosophers who see intuitions as playing a source-like or enabling role. For instance, Nado (2016) explicitly reframes the debate around this very idea. As she puts it, “The most natural way to put this [how to interpret Centrality] is as a question of whether philosophers rely on intuition as a *source of evidence*” (p. 791: emphasis in original). More recently, Ramsey (2019) has developed a similar idea with his concept of “evidence facilitators.” For him, the psychological state of intuition is not evidence, but it facilitates the evidential role of its content.

I think these accounts are closely analogous to a plausible story about perception. When I see an orange cat on the window, my perceptual mental state—the *perceiving*—is what provides the entitlement to treat the proposition “There’s an orange cat on the window”—the *perceived*—as evidence. The evidence I use in reasoning is the proposition, not the private mental state.

Therefore, when this paper asserts that “intuitions are used as evidence,” it should be understood as shorthand for this source-content account: the propositional contents of non-inferential seemings are treated as having a *prima facie* evidential standing that is sourced directly from the intuiting-state itself.

With this source-content model in place, we can now see how it is specifically designed to meet the challenge posed by Horvath’s formulation of (MISC+). The model accounts for intuitions as a source of direct evidence

¹⁰ The PES can be understood as an application of a more general epistemological framework. It follows from the conjunction of two plausible claims: (1) the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism (PC), which states that if it seems to *S* that *p*, then *S* has *prima facie* justification for believing that *p* (Huemer 2001, 2013); and (2) a “bridge principle” stating that having *prima facie* justification for believing a proposition entitles one to use it as *prima facie* evidence in argumentation. While PC is not without its critics (e.g., Markie, 2005; DePoe, 2011), it remains a major theory concerning the epistemic role of seemings.

because the *prima facie* entitlement for the propositional content is sourced non-inferentially from the intellectual seeming itself, without the need for intervening “reasons or arguments.” Furthermore, it accounts for how intuitions provide crucial evidence. By granting a proposition its initial, non-inferential evidential status as a case verdict, the support from the intuition becomes, in Horvath’s terms, “epistemically and argumentatively indispensable for the relevant case verdicts.” On this view, without the intuiting-state sourcing the verdict’s evidential power, that verdict could not stand on its own; it would have no force against a theory until a separate argument was provided in its favor. The abductive argument that follows is designed to show that this model is not just a theoretical possibility, but in fact provides a superior explanation for how philosophers actually treat evidence in practice.

3. An Abductive Argument

With our competing metatheories now defined—Centrality understood through the source-content model, and the Mischaracterization Objection as formulated in (MISC+)—we can proceed to the abductive case for Centrality. An abductive argument, often called an “inference to the best explanation,” adjudicates between competing theories by assessing which one provides a superior explanation for a given set of data. The “best” explanation is typically the one that is most parsimonious (simple), has the greatest explanatory power, and fits the evidence most elegantly.

In our case, the data to be explained (the *explanandum*) are two of the most revealing and deeply entrenched features of the method of cases: the standard practice of refutation by counterexample, and the twin phenomena of “biting the bullet” and the corresponding demand for error theories. I will argue that Centrality provides a superior *explanans* for these observable practices, offering a more powerful and parsimonious account than the MO’s purely argument-driven picture.

3.1. Offering counterexamples within the method of cases

The most telling feature of the method of cases is the immediate and immense dialectical force of a successful counterexample. When a philosopher presents such a case, the verdict enters the dialectic with enough epistemic weight to instantly challenge a long-standing theory and shift the entire burden of proof to the theory’s defender. This immediate “punching power” is a core piece of data that any metatheory about the method of cases must explain.

Let us examine this phenomenon in its most famous application: Gettier's (1963) refutation of the traditional analysis of knowledge. The long-standing Justified True Belief (JTB) theory holds that knowledge is equivalent to having a belief that is both true and justified. Gettier's strategy was to construct a pair of hypothetical cases intended to show a situation where a subject has a justified true belief, but lacks knowledge. In his 10 Coins Case, a subject called Smith has strong evidence to believe that Jones will get the job and that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. From this, Smith correctly infers the proposition: (e) the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. However, in a twist, Smith himself gets the job, and, unbeknownst to him, he also has ten coins in his pocket. Proposition (e) is therefore both true and justified for Smith. Yet, after laying out these facts, Gettier delivers his famous verdict:

But it is equally clear that Smith does not *know* that (e) is true; for (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (e) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job (p. 122; emphasis in original).

The crucial observation is how the philosophical community reacted. The verdict was not considered a tentative hypothesis or a debatable assumption. It was, by and large, immediately accepted as a decisive refutation. The JTB theory, widely regarded as a cornerstone of epistemology, was effectively overthrown in under three pages.¹¹ Identifying the source of this incredible dialectical force is therefore the central explanatory challenge.

At this point, one might object that my reliance on the Gettier case is misleading. The Gettier verdict, the objection goes, is unique in its phenomenal force and the near-universal consensus it generated. If other case verdicts lack this power, then Gettier cases are not a representative example of philosophical methodology, but rather a rare exception. This objection is significant, as it threatens to undercut an important aspect of the entire abductive argument by suggesting it overgeneralizes from

¹¹ While the JTB theory is traditionally attributed to Plato's *Theaetetus*, this dialogue actually ends in aporia and offers an extended critique rather than an endorsement of the view that knowledge is true belief with an account. Furthermore, the notion that the JTB analysis stood as a historical cornerstone for centuries is itself strongly contested; as Dutant (2015) persuasively argues, the perception of JTB as the longstanding "standard view" is largely a mid-twentieth-century development.

a single, anomalous data point, thereby failing to describe the common practice of philosophy.

However, this objection can be answered by recognizing two key points. First, the phenomenological force of case verdicts and the consensus they generate can be understood as existing on a spectrum, rather than as an all-or-nothing phenomenon. An analogy with perception is useful: the visual evidence that a large, stationary object in broad daylight is a “house” is not only phenomenologically powerful for any normal observer, but it also generates near-universal consensus among witnesses. Conversely, the evidence from glimpsing a fleeting shape in a dense fog is not only weak for an individual, but it is also likely to produce disagreement among a group—some might say it was a deer, others a person. Case verdicts can be understood to function in precisely this way.

Second, while the Gettier verdict sits at the highest end of this spectrum, it is by no means an isolated peak. It is closely joined by a range of other paradigmatic thought experiments that, while perhaps not generating the same instantaneous, universal assent, still elicit robust and widely shared intuitions that have shaped entire fields of inquiry. For instance, in philosophy of mind, Jackson’s (1982) “Mary’s Room” thought experiment elicits a compelling verdict that Mary *learns* something new upon seeing red, a verdict that forms the primary evidence against physicalism. Similarly, Searle’s (1980) “Chinese Room” thought experiment elicits a decisive, widely shared case verdict that the person manipulating symbols does not truly *understand* Chinese, a verdict that serves as a cornerstone challenge to computational theories of mind. And in philosophy of language, Kripke’s (1980) Gödel-Schmidt case prompts a robust verdict that the name “Gödel” refers to the actual person, not whoever fits the description, a verdict that was instrumental in dismantling descriptivist theories of reference.

Therefore, the existence of this spectrum of force does not undermine my argument; it reinforces it. It demonstrates that treating case verdicts as crucial evidence is a robust and widespread philosophical practice, not an anomaly. My choice to focus on the Gettier verdict is thus methodological: it is not an exception but a paradigm case. By analyzing the mechanism in its clearest and most forceful manifestation, we can better understand how it operates across the entire spectrum of philosophical inquiry.

With the status of the Gettier verdict as a paradigm case now established, we can return to the central question. What is the source of the profound dialectical power possessed by the Gettier verdict? Centrality, understood through the source-content model, offers a single, unifying explanation for the power of these case verdicts across the entire spectrum.

On this view, a thought experiment like the Gettier case is not merely a story; it is a carefully constructed instrument designed to elicit a specific, non-inferential intellectual “seeming” in the reader.

When we consider the 10 Coins Case, we experience a strong and immediate seeming that “Smith does not know.” According to the PES, this seeming provides a *prima facie*, defeasible entitlement to treat its content—the proposition “Smith does not know”—as a piece of evidence. The case verdict thus enters the dialectic with a high degree of initial epistemic standing. Its force comes not from its being the conclusion of a prior argument, but from its being treated as a piece of foundational data against which theories are tested.

(MISC+) must explain this same dialectical force without recourse to intuitions. Its only available resource is argumentation. For this story to make sense, it must claim that the verdict “Smith does not know” derives its immense power from the fact that it is the conclusion of an overwhelmingly strong, albeit brief, argument presented by Gettier himself.

This is exactly what Deutsch (2015) and Horvath (2026) do. They argue that Gettier’s use of the word “for” is a premise-indicator and definitive textual evidence that an argument is being offered, not just a bare assertion of intuition. On their reading, the conclusion is “Smith does not know,” and the premises are the specific considerations that follow the word “for”—namely, that the belief is true because of the coins in Smith’s pocket, while it is justified by the count of the coins in Jones’s pocket.

Delving into the specifics, Deutsch claims that this alleged argument “is straightforward, compelling, and appeals only to specific stipulations about the 10 Coins Case, which, when taken together, lead rather directly to the conclusion that Smith does not know” (2015, p. 82). Furthermore, he argues that Gettier’s reasoning relies on an implicit but crucial anti-luck condition, namely that “If *S*’s belief that *p* is knowledge that *p*, then *S*’s belief that *p* is not luckily true” (2015, p. 88). Similarly, Horvath identifies Gettier’s core argument as an appeal to “a kind of epistemic luck¹²,” which Gettier himself would emphasize through phrases like “by the sheerest coincidence” (2026, p. 1924). In both analyses, the considerations in Gettier’s text would function as inferential reasons, grounding the famous verdict in argumentation.

This textual interpretation, however, has become a focal point of criticism. A common objection is that the alleged arguments are often mere restatements of a case’s features. Colaço and Machery (2017), for instance,

¹² For a canonical analysis of the role of epistemic luck in the post-Gettier debate, see Pritchard (2005).

argue that the considerations Gettier presents are “unilluminating” and simply “add nothing to the cases themselves.” Building on this objection, Chudnoff (2017) and Ramsey (2019) propose that the function of these restatements is not to inferentially prove a verdict, but to enable or “trigger” the relevant intuition—that Smith lacks knowledge.¹³

These existing critiques already cast serious doubt on the Mischaracterization Objection’s textual interpretation. However, by taking these points a step further, we can reveal more precisely the profound dialectical weakness of the argument alleged to be in Gettier’s text. Even if we charitably grant that an argument is being offered, that argument is demonstrably too weak to do the revolutionary work its proponents require, for two main reasons.

First, the reconstructed argument is crucially incomplete; it is, at best, an enthymeme. The considerations Gettier provides after the word “for”—that Smith doesn’t know the number of coins in his own pocket and bases his belief on a count from Jones’s pocket—do not, by themselves, logically entail that Smith lacks knowledge. For the inference to be valid, it requires a necessary condition that is violated, a crucial hidden premise that Gettier never states. The proponents of (MISC+) are forced to supply this premise themselves.¹⁴

This creates a significant explanatory problem. Recall that (MISC+) defines “reasons and arguments” very broadly to include any “considerations that count in favor” of a verdict. Yet, in their central case, they have to concede that the considerations on the page are insufficient. Consequently, a defender of (MISC+) must claim that the JTB theory was defeated not by a clear and powerful argument, but by a mere enthymeme whose force depends entirely on an unstated and highly contentious implicit premise. This picture of philosophical practice is implausible on its face. An argument with such a logical gap¹⁵ would typically be met with immediate dismissal or

¹³ A helpful analogy for this “enabling” function is the way one might explain a visual illusion or a complex image. For example, when looking at the famous duck-rabbit illusion, one does not give an argument for the conclusion “it is a duck.” Instead, one might say, “Look, this part is the bill, and that part is the eye.” These are not premises in an inference, they are pointers designed to guide the viewer’s perception so they can see the duck for themselves. Chudnoff (2017) argues that the reasons Gettier gives function similarly: they are instructions for how to “look at” the case in a way that makes the intuition that Smith lacks knowledge manifest.

¹⁴ Landes (2023) argues that even if we supply the alleged, hidden anti-luck premise, the argument becomes a *reductio* against the conjunction of JTB and the anti-luck principle, which, on its own, provides no reason to reject JTB rather than the principle itself. The argument is therefore dialectically inconclusive.

¹⁵ Some philosophers, drawing on Sellars (1953) and Brandom (1994, 2000), might

demands for clarification, yet Gettier's verdict was met with near universal and immediate assent, which is precisely the opposite of what we would expect if this enthymematic reconstruction were its true source.

Second, the reconstructed argument is historically ambiguous. This becomes clear when we examine the historical record of the post-Gettier literature, a strategy most prominently associated with Brown (2017). This literature is a testament to the fact that while the verdict "Smith does not know" remained unshakably stable, the proposed arguments for it were a matter of intense and shifting debate. Instead of a single, obvious principle that everyone agreed had been violated, a range of different diagnoses emerged: "no false lemmas" (Clark, 1963), the lack of an "appropriate causal connection" (Goldman, 1967), and the presence of an "undefeated defeater" (Lehrer & Paxson, 1969), among others.¹⁶

Indeed, Nozick (1981), reflecting on this exact period, describes his own reaction not as grasping a clear argument for Gettier verdict, but as despairing at the chaotic aftermath:

Early in the flurry of journal articles presenting counterexamples to increasingly complicated accounts of knowledge, stimulated by Edward [sic] Gettier's counterexample to the traditional account of knowledge as justified true belief, I despaired of anyone's getting it exactly right. So messy did it all seem that I just stopped reading that literature (p. 169).

This first-hand account of the "messy" proliferation of competing argumentative diagnoses is strong evidence that the philosophical community was united by a shared verdict, not by a shared argument that explains the verdict.

Horvath (2026), however, directly counters this historical argument. He argues that its proponents are looking at the wrong reasons. For

object that enthymematic arguments (or "material inferences") are valid by virtue of their conceptual content and do not inherently contain a defective logical gap. For instance, the inference from "Pittsburgh is to the west of Philadelphia" to "Philadelphia is to the east of Pittsburgh" is a materially good inference that relies on the contents of the non-logical concepts involved rather than formal validity. While this holds for uncontested, everyday concepts (e.g., north/south, east/west, or rain/wet streets), it fails to apply to the Gettier cases. The "implicit premise" in Gettier's argument was not a universally shared conceptual truth, but rather a highly contested epistemic condition that sparked decades of debate. Therefore, treating the Gettier refutation merely as an unproblematic material inference cannot explain its immediate and universal dialectical success.

¹⁶ For a recent and authoritative overview of the sheer variety of diagnoses that emerged in response to Gettier, see the introduction and collected essays in Hetherington (Ed.) (2012).

Horvath, the verdict's stability is perfectly explained by an argument provided by Gettier from the very start. He claims:

Gettier in fact offered a compelling reason for his case verdicts, namely, the presence of epistemic luck, and this explains the near-universal acceptance of Gettier's cases as counterexamples to the JTB-account. The many failed attempts to provide better accounts of knowledge in the wake of Gettier (1963) can simply be understood as mistaken attempts to exclude the relevant kind of epistemic luck (Horvath, 2026, p. 1943).

He concludes that this "argument-based explanation of the historical success of Gettier's thought experiments seems to be just as good as the intuition-based explanation—and arguably even better, because it does not project any appeals to intuition onto Gettier (1963)" (Horvath, 2026, p. 1943).

If I understand Horvath correctly, he is re-interpreting the entire post-Gettier project. His claim is that the various diagnoses that emerged—such as the "no false lemmas" or "no defeaters" conditions—were not offered as competing reasons for the Gettier verdict. Rather, he sees them as different (and ultimately "mistaken") attempts to capture and exclude the "relevant kind of epistemic luck" from the definition of knowledge. On this view, the philosophical community was not debating what the reason was, but merely the best way to formulate an anti-luck condition. This re-characterization is a direct attempt to dissolve the tension between the stable verdict and the allegedly unstable reasons by claiming the reason itself—epistemic luck—was stable all along.

I think Horvath's reply, however, is problematic for two reasons. First, his explanation fails to account for the historical data. The *explanandum* is the profound stability of the Gettier verdict. Horvath's proposed *explanans* is a single, clear reason present in the original text (epistemic luck). Yet his explanation is fatally undermined by his own characterization of the subsequent historical record. He dismisses the decades of different theories not as offering competing reasons, but as a series of widespread and varied "mistaken attempts" to formalize the one true reason he identifies.

This re-characterization raises a question: If the reason of "epistemic luck" was so clear and compelling from the start, why did the philosophical community spend decades proposing entirely different reasons to explain the Gettier verdict? Horvath's account forces us to believe that brilliant epistemologists like Goldman, Lehrer, and Paxson all understood the core issue was "luck" but then, for some reason, chose to write seminal papers proposing solutions using different concepts ("appropriate causality," "defeasibility") without explicitly connecting them back to the original

diagnosis. This makes their intellectual project look strangely indirect and confused. The historical record shows that the verdict was stable while the proposed reasons were unstable and fluctuating.

Even if the post-Gettier literature has now largely converged on the view that the problem is one of epistemic luck, this modern consensus is not the implicit premise that Gettier's audience grasped in 1963. Rather, it is the hard-won product of decades of philosophical reflection, trial, and error, born from the collective attempt to explain the powerful, pre-theoretical verdict that Smith does not know—a verdict shared even by those who today dissent from the standard anti-luck diagnosis.¹⁷ What unites the entire philosophical community—from safety theorists to knowledge-firsters—is not a shared, unstated argument about why Smith does not know, but the unshakable initial verdict that he does not know. That shared verdict is the key data point.

Second, Horvath's argument relies on the same methodological move he criticizes. His claim that his explanation avoids "projecting" anything onto the text is demonstrably false. Nowhere in his original paper does Gettier use the phrase "epistemic luck" or explicitly state an "anti-luck" condition for knowledge. If that were the case, the source of the Gettier verdict would not be a contentious point, neither within the subsequent epistemological debate nor in the current dispute between Centrality and the Mischaracterization Objection. The "compelling reason" Horvath identifies is itself a theoretical reconstruction projected back onto the text. Thus, Horvath's explanation simply replaces the projection of an intuiting-state with the projection of an implicit, unstated argument.

These two facts—the argument's structural incompleteness and its historical ambiguity—combine to show that the argument (MISC+) posits is, from an argumentative standpoint, remarkably weak. An argument that is enthymematic and whose crucial premise is so historically contested is not a compelling one. This creates a deeper explanatory problem: it divorces the strength of the proposed cause from the strength of its observed effect. The Gettier verdict had a maximal epistemic impact, achieving near-universal assent and decisively overthrowing the JTB theory of knowledge. It is simply implausible that such a powerful and uniform outcome could be produced by an argument possessing these frailties—one that should have, at best, initiated a prolonged and messy debate, not a swift capitulation. It is far more parsimonious to conclude that the verdict's incredible dialectical

¹⁷ A proponent of a "knowledge-first" view, for instance, would not attempt to analyze Smith's failure in terms of luck; she would simply assert that Smith is not in the mental state of knowing, taking that as a primitive fact about the case (see Williamson, 2000).

force came not from this weak and contested implicit argument, but from a powerful, direct, and widely shared intuition whose content was treated as a decisive piece of evidence, just as Centrality proposes.

Ultimately, (MISC+) fails to explain the core historical fact of the post-Gettier literature: a stable verdict accompanied by decades of unstable, shifting reasons. Centrality, by contrast, elegantly explains this: a widely shared intuiting grounds the stable verdict, while the shifting reasons represent the difficult a posteriori work of building a theory to match that pre-theoretical data.¹⁸ The explanatory power of this intuitive evidence becomes even more apparent when we examine the downstream practices it gives rise to—specifically, the twin phenomena of biting the bullet and offering error theories.

3.2. *Biting the bullet and offering error theories*

A second powerful line of abductive evidence for Centrality comes from a unified intellectual maneuver common in the method of cases: the two-stage act of biting the bullet and providing a corresponding error theory. This practice occurs when a theory's logical consequences clash with a proposition possessing undeniable, pre-theoretic plausibility. The theorist is then confronted with a difficult choice: abandon the theory, or accept its deeply implausible consequence.

To bite the bullet is to choose the latter, upholding the theory by rejecting the highly plausible proposition. However, this move is dialectically incomplete and incurs an explanatory debt. The theorist must then provide an error theory—a diagnosis that explains away the source of the rejected proposition's appeal, showing why it *seemed* so compellingly true despite being allegedly false. I contend that this entire intellectual

¹⁸ Recent empirical studies in experimental philosophy suggest that laypeople often exhibit conflicting intuitions when presented with classic philosophical thought experiments (e.g., Knobe, 2026; Hannikainen & Knobe, 2026). One could certainly argue that the intuitions of professional philosophers also conflict at times, and I readily concede this point. However, as noted in Section 3.1, the consensus generated by intuitive verdicts exists on a spectrum. I chose the Gettier verdict as a paradigm case precisely because it sits at the absolute peak of that spectrum of consensus; the dissenting view that Smith does know is a distinctly minoritarian position among experts (e.g., Hetherington, 2001). However, the “stability” referred to here concerns the sociological and dialectical consensus within the community of professional analytic philosophers. Because Centrality is strictly a descriptive thesis about the methodological practices of these professionals (as defined on Section 1), the empirical instability of lay intuitions does not undermine the claim that professional philosophers treat their shared, stable verdicts as evidence.

maneuver—the costly bite and the corresponding error theory—is a crucial piece of data that any adequate account of philosophical methodology must explain, and that Centrality, via the source-content account, provides the best explanation.¹⁹

It is telling that philosophers frequently resort to “intuition-talk” when describing this very practice. One might describe a theory’s consequence as “deeply counterintuitive,” or speak of the need to “explain away a powerful but mistaken intuition.” However, to avoid any charge of begging the question against (MISC+), I will set this linguistic evidence aside.²⁰ Even without relying on how philosophers talk about this phenomenon, the structure of the practice itself—the act of biting the bullet and the subsequent need for an error theory—provides a powerful *explanandum*.

To illustrate the phenomenon of biting the bullet and to test the explanatory power of Centrality against (MISC+), we can turn to one of contemporary epistemology’s most famous and consequential examples: Nozick’s rejection of the epistemic Closure Principle. I focus on Nozick not as an isolated anecdote, but as a paradigm case of a widespread structural maneuver.²¹ If a purely argument-driven metatheory like (MISC+) cannot

¹⁹ The classic example of an error theory in another field is Mackie’s theory in meta-ethics. Mackie argued that our moral language and thought are committed to the existence of objective moral values, but that no such values exist. He then offered an error theory to explain why we have this mistaken belief, tracing it to the social and psychological functions of moral discourse. See Mackie (1977).

²⁰ There is a robust and growing literature employing empirical, corpus-based methods to analyze the quantitative frequency and interpretative significance of “intuition-talk” across philosophy and other disciplines (see, e.g., Andow, 2015; Ashton & Mizrahi, 2018; Bordonaba-Plou, 2021; and for an analysis in physics, Tallant, 2013). While these quantitative approaches provide valuable evidence regarding Centrality, my strategy here is entirely distinct. By focusing exclusively on the structural practice of argumentation (the “cost” of biting the bullet and the demand for error theories), I aim to show that Centrality is the best explanation for what philosophers *do*, regardless of the specific vocabulary they *use*.

²¹ While this paper focuses on Nozick’s rejection of closure as a detailed paradigm case, the practice of coupling a costly theoretical concession with an error theory is ubiquitous across analytic philosophy. Other classic examples include Lewis’s (1986) defense of modal realism—the highly counterintuitive thesis that all possible worlds are concrete, physical entities just like our own. Lewis famously bites the bullet of the “incredulous stare,” arguing that the theoretical utility of his framework justifies overriding common sense, and offers a semantic error theory to explain our ordinary intuitions. Similarly, in ontology, van Inwagen (1990) bites the bullet of denying the existence of ordinary composite objects (like chairs or tables). He argues that strictly speaking only elementary particles exist, offering a paraphrase strategy—we mistakenly intuit a chair when there are only “simples arranged chair-wise”—as an error theory to explain away our persistent

plausibly explain the dialectical mechanics—the profound resistance and the subsequent demand for an error theory—at the heart of one of the most heavily scrutinized and canonical debates in 20th-century analytic philosophy, its viability as a general account of philosophical practice is severely undermined.

In *Philosophical Explanations*, Nozick (1981) proposes a new analysis of knowledge designed to handle certain skeptical paradoxes. A central component of his overall “tracking” account is the sensitivity condition. The condition states:

Sensitivity Condition: *S* knows that *p* only if, were *p* false, *S* would not believe that *p*

A primary theoretical virtue of this condition is its elegant explanation of the Gettier cases. Sensitivity provides an answer to why the subject’s belief is not knowledge: his belief is *insensitive*. In the closest possible world where the proposition *p* is false, the subject’s evidence would often remain the same, so they would still believe *p*. Because their belief does not track the truth in this way, they do not have knowledge. This success in handling the canonical counterexamples to the JTB theory is a significant theoretical benefit, providing a strong motivation for a philosopher like Nozick to defend the sensitivity condition, even at a high cost.

At the same time, this condition must contend with another deeply entrenched principle of epistemology: the principle of closure for knowledge under known entailment. This principle can be stated as:

Closure Principle: If *S* knows that *p*, and *S* knows that *p* logically entails *q*, then *S* knows that *q*²²

The Closure Principle is widely considered a bedrock principle of knowledge. It captures the fundamental idea that we can extend our knowledge through deduction. To deny it seems, at first blush, deeply implausible. Rejecting closure leads to what DeRose (1995) has called an “abominable conjunction”: the claim that one can know a proposition while

perceptual and linguistic intuitions. The structural presence of this explanatory debt across various philosophical sub-disciplines strongly suggests a shared methodological reliance on intuitive evidence.

²² While this formulation is standard, debates around closure are notoriously complex. The principle can be weakened or strengthened, and its relationship to principles of epistemic justification is also highly contested. My use of this standard formulation follows central figures in the debate like Dretske (1970) and Nozick (1981).

simultaneously not knowing a clear and obvious logical consequence of that proposition. The sheer implausibility of asserting such conjunctions is why the Closure Principle is often treated as a non-negotiable starting point for any adequate theory of knowledge.

The conflict arises when Nozick's theory is applied to classic skeptical scenarios, particularly those involving scenarios like being a bodiless Brain in a Vat (BIV).²³ Consider the standard skeptical argument, based on closure:²⁴

- (1) If I know that I have hands, then I know that I am not a Brain in a Vat (BIV)
- (2) I do not know that I am not a BIV
- (3) Therefore, I do not know that I have hands.

When addressing the skeptical argument, Nozick's sensitivity condition forces him to accept a pair of verdicts:²⁵

- V_1 : I know that I have hands
- V_2 : I don't know that I'm not a brain in a vat

The Closure Principle, as exemplified in the first premise of the skeptical argument, states that if one knows a proposition ("I have hands"), one must also know its obvious logical consequences ("I am not a BIV"). Nozick's

²³ The BIV scenario has become the canonical way of expressing the skeptical hypothesis in this context. Nozick's (1981, p. 207) own original example involves the contrast between "sitting on a chair in Jerusalem" and "floating in a tank on Alpha Centauri," but the logical structure of the problem is identical.

²⁴ This argument is a powerful illustration of a central paradox in modern epistemology, often framed as an inconsistent triad of individually plausible claims (e.g., DeRose, 1995). The claims are: (i) I know I have hands; (ii) I do not know I am not a brain in a vat; and (iii) If I know I have hands, then I know I am not a brain in a vat (the Closure Principle). Because these three claims are mutually inconsistent, any coherent epistemological theory must reject at least one. The skeptic rejects (i). The "Moorean response," named for Moore (1939), rejects (ii), insisting on the strength of our common-sense knowledge (for a modern defense, see Pryor, 2000). As this paper discusses, theorists like Nozick (1981) resolve the paradox by taking the radical step of rejecting (iii).

²⁵ It is worth noting that while the method of cases is typically described as yielding a single "verdict" for a given scenario, Nozick's analysis here generates a pair (V_1 and V_2). This structural difference, however, poses no problem for the argument. If one prefers, the pair can be treated as a single, complex conjunctive verdict: that one knows one has hands *and* that one does not know one is not a brain in a vat. The crucial dialectical feature remains the same: it is the acceptance of this conjunctive outcome, derived from Nozick's theory, that stands in direct and unavoidable conflict with the Closure Principle.

account violates this principle because his sensitivity condition yields opposing verdicts for these two beliefs. This is because, according to his account, the belief “I have hands” is *sensitive*, as one would not hold it in the closest possible world where it is false (e.g., after an accident), and thus it qualifies as knowledge. Conversely, the belief “I am not a BIV” is *insensitive*, as one would still hold it in the closest possible world where it is false (i.e., in the vat itself). This failure to track the truth means it does not qualify as knowledge, committing Nozick to the position that we can know a premise but not its known logical consequence.

Nozick articulates the dilemma starkly: either the skeptic’s inference using closure is flawed, “or our account of knowledge is incoherent” (p. 204). He is fully aware that rejecting the Closure Principle leads to an “unacceptable-sounding conclusion” (p. 204). But rather than abandon his sensitivity condition for its consequences, he makes a momentous choice: he bites the bullet and argues that it is the deeply entrenched principle that is mistaken. He concludes unequivocally that “Principle P [the Closure Principle] is wrong [...] Knowledge is not closed under known logical implication” (p. 206). For Nozick, the theoretical virtues of his own account—particularly its ability to handle Gettier cases and provide a way out of the skeptical trap—justify this high epistemic cost.

First, Nozick provides the technical diagnosis for closure’s failure. For him, the deep structure of knowledge is “tracking the truth,” which requires a belief to be sensitive. The failure of closure, Nozick argues, occurs because sensitivity is not a property that necessarily transfers from a premise to its known logical conclusion. This is a modal fact: the closest possible world where a premise p is false (e.g., a world where I had an accident and lost my hands) can be a very different kind of world from the one where its consequence q is false (e.g., the BIV world). As the BIV analysis already demonstrated, our belief-forming mechanisms can track the truth successfully in the first kind of world but fail in the second. Since a belief can be sensitive while its consequence is insensitive, the Closure Principle must be false.

However, this alone does not constitute an error theory. The second, and crucial, part of his argument is to diagnose the source of this profound resistance, namely, the principle’s persistent “intuitive appeal” (p. 206). Nozick’s true error theory is that the powerful appeal of closure is a cognitive shortcut gone wrong: an overgeneralization from ordinary cases where belief-forming methods are stable across an entailment. Nozick’s famous “grandmother case” perfectly illustrates this crucial point about method-instability. A grandmother sees her grandson is well when he comes to visit, and so forms her belief via direct perception. However, if he

were sick or dead, “others would tell her he was well to spare her upset” (p. 179). In the counterfactual scenario, her method of belief-formation would shift from reliable perception to unreliable testimony. The case forces us to recognize that a proper analysis of knowledge must be relativized to the specific method used.

This is precisely the mistake the skeptic’s argument exploits, according to Nozick. Our powerful intuition in favor of closure stems from our failure to notice a similar, though more subtle, shift in methods. We implicitly assume that the reliable method of perception used to know p (“I have hands”) will carry over to its entailment q (“I am not a BIV”). But the error lies in this assumption. As Nozick’s analysis shows, the method for knowing p is completely different from any possible method for knowing q , and the latter is systematically unreliable. It is this “hidden shift in method” that explains both why closure fails and, more importantly, why we are so powerfully—and mistakenly—convinced that it must be true.

Nozick’s final admission provides a powerful piece of phenomenological data in this regard. Even after providing this complex error theory, he still recognizes the profound “intuitive appeal” of the principle he rejects, an appeal so strong that he describes the futility of arguing against its details as akin to “a wasp attacking a steamroller” (p. 206). This entire intellectual performance—the costly bite, the elaborate diagnostic error theory, and the acknowledgment of a persistent appeal—is precisely the phenomenon our metatheories must explain.

This entire dialectical performance undertaken by Nozick provides a rich set of data that, I argue, is best explained by the Centrality thesis. The fit becomes especially clear when we view the practice through the lens of Horvath’s own definition of “appealing to intuition.” Recall that for Horvath this includes not just using intuitions for positive support, but also cases where philosophers “appeal to intuitions in a purely negative way, for example, by rejecting a case judgment as ‘counterintuitive’” (Horvath, 2026, p. 1920). Nozick’s rejection of closure is a perfect illustration of this negative appeal: he treats the denial of closure as an “unacceptable-sounding” conclusion precisely because it conflicts with the powerful intuition for closure. The source-content model of Centrality, powered by the Principle of Evidential Seemings (PES), offers a single, unified, and parsimonious explanation for why this kind of dialectic unfolds as it does.

First, Centrality explains the source of the “cost” of biting the bullet. The reason Nozick’s rejection of closure is a costly, “unacceptable-sounding” move is that the Closure Principle is not just a popular proposition; it is

the content of a powerful, widely shared intuition.²⁶ According to PES, this intellectual “seeming” that closure is true provides immediate, *prima facie* entitlement to treat the principle as a piece of evidence. The “felt resistance” is the rational pressure exerted by this evidence. In this way, the intuition for closure serves as direct and crucial evidence against Nozick’s theory. It is “direct” because the warrant for closure stems non-inferentially from the seeming itself. It is “crucial” because, without this evidential weight, Nozick’s move would not be a costly “bite” but a simple choice between two competing propositions; the entire character of the debate would change.

Second, Centrality explains the demand for an error theory as a necessary consequence of overriding this evidence. Because the intuition for closure is treated as genuine evidence, Nozick cannot simply dismiss it. He must not only argue that it is false, but also explain *why* it seems so powerfully true. He accepts this diagnostic burden, and his explanation is twofold. First, he offers a technical diagnosis of why closure fails: the tracking conditions that constitute knowledge are not always inherited through entailment. This, however, only explains why the principle is incorrect, not why it seems so correct. Nozick’s error theory addresses this second question. The explanation is that our intuition for closure is an overgeneralization from ordinary cases where the method of belief-formation remains stable across the entailment. We mistakenly apply this powerful heuristic to the skeptic’s puzzle case, which is specifically designed to exploit a hidden shift in method. This, according to Nozick, is why the principle seems so compelling despite being false. The entire complex maneuver—providing both a technical refutation and a psychological

²⁶ A defender of (MISC+) might object that by centering my analysis on the intuitive status of a general principle like Closure, my argument falls outside their purview. They would point out that their thesis is narrowly concerned with appeals to intuition within the method of cases, and then cite Horvath’s claim that (MISC+) “is neutral, for example, on whether philosophers sometimes appeal to intuitions as evidence for general philosophical principles” (2026, pp. 1920-1921). To be precise about my methodology here: I am not making a general claim about how philosophical principles like closure are justified in the abstract. Rather, I am making a descriptive claim about how philosophers use certain propositions—which happen to be the content of powerful principled intuitions—as evidence when they are evaluating the specific verdicts of a thought experiment. On my analysis, the evidential relationship in the Nozick case is not (A) the mental state intuiting that closure is true is evidence for the proposition “closure is true.” It is rather (B) the proposition “closure is true” (which possesses its high epistemic standing because it is intuitively sourced via PES) that is used as evidence against the couple of verdicts generated by Nozick’s theory. This practice of bringing a general principle to bear on a specific case verdict is undeniably within the scope of the method of cases and, therefore, of (MISC+).

error theory—is precisely the work required to justify overriding a piece of evidence as powerful as the intuition for closure.

Finally, Centrality explains Nozick's crucial admission that the "intuitive appeal" of closure persists even after he rejects it. This phenomenological "stickiness" is a hallmark of seemings. A refuted argument loses its rational force entirely. But a powerful seeming, like a perceptual illusion, can continue to seem true even when we have a theory that tells us why it is false. The persistence of closure's appeal is best explained as the persistence of the intuition-state itself, which continues to present its content as true, even after Nozick has concluded he must reject that content.

In sum, the source-content model of Centrality provides a single, coherent mechanism that explains the entire arc of Nozick's practice: the initial cost of the bullet is explained by the intuitive evidence for closure, the need for an error theory is explained by the obligation to account for that conflicting evidence, and the persistence of the conflict is explained by the phenomenological nature of the intuition itself.

To clarify the structure of this dispute, it is crucial to distinguish how intuition functions here versus in a standard counterexample. In a typical case like Gettier's, the appeal to intuition is straightforwardly positive. The intuitive verdict serves as the primary evidence *for* a claim. On our source-content model, the mental state of intuiting directly sources its propositional content (the intuited), which functions as the case verdict—for instance, "Smith does not know."

Nozick's rejection of closure, however, demonstrates a more complex, negative use of intuition. Here, the final verdicts— V_1 ("I know that I have hands") and V_2 ("I don't know that I'm not a BIV")—are not sourced from intuition; they are the logical consequences of applying Nozick's sensitivity condition. Instead, the crucial intuition at play is the one whose content is the Closure Principle. This intuition is not used to support the verdicts, but rather as powerful evidence *against* their joint acceptability. Within our source-content model, the powerful seeming that closure is true (the intuiting) sources its propositional content, which then enters the dialectic as a formidable piece of evidence challenging the package of verdicts Nozick's theory generates.

Just as in the Gettier case, this structure creates a severe explanatory challenge for (MISC+). To maintain its thesis, the defender of (MISC+) cannot simply point to Nozick's explicit argument (the sensitivity condition), because that only explains the verdict, not the profound resistance to it. Forced once again to rely on an "Implicit-Argument Strategy," the (MISC+) defender must claim that the overwhelming plausibility of the Closure

Principle is grounded in a powerful, unstated background argument. However, just as this strategy proved historically implausible in Section 3.1, it proves phenomenologically and logically implausible here, for two main reasons.²⁷

First, there is a profound phenomenological mismatch. Our confidence in the Closure Principle does not feel like the conclusion of a recalled argument, implicit or otherwise. It presents itself with an immediate, self-evident plausibility. When we consider the principle—that if we know p , and know this entails q , then we can come to know q —our assent feels direct, not like the final step in a chain of reasoning. While not decisive on its own, this phenomenological data aligns far more naturally with the Centrality model, where the principle's justification is sourced directly from a non-inferential seeming, than with (MISC+)’s Implicit-Argument Strategy that could be used.

Second, there is an in-principle difficulty in trying to ground a principle as fundamental as closure with a non-question-begging argument. Foundational principles of knowledge, almost by definition, are the kinds of claims we *reason from*, not *to*. Any attempt to argue for closure is likely to rely on premises that are either less plausible than closure itself or that covertly presuppose it. We can ask rhetorically: what non-question-begging premises could possibly ground such a fundamental principle of epistemic logic? For instance, one might try to argue for closure by appealing to the general reliability of competent deduction as a way of extending knowledge. But the idea that competent deduction extends knowledge seems to be just another way of stating the Closure Principle itself. The sheer difficulty of providing a satisfying, independent argument for such principles makes it highly unlikely that their widespread acceptance is based on our collective grasp of such a yet-to-be-found argument.

In summary, the complex but common philosophical practice of biting the bullet and offering a corresponding error theory provides a compelling abductive argument for Centrality. The case of Nozick’s rejection of the epistemic Closure Principle serves as a clear illustration of this. The source-content model of Centrality offers a simple and unified explanation for

²⁷ A second strategy a (MISC+) defender might attempt, inspired by Cappelen (2012), is to appeal to a non-argumentative source of resistance: a proposition’s status as part of the dialectical “common ground.” While this strategy avoids an appeal to intuition, it is not a viable defense of (MISC+). Recall (MISC+) is a conjunction: (A) philosophers do not use intuitions as evidence, and (B) they do use arguments. The “Common Ground” strategy, by positing a principle that is accepted without argument, directly falsifies the positive conjunct (B). Therefore, this alternative defense cannot be used to support (MISC+) and is set aside in this discussion.

the entire dialectical episode. It accounts for the initial “cost” of rejecting closure by identifying the principle’s source of justification in a powerful, non-inferential intuition. This, in turn, explains why a mere dismissal is insufficient and an error theory is required to explain away the conflicting intuitive evidence. Finally, it explains the lingering “intuitive appeal” of closure even after it has been rejected, a phenomenological “stickiness” that is characteristic of intuitions but not of refuted arguments.

Conversely, (MISC+) struggles to provide a satisfactory explanation for this practice. It is forced to posit that the resistance to rejecting closure stems from a powerful implicit argument in its favor. This explanation, however, suffers from both a phenomenological mismatch with how philosophers experience such principles and the inherent difficulty of providing a non-question-begging argument for such a foundational claim. The entire intellectual struggle, which is elegantly explained by Centrality as a conflict between a theory and a piece of intuitive evidence, becomes, on (MISC+)’s account, a less-than-clear conflict between two arguments, one of which is unstated and of dubious origin. Therefore, the source-content model of Centrality offers a more parsimonious and explanatorily powerful account of this deeply entrenched feature of philosophical methodology.

4. Conclusion

This paper has advanced an abductive defense of Centrality, the thesis that intuitions serve as evidence or as a crucial source of evidence in contemporary analytic philosophy. The core of this defense has been to argue that Centrality offers a superior explanation for the observable realities of philosophical practice when compared to its primary rival, the Mischaracterization Objection (MISC+). By moving beyond direct textual exegesis and instead evaluating which metatheory best accounts for the way philosophers actually argue, we can resolve the current impasse in the debate.

In both instances, the purely argument-driven account offered by (MISC+) proved explanatorily weak. To maintain its thesis, (MISC+) is repeatedly forced to invent unstated, implicit arguments to explain away the obvious dialectical weight of philosophical verdicts. This strategy strains credulity, relying on historical revisionism in the case of Gettier, and phenomenological mismatch in the case of Nozick. By divorcing observed dialectical effects from their actual causes, (MISC+) fails as a descriptive metatheory.

In contrast, the source-content model of Centrality provides a unified and parsimonious explanation for both phenomena. The power of a Gettier-

style counterexample is explained by its capacity to elicit a strong, widely shared intellectual seeming whose propositional content is treated as direct, non-inferential evidence against a theory. Similarly, the practice of biting the bullet is costly precisely because it involves overriding such evidence; the corresponding need for an error theory is the explanatory debt incurred for dismissing what seems to be the case. The persistent “intuitive appeal” of a rejected principle like closure, even after a philosopher has argued against it, is perfectly explained by the phenomenological “stickiness” of seemings, a feature that refuted arguments lack.

Ultimately, the choice between Centrality and the Mischaracterization Objection is a choice between two pictures of philosophical methodology. The latter portrays a practice of pure argumentation, where every verdict is, at bottom, the conclusion of an inference. While appealing in its tidiness, this picture struggles to account for the actual dynamics of philosophical debate. The defense of Centrality offered here presents a more nuanced and explanatorily robust alternative. It suggests that philosophy is not a discipline of arguments “all the way down,” but rather a rational enterprise where arguments are constantly tested against, and must ultimately answer to, the evidential force of intuition.

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